Performed and Perceived Masculinity in Father-Son Relationships from the Perspective of Sons: A Thematic Narrative Analysis

Daniel Steven Strasser
University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd

Part of the Community-Based Research Commons, Family, Life Course, and Society Commons, and the Gender and Sexuality Commons

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu,dig-commons@du.edu.
Performed and Perceived Masculinity in Father-Son Relationships from the Perspective of Sons: A Thematic Narrative Analysis

Abstract
The current study qualitatively explored father-son relationships and the perceptions and performances of masculinity within that relationship from the perspective of sons. Through the utilization of symbolic interactionism and narrative as theoretical and conceptual frameworks narratives were collected as a means to make sense of participants' experiences and interactions with their fathers throughout their lives. Through a multi-phase analysis and utilizing Riessman's (2008) thematic narrative analysis as an ideological and practical basis, RQ1, which asked what themes underlie sons' narratives surrounding the performance and perceptions of masculinity within their father-son relationships, yielded the following three themes: (1) traditional masculinity; (2) responsibility; and (3) non-traditional masculinity. From RQ2 which asked what themes underlie sons' narratives surrounding the construction of sons' identities, roles and relationships within father-son relationships, the following three themes emerged: (1) perceptions of father(ing); (2) sons' perceptions of self; and (3) turning point perspectives. RQ3 which asked what themes underlie sons' narratives surrounding father-son contextual differences/similarities offer insight into both the performance and perception of masculinity and father-son relationships, resulted in four main themes: (1) history/family; (2) romantic/interpersonal relationships; (3) culture; and (4) sex and gender. Lastly, RQ4 which asked which themes stemming from sons' dialogue and performances within the context of interviews offer insight into their narratives surrounding father-son relationships and masculinity gained further comprehension in to specific thematic dialogic and performative instances within participant responses. From these results this study added insight and understanding conceptually, ideologically, theoretically, and methodologically into the areas of family communication, gender communication and masculinity studies. Finally, the current study contributes further pragmatic understanding for individuals inside and outside father-son relationships when negotiating identities, roles and relationships regarding masculinity.

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Ph.D.

Department
Human Communications

First Advisor
Elizabeth A. Suter, Ph.D.

Second Advisor
Michele Hanna

Third Advisor
Mary Claire Morr-Serewicz

Keywords
Father-son relationships, Masculinity, Narrative analysis, Perception, Sons' perspective, Symbolic interactionism
Subject Categories
Community-Based Research | Family, Life Course, and Society | Gender and Sexuality

Publication Statement
Copyright is held by the author. User is responsible for all copyright compliance.

This dissertation is available at Digital Commons @ DU: https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/630
PERFORMED AND PERCEIVED MASCULINITY IN FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIPS FROM THE PERPSCTIVE OF SONS: A THEMATIC NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

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

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

by

Daniel S. Strasser

June 2012

Advisor: Dr. Elizabeth A. Suter
Abstract

The current study qualitatively explored father-son relationships and the performances and perceptions of masculinity within that relationship from the perspective of sons. Through the utilization of symbolic interactionism and narrative as theoretical and conceptual frameworks narratives were collected as a means to make sense of participants’ experiences and interactions with their fathers throughout their lives. Through a multi-phase analysis and utilizing Riessman’s (2008) thematic narrative analysis as an ideological and practical basis, RQ1, which asked what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the performance and perceptions of masculinity within their father-son relationships, yielded the following three themes: (1) traditional masculinity; (2) responsibility; and (3) non-traditional masculinity. From RQ2, which asked what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the construction of sons’ identities, roles and relationships within father-son relationships, the following three themes emerged: (1) perceptions of father(ing); (2) sons’ perceptions of self; and (3) turning point perspectives. RQ3 which asked what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding father-son contextual differences/similarities offer insight into both the performance and perception of masculinity and father-son relationships, resulted in four main themes: (1) history/family; (2) romantic/interpersonal relationships; (3) culture; and (4) sex and
Lastly, *RQ4*, which asked which themes stemming from sons’ dialogue and performances within the context of interviews offer insight into their narratives surrounding father-son relationships and masculinity, gained further comprehension in to specific thematic *dialogic and performative* instances within participant responses. From these results this study added insight and understanding conceptually, ideologically, theoretically, and methodologically into the areas of family communication, gender communication and masculinity studies. Finally, the current study contributes further pragmatic understanding for individuals inside and outside father-son relationships when negotiating identities, roles and relationships regarding masculinity.
Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank, first and foremost, my family, especially my mom and dad for their endless love and support. Mom, without your notes, phone calls, text messages and encouragement I would not have made it. Dad, you and our relationship over the years was, is and will be the reason why I study what I do. To my colleagues, Carrie West, Marissa Yandall, Aaron Donaldson, my University of Denver community and especially Arianna Molly, the best dissertation writing partner, friend, cheerleader and co-miserator a person could ever have, thank you for being there for me. You all are incredible individuals and I am blessed to have had the opportunity to share these experiences with you. To all my friends both in Denver and Cincinnati thank you for your support and encouragement throughout the last four years. Without your open ears, hearts, and minds I would not have been able to make it through the doctoral experience. I would also like to thank my advisor, Dr. Elizabeth A. Suter, and my committee members, Dr. Michele H. Hanna, Dr. Mary Claire Morr Serewicz, and Dr. Erin K. Willer, for their support, mentorship, and encouragement. Thank you for being a part of my doctoral experience and particularly the dissertation process. In addition to those scholars above, I would like to thank Dr. Roy Wood, Dr. Bernadette Marie Calafell, Dr. Christina Foust, Dr. Kory Floyd, Dr. Andrea Lambert South, Dr. Jimmie Manning, and Dr. Richard G. Jones, Jr. for showing what Communication Studies scholarship is really all about.
### Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction and Review of Literature ................................. 1
- Father-son Relationship Scholarship .................................................. 8
  - Defining Family ............................................................................. 9
- Father-son Relationships ................................................................. 10
  - Affectionate Communication ...................................................... 11
  - Father-son Relational Satisfaction .............................................. 13
- The Influence of Father(ing) ............................................................... 15
- The Influence of the Son ................................................................. 20
- Masculinity ..................................................................................... 22
  - Masculinism, Masculinity(s) and Manhood Acts .......................... 22
    - Patriarchy and Masculinism ..................................................... 25
    - Hegemonic Masculinity .......................................................... 25
    - Multiple Masculinities ............................................................ 28
    - Manhood Acts .......................................................................... 29
- Masculinity in Father-son Relationships ............................................. 30
- Perceptions ..................................................................................... 38
- Conclusion ....................................................................................... 43

Chapter Two: Theoretical Frameworks .................................................... 45
- Symbolic Interactionism ................................................................. 47
  - The Beginnings of Symbolic Interactionism .................................. 49
    - Cooley and Mead ...................................................................... 49
  - Blumer’s Symbolic Interactionism ................................................. 52
    - Theoretical Assumptions .......................................................... 54
    - Social Interactions .................................................................... 55
    - Triadic nature of Meaning ....................................................... 56
  - Interpretive Methodology ............................................................. 58
    - Exploration and Inspection ...................................................... 60
- Contemporary Symbolic Interactionism ............................................. 62
- Narrative Conceptualizations ......................................................... 65
- Implications to Father-son Relationships, Identity, Gender and Performance ................................. 69
  - Father-son Relationships ............................................................. 70
  - Identity, Gender, and Performance ............................................. 71
- Conclusion ....................................................................................... 74

Chapter Three: Method and Procedures .................................................. 76
- Recruitment, Participants, and Data Collection .................................. 76
  - Recruitment ............................................................................... 76
  - Participants ............................................................................... 77
  - Data Collection .......................................................................... 78
- Analysis ......................................................................................... 81
- Coding Explained ......................................................................... 83
Chapter Four: Results ................................................................. 90
    Research Question One: Perceptions of Father/Son Masculinity ....... 91
        Theme One: Traditional Masculinity “Be/Being a man” ................ 91
            Traditional Masculinity Characteristics .............................. 92
        Theme Two: Responsibility ................................................. 95
            Subtheme One: Responsibility for Your Actions .................... 96
            Subtheme Two: Responsibility to Family .............................. 98
            Subtheme Three: Financial Responsibility ........................... 100
        Theme Three: Non-traditional Masculinity ............................... 102
            Subtheme One: The Role of Emotion in Masculinity ................ 104
            Subtheme Two: Nurturing and Open Masculinity .................... 107
    Research Question Two: Identity, Roles and Relationships ............... 110
        Theme One: Perception of Father(ing) .................................. 111
        Theme Two: Sons’ Perception of Self .................................... 114
        Theme Three: Turning Point Perspective ................................ 118
    Research Question Three: Contextual/Thematic Codes ....................... 122
        Theme One: History and Family ........................................... 123
        Theme Two: Romantic and Interpersonal Relationships ............... 125
        Theme Three: Culture ...................................................... 128
        Theme Four: Sex and Gender .............................................. 131
    Research Question Four: Dialogic and Performative Codes ................. 135
Conclusion ................................................................................ 141

Chapter Five: Discussion ........................................................... 143
    Implications to Symbolic Interactionism ..................................... 145
        Father-son Relationships .................................................... 145
        Masculinity ................................................................. 147
        Interactional Adaptability and Reflexivity .............................. 148
        Exploration and Inspection ............................................... 149
    Narrative Conceptualizations .................................................. 152
        Storytelling, Stories, and Narratives .................................... 152
        Narrative as Symbolic Interaction ....................................... 154
    Implications to Masculinity .................................................... 156
        Traditional Masculinity “Be/Being a Man” .............................. 157
        Idealistic Masculinity ...................................................... 157
Father-son Dyads .................................................................202
Turning Points ......................................................................202
Dialogic/Performative Narrative Analysis .........................203
Conclusion ...........................................................................203

References ...........................................................................208

Appendices ...........................................................................234
Appendix A ...........................................................................234
Appendix B ...........................................................................235
Appendix C ...........................................................................236
Appendix D ...........................................................................238
Appendix E ...........................................................................242
Appendix F ...........................................................................245
Appendix G ...........................................................................247
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Fathers impact our lives in many dynamic ways throughout our lives. Whether that father continues to be an important part in an individual’s life, is biological or non-biological, has moved on from this world, or is the bane of your very existence, the fact of the matter remains that fathers have a significant impact on children’s lives. All children attempt to make sense of the relationships they have with their fathers. But it seems men strive and struggle to understand their identities, roles, and relationships established, reified, challenged and transformed through their interactions with their fathers. A substantial portion of this relationship exists not only in understanding fathers/sons’ place and positionality within the relationships, but also the place and positionality of their fathers/sons. Because of this, men often have thoughts regarding what their fathers/sons think about what they are doing with their lives; wondering if they are living up to expectations. Men think about how they can become, act, think, behave more alike or, for that matter, how to become drastically different from the way their father was/is. Under these considerations, questions often arise: How do men negotiate this relationship? How can they understand why their fathers/sons do the things that they do? With differences/similarities in mind, how can they communicate better in order to improve the relationship, or even just to understand it better? This study addresses those issues and many more from a family communication and masculinity studies perspective.
The role of father(ing) and the impact of that role have been studied in multiple perspectives and disciplines in the past several decades, more recently from a family studies perspective (Atkinson & Blackwelder, 1993; Coontz, 2000; Dowd, 2000; Lamb, 2010; LaRossa, 1988; Pittman, 1993; Segal, 1993; Yablonsky, 1982). This also remains a significant area of study in contemporary family communication scholarship. To simply begin by stating that fathering is important because it is researched in multiple areas does not address the individual saliency or influences that fathering has on identities, roles and relationships. For example, because my father raised me in way that he did, the way that he knew how to, for all intents and purposes, I am the man that I am today. If my father was more present in my life at the beginning; if he would have been more nurturing in addition to being the silent, monolithic, respected father that he was, would I still be the man that I am?

These minute contextual influences of my father-son relationship and the interactions that constitute that relationship have played out over again, in different contexts, a myriad of times for generations. Individualistically and dyadically, father-son relationships incorporate multiple contexts during each interaction. This research helps to make sense of these questions, contexts, and relationships to make them more comprehensible. Furthermore, because of the evolving nature of fathering within individual, historical, cultural, generational, societal and interpersonal contexts, researching sons, fathers and fathering relationships remains a significant area of scholarship to study. One of the most salient areas, specifically for this study, focuses on
father-son relationships, the impact of father on son, son on father, and masculine identities from the perspective of sons.

Comprehending this further, there is no doubt that the areas of scholarship I research emerge from the relationship that I have with my father. For years I have tried to better understand the person that I am, where I fit in my relationship with my father, and how he sees me in the things that I do and the life that I live. I also think about and try to better understand the man that he is. Why does he say and do the things that he does? And how can I continue to make an effort to improve the relationship that exists. I have spent almost my entire adult life trying to figure this out. This study is an extension of my own personal search for answers and a better relationship with my father.

My father was born in 1953 and grew up in the 1950s and 1960s. He began his fathering experience with the birth of my brother in 1974, right after he turned 21. By the age of 23 he had a wife and three kids to support; pretty incredible by today’s standards. These historical contexts give him a significantly different understanding of his perception and performance of father and son. This is a direct result of the interactions he had with his father, his friends and the inclusion of media, culture, economic indicators; all of these being different than my own. Knowing this has helped me to get to know him, on his terms, better. As such, this research helps to contextualize father-son relationships in terms of individual performances of masculinity, roles and relationships. Thus, introducing the ideologies and intricacies of contexts associated with differing masculine identities within father-son relationships contributes to the often difficult negotiation of
the relationship. This research, inevitably, will help others in their understanding their relationships.

Within the context of father-son relationships, the influence of masculinity has great bearing on identity construction, roles and relationships as examined in and through interactions and performances. Within the area of gender and performance, masculinity (e.g., hegemonic, multiple, perceived, performed) has been theorized and conceptualized extensively over the last several decades (Bem, 1974; Beynon, 2002; Connell, 1995; 1998; 2000; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Donaldson, 1993; Kimmel, 2008). More specifically from a communicative perspective, masculinity is conceptualized as the study of the discourses and the effects of those discourses generated by men, unifying men, and revealing the identity and characteristics men ascribe to themselves, others, and their environment (Chesebro & Fuse, 2001). When individuals, roles, relationships, contexts, discourses, interactions, perceptions and performances are introduced into one unique relationship, father-son relationships, a need for more comprehensive understanding becomes imperative because of the vastly dynamic and intricate nature of the relationships. Although scholarship exists exploring the theoretical and conceptual nature of father-son relationships and masculinity, a gap in knowledge exists when specifically exploring the influences of masculinity (e.g., hegemonic, multiple) on father-son relationships. That is, scholarship does not adequately examine how, or the degree to which, masculinity enters into father-son relationships or how, specifically, the performances of fathers/sons’ masculinities transform, reify and/or alter the performances of the other man in the dyad. This research addresses this significant gap in knowledge.
Furthermore, in studying father-son relationships, multiple theoretical frameworks have been utilized including affection exchange theory (Floyd, 2006); confirmation theory (Beatty & Dobos, 1993); theory of parental solicitude (Floyd & Morman, 2003); psychoanalytic theory (Freeman, 2008); and social cognitive theory (DiLorio, McCarty & Denzmore, 2006). Although these theories offer great insight into the relationships between fathers and sons, an additional gap in theoretical perspectives also exists when examining the everyday interactions between fathers and sons and how they make sense of those interactions. Symbolic interactionism and narrative paradigms explore the everyday interactions and the meanings that those interactions create within the context of father-son relationships. Thus, in an attempt to attain greater comprehension of the relationships in terms of individuals, roles, relationships and masculinity, symbolic interactionism best explicates the interactions, performances, evolving dynamics across the relationship, and interpretive methodology (Blumer, 1969) in combination with the sense making processes within narrative paradigms.

Through Blumer’s (1969) theoretical perspective, the fundamental premises of symbolic interactionism are: (1) human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; (2) the meanings of these things are derived from, or arise out of, the social interactions that an individual has with others; and (3) meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process utilized by the individual when negotiating things they encounter (p. 2). In addition to offering a theoretical framework through which father-son relationships and masculinity can be explored, Blumer (1969) also argues for an interpretive methodological paradigm in order
to obtain close, inductive observations of the individuals and relationships explored. Because of the specific manner in which identity, roles, relationships and methodology are approached, by collecting participant narratives, symbolic interactionism and concepts of narrative contribute the best perspective to address the gaps in theoretical and conceptual knowledge.

Additionally, narratives contribute to the sense making processes as well as address gaps in knowledge existing within communication and other disciplines concerning father-son relationships and masculinity. Thus, as a means to gain further insight into father-son relationships and masculinity through a symbolic interactionist and integrating concepts of narrative theoretical perspectives, sons’ narratives were collected. Narratives offer the researcher a means to make sense of experiences and how stories construct, transform, reify and challenge identities (Fisher, 1984; Koenig-Kellas, 2008; Langellier, 1989, 1992). By allowing men the space to talk about their experiences, they are able to learn more about who they and their fathers are within the context of their identities, roles and relationships.

Coinciding with the collecting of narratives through the interviewing process, Riessman’s (2008) thematic narrative analysis was utilized to offer the best foundational analytical perspective when considering the nature of this study. Thematic narrative analysis, which keeps participant narrative intact and remains context focused, spoke directly to the areas of identity, perceptions, performances, gender, relationships and narratives that this research comprehensively explored.
With these areas of scholarship very briefly addressed, it is clear that a need for research in the area of father-son relationships and masculinity within a communicative perspective emerged. This study contributes to the existing knowledge of father-son relationships and masculinity through a close reading and exploring of the relationships and identities constituted in and through narrative experiences from the perspective of the sons. It also offers a much needed concentration on the individual experiences of father-son relationships and masculinity. Because of this unique approach to the subject matters, this study advances scholarly understanding relationally, conceptually, theoretically and methodologically within a communicative perspective. Additionally, it contributes to communication scholarship surrounding father-son relationships, masculinity studies and other disciplines as well (e.g., gender studies, family studies, psychology) by asking the following research questions: (1) What themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the performance and perceptions of masculinity within their father-son relationships?; (2) What themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the construction of sons’ identities, roles and relationships within father-son relationships?; (3) What themes guide sons’ narratives surrounding both the performance and perception of masculinity and father-son relationships; and (4) Which themes stemming from sons’ dialogue and performances within the context of interviews offer insight into their narratives surrounding father-son relationships and masculinity? These research questions, further explicated below, guide the research for this study and offer parameters through which the research was conducted.
Essentially the goal of this research project is to gain insight and understanding into the perceived and performed masculinities within father-son relationships from the perspective of adult sons, as well as further inform the areas of father-son relationships, masculinity and thematic narrative analysis from both symbolic interactionist and narrative paradigms. In order to understand more fully the scholarship that exists in the areas of father-son relationships and masculinity, a contemporary review of literature enveloping father-son relationships, masculinity and perceptions will be addressed.

**Father-son Relationship Scholarship**

The nature of father-son relationships and the effects each relationship has on those within the dyads make the family relationship intriguing to study. Many aspects of father-son relationships have been conceptualized and studied in an attempt to create and contribute a clearer vision into how the relationships and individuals function. Because there are so many intricacies surrounding individuals and relationships, there was and continues to be a wide variety of views, perspectives and research pipelines on father-son relationships. Encouraging when researching father/son identities, roles, relationships and culture is the abundance of both popular culture books and scholarly research on the multiple areas (e.g., developmental psychology, psychology, family studies); encouraging because of the salient nature of fathers and their roles throughout the life of their children; and discouraging because of the lack of scholarship explicitly focusing on sons perspectives.

One main purpose of this study concentrates on synthesizing the relevant literature in relevant fields on father-son relationships. One specific area that has yet to be
fully examined when researching father-son relationships is the performed and perceived influence of masculinity. In order to more fully understand this specific area, I will examine several areas of research that conceptualize, synthesize and review these areas of study.

I will first examine father-son relationships from multiple perspectives including family studies, developmental psychology and communication. Researching these areas gives a general overview of the scholarship in past and contemporary family scholarship. This will be followed by a review of masculinity studies from relevant perspectives and how I envision masculinity as a larger construct. Lastly, these two areas of content, with the addition of interpersonal perceptions, will be synthesized in such a manner as to review literature pertaining to these specific areas while offering gaps in knowledge, additions to existing scholarship, and a rational for future research.

Defining Family

I would first like to clarify the definitions that constitute family, and therein father and son. Because this study was created to help explicate the existing research on the father-son relationships and masculinity, it is imperative that we understand the parameters of the individuals and dyads researched. Considering the number of definitions available for family, I will draw from two in which I feel most succinctly represent my personal and research-oriented perspectives.

Initially, Galvin, Brommel, and Bylund (2004) assert that family is a:

[N]etwork of people who share their lives over long periods of time bound by marriage, blood, or commitment, legal or otherwise, who consider themselves as family and who share a significant history and anticipated futures of functioning in a family relationship. (p. 6)
Secondly, stemming from Braithwaite et al.’s (2010) study surrounding the construction of family, I will also take a voluntary kin perspective on both the father and the son. Voluntary kin refers to “those persons who are perceived to be family, but who are not related by blood or law” (Braithwaite et al., 2010, p. 390). Those who integrate and utilize ideas of voluntary kin discursively create their family through social interactions, dialogically constituting family through discourse. Furthermore, relating to Braithwaite et al.’s (2010) conceptualizations of family, and because of the multiple and different father-son relationships, I will include father and son figures. Together these conceptualizations of family relationships speak to my own framework of understanding and will inform my future research pipeline.

Now that we have a framework by which to define the individuals and dyads within father-son relationships, we can now move on to the discussions surrounding the contemporary and relevant literature on father-son relationships.

**Father-son Relationships**

Fathers have a significant impact on our lives. The role of father, fathering and the importance and impact of that role have been studied in multiple perspectives and disciplines throughout the past several decades (Hobson, 2002; Lamb, 2010; LaRossa, 1988; Pittman, 1991). The role of the father remains a salient area of study in contemporary communication scholarship. Thus, researching fathers and the relationships that are held with them becomes an imperative area of scholarship to continue to study within communication.
Affectionate communication. To begin from a communicative perspective, a large portion of the contemporary scholarship surrounding father-son relationships stems from the research of Kory Floyd and Mark Morman. Within their scholarship, the inclusion of affectionate communication becomes imperative to understanding the dynamics within father-son relationships. Because the nature of the relationship exists between two men, often the inclusion or exclusion of affection has a tremendous effect on the individuals, roles, relationships and even those outside of the relationships.

Previous research identifies father-son relationship satisfaction in terms of the theory of discriminative parental solicitude and more specifically the theoretical assumptions of affection exchange theory (Floyd, 2006). This theory examines affection as an evolved behavior that contributes to humans’ superordinate motivations toward viability and fertility. Morman and Floyd (2001) suggest that the theory helps to explain and predict the relationships between affection of biological or non-biological sons and their fathers. Initial findings illustrate that fathers will show more affection to their biological sons than to their non-biological sons as a result of the biological son’s ability to further the fathers’ genetic reproductivity.

When further explicating the influence of affection in father-son relationships, Floyd and Mormon (2000) suggest that men are more affectionate with their sons when their fathers are affectionate with them. The affection was measured by the closeness, involvement, and satisfaction that the participants had with their sons. Additionally, fathers who did not receive affection from their fathers were more likely to show greater affection toward their own sons (Floyd & Mormon, 2000). When determining variables
most often introduced in father-son affectionate communication, Morman and Floyd (2002) conclude that men report greater levels of closeness, relationship satisfaction, and the three forms of affectionate communication (e.g., verbal, non-verbal, and supportive affection) with their own sons than with their fathers. Furthermore, they found that sons’ scores on the same variables were higher than the scores their fathers reported when speaking about their own fathers.

Together the crux of affectionate communication research demonstrates a shift in father-son interactions and relationships in terms of satisfaction and affection from the previous generation to the current generation. They found both fathers, now more nurturing, and sons had nearly identical levels of satisfaction within the relationship (Morman & Floyd, 2002). Here, within the literature on affectionate communication, we find the first inclusion of the contextual nature of father-son relationships. The introduction of generational differences in affection from father to son illustrates the importance of a more contextual, and, in this case generational, understanding of father-son relationships. That is, the contextual dynamics of the relationship the father has with his father (in)directly impacts the relationships that he has with his son; a determining and influential factor in this study.

Furthermore, Floyd (2001) asserts that fathers communicate more affection to their sons through supportive activities than through verbal statements or nonverbal activities. In conceptualizing a framework of father-son relationships through an affectionate communication lens, Morman and Floyd (2006) utilize a 20-item scheme attempting to define effective fathering. The research stemming from the scheme posits
that fathers mentioned the categories of love, availability, and role model most often when responding to their type of fathering. These findings directly address the more contemporary relational and emotional components of fathering roles.

Affectionate communication in father-son relationships correlates with levels of satisfaction in the relationship. Research on relational satisfaction in father-son relationships is another imperative area of research to consider when comprehending the relationships that are the focus of this study.

**Father-son relational satisfaction.** Discussing relationship satisfaction variables, a key element in conceptualizing father-son relationships, Yablonsky (1982) states that most caring fathers have dream maps, or preconceived notions, beliefs and ideas, about their sons’ life choices and future paths. The fulfillment of fathers’ maps increases the satisfaction of the relationships from the perspective of the fathers. However, most sons tend to have emotional reactions about their fathers’ conceptions of their lives’ directions. Therefore, the degree of caring by fathers is a factor in determining the quality of the relationships and the extent to which their respective dreams could be actualized. It is important to note that the actualization of fathers’ dreams may not be the dreams of the sons. What each deems as reasonable and achievable dreams is one example of how father-son relationship satisfaction can be affected by differing perspectives of fathers and sons. Therefore, the relationship satisfaction implied from the dream maps of fathers may also have negative effects on the relationship as well.

Brotherson, Acock, and Yamamoto (2003) suggest higher levels of father-adolescent connection tend to have a positive and significant influence on the quality of
father-child relationships. The satisfaction addressed within Brotherson et al.’s research suggests that the levels of relational satisfaction will increase when a strong connection between fathers and sons exist. For example, connections between fathers and sons may exist on many levels possibly stemming from shared interests in sports, outdoor activities, music tastes, or many others. By investing time and effort into creating connections between fathers and sons, the satisfaction of the relationship may increase. Investigating more explicit communication tendencies, Beatty, Zelley, Dobos, and Rudd (1994) suggest that in order to achieve relationship satisfaction, sons should be conscious of their fathers’ verbal behavior. What fathers say and how they say it influences the perception of satisfaction that exists within the relationships. In turn, conclusions drawn about their fathers’ attitudes are based on messages received from fathers and perceived by sons.

Furthermore, Beatty and Dobos (1992) observe that sons’ view of the satisfaction level of father-son relationships significantly decrease when there is apprehension in communication between fathers and sons. Beatty and Dobos (1992) also observe that when relationships with sons incorporate a competitive nature the advancement into a mature masculinity for the sons may be interrupted. Furthermore, the relationship between fathers and sons often encounters some difficulty when the relationship itself moves from a complementary to a symmetrical orientation. That is, as sons mature and begin to own and understand their own masculine identities, often the masculine identities of fathers conflict with the identities of sons. Although this conflict may not be explicit, the nature of competition in men often makes itself known. This research is integral to the current study because it addresses issues that emerge in the demographic,
adult-males over the age of eighteen, researched. As sons come of age and begin to acknowledge their own identity, they may feel that their fathers’ ideas conflict with their own.

In addition to acknowledging their own identity these conflicts often emerge in other aspects of father-son relationships. More specifically, when moving forward from literature concentrating on relational satisfaction, research also examines fathers’ trait aggressiveness and argumentativeness as a predictor of the adult-son’s perception of fathers (Beatty, Zelley, Dobos, & Rudd, 1994); influences of sons’ sexual orientation in the amount of affectionate communication (Floyd, Sargent, & Di Corcia, 2004); positive/negative benefits of filial self-esteem as a result of affection received from parents (Roberts & Bengston, 1993); and communication apprehension (Beatty & Dobos, 1993). The relational satisfaction research contributed by Beatty and Dobos along with their co-researchers often draws upon conceptualizations of perceptions. Although interpersonal perceptions are not clearly defined within their research as an area of interest and review, according to Beatty and Dobos, interpersonal perceptions are implicitly recognized as salient within father-son relationships. As perceptions of self, other and relationships offer an area of abstraction that creates difficulty in conceptualization, and with the addition of masculinity to this study, this area will be addressed in greater detail later in the chapter.

Now that research on father-son relationships, affection and satisfaction has been considered, an examination of generational differences, and specifically the role of
fathers, fathering, and sons as important variables influencing father-son relationships will be addressed.

**The Influence of Father(ing)**

Generational differences in fathering and the impact differences have on father-son identities, roles and relationships constitute a large area of research both inside and outside academia. As briefly stated above, the impact of fathers’ relationships with their fathers has an impact on the relationships they have with their sons (Floyd & Morman, 2000). These relationships will, in turn, impact relationships and other areas of the sons’ lives. Morman and Floyd (2006) state:

[T]he scholarship on fatherhood developed over the last few decades has resulted in an abundance of complex, interwoven and multidimensional perspectives on the role of the father, both positive and negative, within the family. (p. 116)

Thus, when initially examining the literature surrounding generational differences within father-son relationships, contemporary concepts of fatherhood suggest that father-son relationships should be closer, more satisfying, and more nurturing in this generation than in past generations (Lamb, 2010; LaRossa, 1988). Furthermore, LaRossa (1988) proposes the idea of an androgynous fatherhood; where fathers now taking on maternal roles becomes more involved in the child rearing process (e.g., changing diapers, playing, baby sitting). This is in direct opposition to past research illustrating fathers’ almost non-existent, monolithic, distant, breadwinning and emotionally absent roles. More specifically research suggests that mothers had almost exclusively taken the lead in the child-rearing process. Fathers were there for economic and disciplinary support (LaRossa, Gordon, Wilson, Bairan, & Jaret, 1991).
But from a historical perspective, as more mothers joined the workforce there was an increasing need for fathers to become a more substantial part of their children’s lives. Thus, the change in the culture of fatherhood stemmed primarily because of the change of conduct and roles of mothers and fathers. Specifically, LaRossa (1988) continues that it is the culture of fatherhood that has changed; in essence, the shared norms, values, beliefs, and expressive symbols pertaining to fatherhood. LaRossa (1988) and Lamb (2010) further encourage a balance of a new fatherhood where individual examples of, excuses for, and solutions to negative levels of fathering are overtaken by a general societal effort to change the role of the father for the positive.

This literature is particularly salient for this study and the communicative perspective of father-son identities, roles and relationships in that it offers insight on the multiple contextual (e.g., historical, cultural, interpersonal) differences/similarities that may influence the perceived experiences of both fathers and sons (Lamb, 2010). The different contexts and the ideologies that are encompassed within those differing, intersected contexts inform the specific roles fathers fulfill, how they perform those roles in terms of closeness, satisfaction and involvement in their sons’ lives, and emphasize the importance fathers place on the roles and relationships with their sons.

Because fathers and sons grew up in separate eras, the way in which they view father-son roles, relationships and performances may be drastically different. As an example focusing on interpersonal contexts, fathers may require distance in the relationship when sons want to be closer to their fathers. The interpersonal context of the fathers may stem from interactions that they had with their fathers in the past. Their role
performances may also be a result of the stereotypical father-figure that they witnessed on television growing up or even a result how they think they should be as fathers. These contexts established in the generational difference from their sons affect father-son relationships. In contrast sons may desire closeness, involvement and inclusion in the relationships when contextual circumstances within the relationship inhibit those needs. That is, the contextual differences emerging from generational gaps may lead to a separation of fundamental, ideological understanding of father-son performances, identities, roles and relationships. In addition to the contexts stated above, sexual orientation, age and geographical distance also influence the relationship as well.

Moving forward through the historical perspective of fathering, Atkinson and Blackwelder (1993) suggest there was a fluctuation in the way fathers were seen throughout the century from provider to nurturer. As an example of how fathering was conceptualized in the 1970’s, and specifically when considering the roles of fathers and the practical implications of father-child relational dynamics, Bigner (1970) states that men usually consider their occupations to be the focal point of their fathering behavior. Furthermore, Bigner suggests an active attempt on the part of parents to increase children’s comprehension of what fathers actually do greatly increases the development of fathers’ roles. This perspective of fathering reinforces the concepts of the distant father in which the centralizing role of the father focuses on his occupation rather than his nurturing qualities. Bigner’s research further explicates the generational difference in fathering which affects the relationship between fathers and sons. Established in the
1970s, this style of fathering would be set against contemporary fathering which emphasizes a nurturing, inclusive father.

Giving an insight into the fathers in the 21st century, five categories of fathering are posited: (1) nurturing fathers who parent their children as mothers; (2) nurturing fathers in stepfamilies, blended families, or in cohabitating adult families; (3) less engaged fathers who are minimal nurturers plus breadwinners; (4) disengaged fathers who may or may not have economic roles; and (5) fathers who never engage in their children’s lives at all (Dowd, 2000). These categories, by no means inclusive of all fathering, offer an insightful glimpse into the possible roles that exist. Similarly, Marks and Palkovitz (2004) considered four alternative types of fathering: the new involved father, the goods provider, the deadbeat dad, and the paternity-free man. Although specific to each unique father-son dyad, these categories also offer an illustration of where fathers are and the possibility of where fathers could be in the future. The importance here is to see that over the generations there has been more emphasis on the types of fathers and fathering that exist in contemporary Western society. More importantly, scholars and lay individuals recognize that these categories of fathers and fathering are just that, categories. Individual experiences of fathering and the recognition of generational and other contextual differences will only add to the understanding of how fathers may improve the relationships that they have with their sons. Offering a perspective regarding the position of contemporary fatherhood, Mormon & Floyd, (2006) succinctly state that “Central to the current social transformation of fatherhood at the
beginning of the twenty-first century is the notion that a ‘good father’ should be loving, affectionate, involved, nurturing, and consistent in the raising of his children” (p.117).

**The Influence of the Son**

In researching father-son relationships and the influences on the relationships and the individuals, scholarship surrounding the influence of sons or the identities, roles, and relationship on fathers is much less apparent within the literature than the influence of fathers on sons. This study offers a great deal of insight into how sons’ perceptions and performances affect communication patterns between and among fathers and sons, as well as the individuals, roles and relationships therein.

As reviewed above, the role of fathers or fathering in father-son relationships has a tremendous effect on individuals and relationships. Much like fathers, sons’ historical, cultural and interpersonal experiences heavily influence their participation, presence and investment, or lack thereof, in father-son relationships. But just as with fathers, contexts of sons are multiple, varying and often intersecting. When discussing the importance and impact of generational differences and gaps on relationships, Vaillant (2006) suggests:

> [D]istinct historical consciousness of each generation is much more pronounced. There is always, however, a flow of culture ensuring transmission in both directions (with old generations usually preserving much of cultural heritage and new generations introducing new ideas and trends). (p. 20)

Vaillant (2006) continues stating that each generation is shaped and made uniquely cohesive by the presence of alternative generations. Furthermore, generational differences in multiple contexts not only affect the other generations unidirectionally but instead, Vaillant (2006) suggests, may emphasize and influence differences and similarities mutually and simultaneously. That is, fathers and sons, no matter which
contextual similarities and differences exist, influence each others’ identities, roles and relationships through their interactions and communicative patterns.

In a study focused on fathers and sons, Davis and Tagiuri (1989) examine work relationships between father-son dyads and specifically focused on how the differences in life stages affects work relationships between fathers and sons. From the perspective of sons’ life stages, Davis and Taguiri address the implicit and explicit characteristics associated with those life stages and the implications on the relationships. The research begins to approach the importance of contexts when examining father-son relationships but does not address the perspective of the son specifically.

Taking an interesting perspective and indirectly approaching the influence of sons on family relationships, Willoughby, Malik, and Lindahl (2006) examined gay men and their families. More specifically, they examined the influence certain family characteristics have on the manner in which coming out to the family affected the family after the disclosure took place. Results indicate that responses were more acceptable and positive coming from adaptable and cohesive families and more often negative when coming from less adaptable and authoritative families. Here, sons’ sexual orientations and their coming out processes, both contextual familial influences, were shown to impact family dynamics. Another area of research that includes the influential roles of the sons/daughters on parents concentrates specifically on aging or impaired parents and the care given to them by their children (Dwyer & Coward, 1991; Ikels, 1983). Although these areas of research are important to understanding the dynamic nature of families in
diverse contexts, they do not address directly the influence of sons on fathers or father-son identities, roles and relationships.

A large discrepancy in the generational orientations of fathers and sons stems from their perspectives of gender orientation and more specifically performances of masculinity. As alluded to above, fathers and sons grow up in different times. Thus, normative criteria for self-identification, roles and relationships, all influenced by such things as media and technology, impact the understanding of masculine ideologies and others’ performances of masculinity. Furthermore, performances of masculinity both outside and within the confines of the relationship may have significant impact and influence on the relationships. With this in mind the next section of the review will address contemporary research on masculinity.

**Masculinity**

What makes men act the way that they do? What outside and inside stimuli affect the way men act and, in turn, affect the actions of other men? Why is it so important for men to adhere to societal norms of masculine behavior? Where are these behaviors learned? And why is it difficult to talk about masculinity?

As one of the most intriguing parts of men’s lives and relationships, masculinity and the effects of masculinity continue to be a very popular topic to research. Popular press books such as Frank Pittman’s *Man Enough: Fathers, Sons and the Search for Masculinity*, Lynne Segal’s *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities Changing Men* and Barbara Hudson’s *Making Men into Fathers: Men, Masculinities and the Social Politics of Fatherhood* offer a minute glimpse of texts attempting to give men the opportunity to
consider their masculinity; to help men understand other men; and to further emphasize the continued need for contemporary scholarship on masculinity and father-son relationships (Hudson, 2002; Pittman, 1993; Segal, 1990).

In addition to popular press texts covering issues of father-son relationships and masculinity, popular culture has been (in)directly commenting on how men should act, interact and perform for decades. For example, television shows throughout the last fifty years such as *My Three Sons, Father Knows Best, Leave It To Beaver, The Brady Bunch, Eight is Enough, The Wonder Years, Married with Children, That 70’s Show, Parenthood,* and *Modern Family* have all given men cultural parameters on how fathers, sons and father-son relationships should be. As ubiquitous as these representations are, the types of masculinity performances enacted in popular culture are an unachievable fiction (Lair & Strasser, in press). However, the presence of these topics in popular press reflects the presence of and need for more scholarship in this area of research. Research, as in the current study, encompasses how men act and interact everyday and offers a more realistic understanding of how men are and how they talk about their relationships. Furthermore, new scholarship should be available and understandable to scholars and lay individuals alike. In order to reach that point of integration, a grasp of the scholarship which exists is necessary to undertake.

As referenced to very briefly above, relationships between fathers and sons become such difficult ones to conceptualize and even more difficult to study with accuracy because they are relationships between two men (Floyd & Morman, 2002); two men who may have very different opinions, values, beliefs, orientations, and knowledge
of the world. A common stigma when addressing issues of father-son relationships, and men in general, surrounds the idea that it is not masculine to talk about your feelings; it is not masculine to express how and why you feel as you do; it is not masculine to have genuine or generic conversations about your own or other masculinities. There is, in fact, stigma or taboo attached to communication surrounding masculinity. This is exactly why research such as this helps to more comprehensively understand the implications and characteristics of masculinity and its influences on men and, more specifically, fathers and sons. With a better understanding, research such as this has the capability to help men communicate better with other men and with their fathers and sons.

**Masculinism, Masculinity(s) and Manhood Acts**

Conceptualizing masculinity becomes quite challenging when trying to consider the multiple paradigms of scholarship. Through research conducted over the past few decades and because of the myriad ways in which masculinity can be conceptualized and generalized, integrated explanations and definitions make it difficult to utilize one construct of what masculinity is; no all-encompassing definition exists.

So where do we begin? Interestingly, communicative definitions of masculinity are rare. One of the few definitions that stems from a strictly communicative perspective, as reviewed above, suggests that masculinity is the study of the discourses and the effects of those discourses generated by men, unifying men, and revealing the identity and characteristics men ascribe to themselves, others, and their environment (Chesebro and Fuse, 2001). Furthermore, in this perspective, masculinity predominantly remains a social and symbolic concept, shaped and affected by historical and cultural factors. These
factors ultimately provide a framework and perspective by which men perceive and understand themselves, others, and their environment. Masculinity is, thus, socially constructed in and through the personal relationships and discourses in an individual’s life. As a starting point, this definition offers a great way to begin to view masculinity. Below other ideologies and concepts will be addressed. These concepts will be considered when building a construct of masculinity that is utilized in the current study.

In this, masculinity, as defined below, will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of masculinity within father-son relationships.

It is important to start the review of masculinity from the communicative perspective in order to properly frame how this masculine construct came to fruition. Moving forward from this, the majority of what is known about masculinity and the concepts embedded in and surrounding stems from sociology, cultural and gender studies. Imperative terms are addressed below.

**Patriarchy and masculinism.** Masculinity in its multitude of characteristics operates under the umbrella of the larger social construct of patriarchy. Although the concepts of masculinity were well established before the onset of modern Western society, the initial, foundational concepts were established in and through the construction of male dominated, female (and other marginalized groups) suppressing (Walby, 1989) institutions of law, education, business, philosophy, religion; all of which reify and explain the current conditions of masculinism within modern society. Masculinism lies directly beneath the large umbrella of patriarchy and further explains the concepts of men and the performance of men and masculinity throughout all of
society. Brittan’s (1987) definition of masculinism, as an overarching, archetypal construct of masculine concepts, principles and ideologies, respectively addresses the essentialist views of and cultural norms embodied in multiple forms of masculinity. Together these two concepts, patriarchy and masculinism, establish a basis from which other definitions and concepts embedded in and around masculinity can be examined. It also establishes a dominant ideological construct by which other constructs are weighed against.

**Hegemonic masculinity.** One of the key terms further explicating the influence of patriarchy and masculinism is hegemonic masculinity. Although hegemony can be defined and conceptualized in multiple ways as applied to masculinity, the parsimonious cultural and gendered studies definition best representing the ideas of hegemony is stated as “the winning and holding of power and the formation of social groups” in which the dominant class creates and maintains these social groups (Donaldson, 1993, p. 645). Connell (1995) utilizes this concept of hegemony further defining hegemonic masculinity as a superordinate, subordinate struggle for power and dominance inclusive in and a result of historical, societal and cultural influences. Inclusive in this definition Connell differentiates between politically and culturally dominant forms of hegemonic masculinity as well as addresses subordinated and marginalized masculinities.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity emerged in the mid-1980s from a sociological critique of the male sex role literature (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985). Prior to the 1970’s, sex role literature posited that there were two distinct sex roles; male and female. However, emerging in the 1970s, the concept of androgyny as one example was
added to the sex roles literature as a means to explain alternative roles (Bem, 1974). Androgyny was said to exist when an individual exuded both male and female sex role characteristics. No longer was the research strictly placing men and women into two separate, mutually exclusive categories. Instead, scholars began to explore the possibilities of normative male and female characteristics as intersecting and overlapping. More specifically, men who were placed into the androgynous category began to be set apart as “different” from the normative category of male. Thus, returning to the scholarship of the 1980’s, rather than adopting an essentialized view that attaches roles to the female and male body, specifically addressing the male body, hegemonic masculinity was conceptualized as a “socially constructed, institutionalized system of power that simultaneously privileges a certain definition of masculinity and marginalizes other competing forms” (Mumby, 1998, p. 165). Men outside of the normative performance of male were subordinated and marginalized.

As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) further observe, hegemonic masculinity captures “a pattern of practice . . . [that embodies] the currently most honored way of being a man” (p. 832). In other words, hegemonic masculinity refers to what a particular culture considers normative to be a man (Hanke, 1998). This normative understanding not only includes commodifying characteristics (e.g., how to dress, what jobs to undertake) but also normative discourse and performance. This definition of hegemonic masculinity operates within every day, real world situations but also exist as a reification of power positions and constructs over men.
Multiple masculinities. During this same time period, the conceptualizations of hegemonic masculinity evolved in conjunction with the recognition of multiple masculinities (Connell, 1995). The conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity implicitly assumes that there are, in every interaction, a dominant and a submissive individual. Consequently, this power discourse can also be generalized to dominant/submissive and/or superordinate/subordinate groups of individuals. As a result, masculinity or multiple masculinities have been researched, conceptualized and theorized in myriad ways addressing Black, Latino, Gay, white and other masculinities (Beynon, 2002; Brod & Kaufman, 1994; Connell, 1995; hooks, 2004; Kimmel & Messner, 1998).

The general understanding within hegemonic masculinity is that white men hold the privileged position as dominant over others. Again, because of the separation of power, masculinity exists in multiple forms and contexts. Williams (2009) specifically states that, “Masculinities are therefore multiple, contested, and contradictory and are also based on the specific social and historical contexts that shape gender relations” (p. 442-443). As Hearn (2010) further suggests, research over the last several decades has particularly emphasized the multiple nature of masculinity, exploring its different articulations across the lines of class, sexuality, ethnicity, race, national culture, religion, age and disability. Additionally, Coles (2007) asserts that masculinity is fluid in multiple ways, with its expression variable across time, across social groupings, and even within men over the course of their lives and across the different situations they encounter. Thus, when researching men, and specifically father-son relationships, it is imperative to comprehend that not only differing and changing contexts influence the performance of
masculinity within the dyad but the performances of masculinity may change over the course of the relationship between the two men. The individual performances of men and how they embody their own form of masculinity within interactional contexts also adds to the importance of the scholarship surrounding father-son relationship and masculinity. As an interesting addition to the masculinity construct utilized within this study, Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) offer an intriguing sociological perspective on the individual acts that are constituted in masculine performances.

**Manhood acts.** As Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) suggest, a focus on the performance of masculinity is essential to a basic understanding of multiple masculinities that both resists the temptation to identify particular forms of masculinity with particular groups in an essentializing fashion and maintains a focus on power in relation to hegemonic masculinity. So what does this mean? It means that within an established group of men or cultural group, masculinity, as well as performances, take varied forms within those groups. By examining each group as separate (e.g., Black masculinity, white masculinity, Italian masculinity), attempts to also comprehend masculinity in differing forms reinforces the marginalization of the subordinate groups. Instead, examining the individual acts both mundane and strategic (e.g., hugging another man, entering a room, cat-calling a woman) helps define a unique masculine self and separates the actions, or manhood acts, from the groups and from other individuals.

To further explain, Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) continue noting that:

[M]ales - if they are to do their part in maintaining men as the dominant gender and if they wish to enjoy the privileges that come from membership in that group - must signify possession of a masculine self. (p. 279-280)
This refers to the process of signification; the pronouncing and reification of a masculine self, as manhood acts. More specifically, manhood acts encompass efforts to exert control of environments, events, people, perceptions and influences in a manner that (re)produces unequal gender order.

Now that the basic concepts of masculinity have been addressed, research addressing the intersection of masculinity and father-son relationships will now be examined.

**Masculinity in Father-son Relationships**

Research addressing masculinity and father-son relationships has most often been focused on the perspective of fathers and how the masculine identities of fathers and the performances of fathering roles influence sons (Silverstein, Auerbach & Levant, 2002). Furthermore, although the definitions and concepts above offer great frameworks by which to understand masculinity, there are very little spaces within communication explaining hegemonic masculinity in reference to father-son relationships. From the perspective of normative father-son relationships, fathers embody and perform a dominant form of masculinity. They are often authority figures for sons and offer a great deal of direction on the proper, albeit their own definition of proper, ways to enact the sons’ own masculinity through performances of their own. Consequently, fathers may also interfere and interject in sons’ performances when sons’ enactments do not conform to the dominant masculine discourses, or the father’s own. Sons thus embody the submissive positions in the performances of masculinity. These relationships continue on multiple levels throughout the life span of both fathers and sons. This study specifically
addressed the changing nature and influence of fathers and sons masculinities on their performances, identities, roles, and relationships.

As stated above, masculinity also exists in multiple forms throughout the life span of an individual. It is apparent that the multiple forms of both sons and fathers alter throughout the life span of their relationships. Thus, in each instance in which fathers and sons interact both men’s masculinities and the contexts from which those masculinities were constructed interact as well. Masculinity is not just an outward performance but an enactment and embodiment of the self. As Connell (1998) suggests masculinity does not exist prior to interaction. Since initial interaction of a man begin with the father, this basic statement becomes integral to understanding the intricate nature of masculinities influence on father-son relationships and vice versa. Even if interactions with a biological father are not explicitly present in the development of the son, implicitly the absence of the father or the presence of a father-figure contributes to the masculine self.

Specifically examining masculinity in comparison to fathering roles, LaRossa (2005) states that it is implicit to understand that not only are masculinities multiple but so are fathering styles. As LaRossa (2005) further suggests, it is imperative to acknowledge that just as there are multiple forms and performances of masculinity through which we must interpret actions and performances, there are also an infinite number of individualistic performances of father and son. So just as it is difficult to grasp a unified understanding of masculinity, masculinities and manhood acts, it is equally difficult to grasp a comprehensive understanding of what it is to perform father or perform son.
The individual performances of the fathers and sons become integral to understanding the dynamics within father-son relationships. Addressing the generative masculine influences of fathers’ on fathering, Levant (1992) states:

Raised to be like their fathers, [men are] mandated to become the good provider for their families, and to be strong and silent. They [are] discouraged from expressing vulnerable tender emotions, and [are] required to put a sharp edge around their masculinity by avoiding anything feminine. (p. 381)

Revisiting generational contexts addressed above, fathers were taught to be expressionless, breadwinning, distant and respected. This form of fathering directly influences the relationship with sons and the manner in which fathers perform masculinity within that role. As an example, Golden (2007) advances a masculine concept of caregiving which confounds the assumption of fathers’ caregiving as dominated by hegemonic masculinity in three distinct ways: childrearing as work, childrearing as pure emotion and as emotion work, and fathers as frame shifters. Although not mutually exclusive, these concepts contribute to the developing notions that are contemporary fathering. Additionally, and vital to the study under investigation, the perception of fathers from the perspective of sons also becomes imperative to understanding fathers/sons identities, roles, and relationships.

Furthermore, Horan, Houser and Cowan (2007) continue by asserting that fathers remain rigidly masculine by encouraging sons to communicate in masculine styles. The reinforcement of masculine ideals within father-son relationships gives lasting importance to how, where and why these ideals are constructed and performed outside father-son relationships. Within these concepts of how masculine men are “supposed” to perform are essentialized concepts of men, masculinity and gender roles that are, again,
constituted in and through father-son interactions. Moving this concept further into parent-child relationships, Levant (1992) suggests that “gender roles are defined by gender role stereotypes and norms imposed on the developing child by parents, teachers and peers who subscribe to the prevailing norms and stereotypes” (p. 380). Furthermore, as communication through verbal and nonverbal messages is intrinsic to learning, parents ultimately serve as key facilitators for children learning their gender (Mottet & Beebe, 2006). Put simply, sons learn about masculinity from fathers.

Speaking more specifically, Lamb (2010) suggests that often fathers vary on the amount of influence they have on their children. This depends on two separate but non-mutually exclusive orientations of fathers. This first orientation effect on sons exists specifically because of the interactions of the parent being male and the degree to which fathers perform their version of masculinity. Lamb (2010) also considers that the effects on fatherhood that may be affected by masculinity. That is, becoming a father may impact the masculinity of the father in a very positive way. Specifically in father-son relationships, fathers are the first reference and source for how a young man is supposed to act, making fathers essential to the development of the sons’ masculine characteristics. Even in the cases where a father is not present, the son’s masculine development is still affected. The son continues the process of constructing a masculine self in lieu of the father’s absence.

Historically situated in a dichotomous perspective of both gender and parenting, Mussen (1959) discusses that at the preschool age of male children, boys move away from the feminine style of nurturing of the mother and move to the more masculine style
of the father. In addition, Mussen suggests that young boys do not associate and assimilate their identity to a certain type of father or fathering techniques, instead to the perceptions of a father who is more salient (i.e., potency of time spent) and viewed as more powerful. In the late 1950s it appeared that most evidence suggested that both mothers and fathers were more eager to press their boys toward masculinity than to press their girls toward femininity. For many, the issue was less a positive concern that the boy be masculine than a negative concern that he not be feminine. From a similar historic perspective Kagan (1958) categorizes three conditions necessary for the establishing strong masculine identification in boys: (1) the father must be perceived as nurturing to the child; (2) the father must be perceived as being in command of desired goals, (e.g., power, love from others, competent in tasks) which the child regards as important; and (3) the child must perceive some basis of similarity of external attributes between himself and the father. Although these studies are considerably outdated the importance of their findings is situated in the historical significance and still speaks to the development of male children masculine association and identity.

Orienting the above historic research with contemporary scholarship in psychoanalysis, Diamond (2004) suggests that a developing male child’s gender identity is a struggle “wherein identification with the father becomes more problematic in its essential opposition to, or identification against, the mother” (p. 361). Furthermore, Diamond posits that boys will move away from mothers is an attempt to dis-identify with a feminine identity and move to adopt a more masculine orientation toward their identities. However, the relational interactions between and among both mother and
father contribute to a male child’s gender identity and, specifically, the masculine self (Diamond, 2004; Fast, 1999).

Focusing on more contemporary masculinity and father-son research within communication scholarship, Morman and Floyd (2002) further assert that when men are uncomfortable expressing emotions or are placed in situations in which they are uncomfortable with their own performance of masculinity, they tend to fall back on normative performances that they have been socially constructed to perform. In many of these instances where men must recall normative masculine performances, the performances are constructed through societal and cultural representations of masculinity. It is what they see in their everyday lives and interactions that help constitute their fall-back masculine performances. However, in other instances the fall-back performances are those established within their relationships with their fathers. That is, fathers often give young men a mold by which to create a performance of normative masculinity. In essence, they performatively answer the question, how would my father act in this situation.

Although it can be argued that a large portion of sons’ masculinities are socially constructed in and through the relationships with fathers, outside factors also have a great deal of influence. Therefore, the adherence to traditional masculinity and the differences performed by either individual will have some effect on the relationship itself. Differences in the orientation of fathers and sons masculinities may exist as well. Exploring developing identity orientations, Labouvie-Vief, Chiodo, Goguen, Diehl, and Orwoll (1995) suggest:
In contrast to development in childhood and adolescence, which is characterized by an outward orientation and the acquisition of cultural norms and standards, maturation during adulthood may be more adequately characterized by an inward orientation. (p. 404)

That is, an adolescent may look to his peers, media and the culture in which he surrounds himself to negotiate his own unique masculine self and identity. The father, however, more stable in his performance of his masculine self, may be more reflexive and introspective when orienting his own identity. Within these differences lie alternative forms of masculinity concepts, contexts and constructs.

Although there is a significant corpus of literature on communicative phenomena surrounding father-son relationships and another body of literature that examines characteristics of masculinity studies, there is a greater need to orient research that specifically looks at the influence of masculinity on the relationships and the influence of the relationships on masculinity. The current study does just that.

Research examining variables surrounding masculinity without explicitly addressing masculine issues include: fathers’ trait aggressiveness and argumentativeness as a predictor of the adult son’s perception of fathers (Beatty, Zelley, Dobos, & Rudd, 1994); predictions of father’s orientation and relationship to the son on the son’s sexuality (Leh, Demi, Dilorio, & Facteau, 2005); influences of son’s sexual orientation in the amount of affectionate communication (Floyd, Sargent, & DiCorcia, 2004); and communication apprehension (Beatty & Dobos, 1992, 1993). Although these studies do not specifically address masculinity and father-son relationships, they implicitly address the perceptions of masculinity on the relationships.
Throughout the reviewing and synthesizing of literature on father-son relationships and masculinity, a gap in knowledge surrounding and embedded in the information emerged. Perceptions of self and other in relationships, the influences and implications of perceptions, and how and why individuals perform within relationships have not been accurately studied in communication scholarship. Although most would say that perceptions and/or the concepts of meta-perceptions (perceptions of perceptions), can only be addressed within the scope of psychology, it is important to understand the implications of these perceptions in communication scholarship. This will give communication scholars a means to gain insight into the impact of masculinity on fathers/sons’ identities, roles and relationships as well as the reciprocal of this impact (i.e., father-son relationships impact on masculinity) which are so heavily reliant on interpersonal perceptions.

Below literature surrounding interpersonal perceptions pertaining to a range of communicative phenomena is addressed. Why is this important? The importance lies in the fact that, especially in men’s relationships with men, the perceptions and meta-perceptions that men hold for one another influence the performances they enact during interactions. A son’s perceptions of how he thinks his father wants him to act influences the way the son actually acts within interactions. Likewise, the father enacts a version of his own masculine self in response to how interactions and individuals necessitates. By having a basic understanding of the role of perceptions within father-son relationships this information can aid in better understanding the dynamics of the relationships and
perhaps alter communicative patterns to increase the satisfaction of the existing relationships.

With this in mind and a significant portion of the literature on father-son relationships and masculinity addressed, a final addition to the literature, perceptions in father-son relationships, will be examined.

Perceptions

Combining father-son relationships, masculinity and perceptions results in a dearth of research within communication scholarship. However, this does not take away from the importance or necessity for the research. The communicative conceptualizations within the areas, the inability to clearly operationalize perceptions, and the lack of methodological variations has created this large gap in the literature.

To begin, the concepts of perceptions and metaperceptions originally stemmed from Cooley’s (1902) looking glass self. They are further explicated through Blumer’s (1969) explication of symbolic interactionism which addresses the triadic nature of meaning (Mead, 1934). The foundations and tenets and symbolic interactionism will be discussed in depth in Chapter Two. However, to orient the argument for the importance of perceptions in communication a brief understanding is needed. Thus, from the combined perspectives of the looking glass self, perceptions and metaperceptions, three interconnected actions are said to take place within communicative interactions constituting the nature of meaning. The first action within the nature of meaning emphasizes the individual's actual view or evaluation of the other individual in the interaction. The second emphasizes the individual’s perception of how the other
individual within the interactions views them. This is considered their metaperspective 
(Cook & Douglas, 1998). Finally, the third action situates how the individual views 
themselves given the other two criteria; or their self-perception. The perceptions and 
metaperceptions thus impact and influence all interactions and can offer greater insight 
into the workings of interpersonal and family communicative phenomena.

Perceptions have been studied in a number of different disciplines with varying 
conclusions pertaining to their importance on relationships. Initially addressing perceived 
judgments within families, Branje, Van Aken, Van Lieshout and Mathijssen (2003) 
examine personality judgments within families. The judgments take four different 
functional forms: (1) target effect (characteristics of the target influence personality 
judgments); (2) perceiver effect (characteristics of the perceiver influence judgments, 
responses and normative behavior); (3) relationship effect (characterizes a unique 
judgment of a target); and (4) family effect (family members judgments are similar to 
other family members) (p. 51). Although this research does not explicitly address the 
concept of perceptions or metaperceptions, the presence of perception is implicitly 
understood within the study.

Researching from an alternate perspective on perceptions, Salt (1991) examines 
paternal affectionate touch, preadolescent sons, physical touch and the perceptions of the 
types and amount of affectionate touch fathers have given. Additionally, the perceptions 
of the affectionate touch that son’s perceive are also examined. This research offers 
insight into interpersonal perceptions in father-son relationships although it mainly 
focuses on the difference in perceptions of the touch itself and not the perceptions of the
individuals within the relationship. In a similar study discussing perceptions of both father and son during three separate stages of development during puberty, Ogletree, Jones, and Coyl (2002) found that fathers’ and sons’ perceptions across that specific time span did not differ in companionship, contact or connection. That is, fathers and sons were able to maintain relationship balance while negotiating the perceptions that they had in the areas of connection, contact and companionship. During this stage of development, the relationships may incorporate more stability as the pubescent male children are still in the developing stages of their own identities and look to their fathers as sources of knowledge. But as children mature, the importance of perceptions and metaperceptions, of what they think their parents think of them, remain imperative to their performances of self. However, although the saliency of parents’ perceptions has less of an influence on performance and identity as children develop into young adults, impact on areas such as academic, athletic and social abilities remains (Felson, 1989; Hergovich, Sirsch, & Felinger, 2002).

Initiating research from a symbolic interactionist perspective and focusing on more explicit concepts of perception, Demo, Small and Savin-William (1987) suggest and imply a necessity to research both adolescents’ and parents’ perceptions of control within family relationships. Demo et al.’s (1987) findings offer an important insight into perceptions and the impact of those perceptions on family relationships suggesting:

[A]dolescents and their parents have independent yet overlapping perceptions of their relationships; and the individual's perceptions of the relationship are consistently related to his or her self-esteem . . . these findings suggest that the intimate, challenging, and emotionally charged nature of parent-adolescent relations is indeed influential in shaping the self-concepts of all family members
involved. We believe the nature of these relationships is critical in that both adolescents and parents serve as significant others whose opinions and reflected appraisals are influential in shaping the others' self-esteem. Reflected appraisals are mutually transmitted as parents and their children interact in daily social encounters (p. 713).

Again, perceptions and metaperceptions remain salient in the studying and understanding of parent-child relationships. Furthermore, within the discussion of their findings, Demo et al. (1987) emphasize the importance of self esteem, self concepts, and reflective appraisal in parent-child relationships. Another concept often utilized within the parameters of perceptions and metaperceptions is reflective appraisal. Simply put, reflective appraisal is the manner in which an individual thinks another individual views them (Kinch, 1963; Matsueda, 1992).

However the influence of parent-child interactions and the terms uses (e.g., perceptions, metaperceptions, reflective appraisal) are conceptualized, it is important to comprehend the need for further research on interpersonal and family perceptions as a means to address issues such as self esteem, self concept and relationship satisfaction in addition to focused research on father-son identities, roles, relationships and masculinity. When examining family dynamics, perceptions of self and others and the unique nature of individuals and relationships, children may often perceive their relationships in quite a different manner than their parents. Especially when children reach the age of adolescence, the view of their parents and the view of the parents on the children change. Outside influences on children from peers and media alter the way that they see their relationships and parents (Collins, Laursen, Mortensen, Luebker & Ferreira, 1997; Laursen & Collins, 2004).
Researching judgmental biases, a variable closely related to perceptions, and the accuracy in which partners can determine positive or negative biases present in intimate relationships, Boyes and Fletcher (2007) offer insight into the perceived biases within family relationships. From their findings, Boyer and Fletcher (2007) suggest that long-term familiarity, as in families, may confound the accuracy of metaperceptions. As family members coexist for extended periods of time, ongoing evaluation of perceptions and metaperceptions may lose potency. That is, perceptions and metaperceptions of self and others established as valid from the perspective of one family member, such as a father, may have changed without that family member’s knowledge. The importance of Boyer and Fletcher’s (2007) research for father-son relationships lies in the development of changing self concepts over the course of the relationship. Adding the outside influences on masculinity and individual identities during certain developmental stages and increased time spent separated may also confound the issues of accurate perceptions of self and other.

Cook and Douglas’ (1998) integral study addressing family relationships and children’s metaperceptions of their parents from a symbolic interactionism perspective examines how children thought their parents viewed them. The findings conclude that “how young people think of themselves does tend to be related to how they think they are perceived by their parents . . . [but] do not know much about how they are perceived by their parents” (Cook & Douglas, 1998, p. 306). Specifically speaking about college students, Cook and Douglas (1998) suggest that because college students are away from home their perceptions and metaperceptions of themselves and their parents may shift.
The shift makes the perceptions and metaperceptions become more convoluted in regards to how they used to be. This causes less accuracy in the perceptions they hold for their parents and the perceptions their parents hold for them.

It is evident that the literature on perceptions and father-son relationships in regards to masculinity is fragmented and essentially nonexistent. Attempting to review and synthesize relevant literature in order to formulate a foundational understanding of the concepts was the focus of this review on perceptions. It is obvious and warranted that further investigation and research remains imperative in order to achieve better understanding of the communicative phenomena existing in and through father-son relationships, masculinity and interpersonal, family perceptions.

**Conclusion**

The main purpose of this chapter was to review and synthesize the relevant and most prevalent literature on father-son relationships, masculinity and perceptions. Throughout I have addressed and examined multiple perspectives of scholarship and research pertaining to these highly salient topics in interpersonal and family communication and other relevant fields. Introducing the area of perceptions and metaperceptions of self, other and relationships into the review adds an intriguing element to father-son relationships and masculinity. In fact, I would argue that perceptions *must* be included in this research in order to comprehensively understand the dynamics of the individuals, relationships and the influences those have on masculinity and the influences of masculinity on individuals and relationships. Although this review and synthesis covers a great deal of information pertaining to these subjects, it is apparent...
that more research needs to be accomplished in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the communicative phenomena surrounding father-son relationships and masculinity. For this particular line of research, the impact of father-son relationships, the performance of unique masculinities and the perceptions of the individuals hold heuristic value within and beyond communication scholarship.

The following chapter will discuss symbolic interactionism theory and important concepts pertaining to narrative and the implications that these theory-based frameworks have on father-son relationships and masculinity. The chapter will be an extension of the literature reviewed above.
CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Family and interpersonal communication offers a tremendous amount of research utilizing a myriad of theoretical and meta-theoretical paradigms all of which contribute to the exploration of multiple subjects and communicative phenomena. But what is the role and importance of theory within communication scholarship? Simply put, theory is an abstract set of ideas that can help control, predict or explain phenomena in order to better make sense of behavior within the social world (Miller, 2005). More comprehensively stated, Stryker (1959) suggests that theory is a:

[S]et of assumptions or postulates with which one approaches some part of the empirical world, a set of concepts in terms of which this part of the world is described, and a set of propositions, emerging from the assumptions and relating the concepts, about the way this part of the world "works" which are checked against observations of that world. (p. 111)

Although some theories have been created specifically within the fields of interpersonal and family communication such as affection exchange theory (Floyd, 2006), communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 2002), and relational dialectics (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008), a large portion of theory utilized as guiding frameworks in communication research, because of the interdisciplinary roots of the field, come from outside the discipline.
When examining interpersonal, family and gendered relationships, utilizing theories that succinctly explain communicative phenomena in those areas becomes imperative. Specifically examining father-son relationships and masculinity through an interpretive methodological paradigm, symbolic interactionism and aspects of narrative ideology emerge as frameworks most conducive to this research. As LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) suggest:

[S]ymbolic interactionism . . . focuses on the connection between symbols and interactions . . . [and] is a frame of reference for understanding how humans, in concert with one another, create symbolic worlds and how these worlds, in turn, shape human behavior. (p. 135-136)

Additionally, the ideology that humans are storytelling creatures who create reality and culture reinforces the combination of these two theoretical frameworks working cohesively together when examining father-son relationships and masculinity (Fisher, 1987; Langellier, 1999).

In order to more fully understand the necessity for and significance of symbolic interactionism and narrative as the primary frameworks for father-son and masculinity scholarship, this chapter will initially examine symbolic interactionism with regards to its historical background, theoretical assumptions, implications for interpretive methodologies, utilization in contemporary scholarship, and significance when examining identity (e.g., self, others, role-identity, role-performance, social values and perceptions) within father-son relationships and masculinity. Following the explication of symbolic interactionism, key components and conceptualizations of narrative will be addressed with regards to its saliency to this particular study. By looking at these areas, arguments will be made for the overall importance of symbolic interactionism and narrative based
communication research and more specifically the future of father-son relational and masculinity research.

**Symbolic Interactionism**

To begin, it is important to understand in very basic terms why symbolic interactionism should be utilized as a theoretical framework from which to study communicative phenomena and specifically, father-son relationships and masculinity. Although this will be addressed throughout the chapter in greater detail, initially, symbolic interactionism helps to explicate how and why individuals make meaning of their selves, relationships and worlds in and through social interactions. Especially considering everyday interactions of fathers and sons over the life span of the relationship, symbolic interactionism offers further comprehension with regards to relationship dynamics and also the unique identity construction of the individuals interacting within the relationship.

Often times when considering the construction of identity from communicative theoretical perspectives, confusion exists among two closely related theories; social constructionism and symbolic interactionism. It is important here to make a distinction. Although the theories are closely related and stem from a similar sociological background, when distinguishing between the two pertinent social theories, Leeds-Hurwitz (2005) succinctly suggests:

> [W]hat separates [the theories] is that social constructionism is centrally concerned with how people make sense of the world, especially through language, and emphasizes language; whereas symbolic interactionism’s central concern is making sense of the self and social roles. (p. 233)
Again, within communication, the significance of both theories resonates and is often misconstrued. It can be argued that the construction of identity and social worlds can come from a constructionist perspective, framing father-son relationships and masculinity as overarching social constructs. This is a valid argument. However, the argument for symbolic interactionism for this specific review and synthesis concentrates heavily on the development of self and social roles (e.g., father, son) through interactions within father-son relationships. Additionally, masculinity, or the masculine self, is viewed as a set of distinct characteristics within the identity of the individuals. The masculine self influences interactions within the relationships and is constituted in and through those same relational interactions. Thus, this clarification helps to prove that symbolic interactionism remains a salient theoretical paradigm from which to study father-son relationships and masculinity.

Connecting other communication scholars’ validation for the use of symbolic interactionism within family communication, Sabourin (2006) states that studying, researching, and applying symbolic interactionism has scholarly credibility by focusing on family relations and examining the mundane interactional experiences in everyday life. Therefore, within the interactions of everyday family life, symbols exchanged by family members create and define individual identities. Symbolic interactionism from this everyday perceptive is essential when conceptualizing self, identity, relationships and social roles, in family. Specifically, the identities of father, son, their social roles and the relationships emerge in and through mundane reality; the reality of everyday interactions and existence. Additionally, throughout the review and synthesis, masculinity, a
distinguishing characteristic of the self and vital to a male family members’ identity, will be inherently recognized as part of identity within fathers and sons. With this in mind, interactions between fathers and sons, the construction and development of masculine selves and the creation and performance of social roles gain even more significance to this review. However, to more fully understand the underlying concepts, the foundational aspects of the theory will be addressed.

The Beginnings of Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective emerged from sociological scholarship in the late part of the 19th and early 20th century and was more specifically divided into the Iowa and Chicago Schools of thought. The Iowa School situated its scholarship around a more post-positivistic research paradigm, whereas the Chicago School situated itself with a naturalistic, behavior-based orientation to observing the social world and situational-based experiences (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; Longmore, 1998). Both schools’ foundational concepts surrounding symbolic interactionism emerged from the scholarship of James’ (1892) *Psychology: The Briefer Course*; Cooley’s (1902) *Human Nature and the Social Order*, specifically incorporating the looking glass self; and further conceptualized through Mead’s (1934) *Mind, Self, and Society*, specifically emphasizing the triadic nature of meaning.

Cooley and Mead. Referenced briefly in Chapter One and one of the founding ideas of symbolic interactionism, Cooley’s looking glass self offers important insight into the construction of an individual’s reality. In the three principles posited in his work, Cooley (1902) suggests that the self is constituted in the imagination of our appearance to
the other person, the imagination of the judgment of that appearance, and a degree of self
acknowledgement and feeling. When considering the importance of these principles in
examining identity and family communication scholarship, father-son relationships,
masculinity and perceptions contribute a great deal to how individuals perform while in
the company of another individual. As an example, a son’s performance of masculinity in
a given context will be altered by how he imagines the father will perceive his
performance. In this instance, the performance of both the father and son are altered
because of the perceptions involved in the interaction. As Cooley (1902) suggests, this is
further confounded by the significance of the relationship and the context in which the
masculinities are being performed. Additionally, “sympathetic introspection” is also
introduced, which explains that individuals imagine situations as others see them. That is,
a son may ask the question to himself, how will my father perceive me within this
interaction? Answering questions concerning those perceptions, again, alters the way in
which a son performs in that situation. This concept can be moved forward to also
encompass Mead’s (1934) “generalized other”.

Further explicating the generalized other, Mead (1934) states that an individual
must be able to examine him/herself as an object unto themselves. Thus, an individual
must objectify themselves as they would any other individual. This is accomplished in
order to negotiate and make sense of the self in relation to other selves. By looking at the
self as others would see, the individual is able to modify the self to accurately perform a
particular role within any social interaction. Mead (1934) further specifies that “concepts
of the object self leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the self as a social
construct which stems from social interactions” (as cited in Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 126). Furthermore, Mead references multiple contexts within social experiences positing that there are multiple selves responding to multiple social interactions. Commenting further on the constructing of the self from multiple “elementary selves” Mead (1934) suggests that multiple elementary selves exist within an individual (e.g., father, husband, uncle, coworker) from which a larger construct of self is organized. This larger, complete self is the self that operates within the everyday social world and the self that performs within everyday mundane interactions.

Not only does this perspective speak to the existence of multiple forms of self within an individual but also emphasizes an individuals’ conscious attempt to negotiate the varied selves within varied contexts. This is particularly salient when addressing scholarship and issues surrounding father-son relationships and masculinity. In each interaction with fathers and sons, the men pull from previous interactions they have had with the others, as well as pulling from interactions with other men outside of those specific relationships. Furthermore, the context in which the interactions are taking place also contributes to the performances of masculine selves. For example, the performances of masculinity may be different if the father-son relationships occur within a family business context as opposed to family dinners or initial introductions of a father to a son’s new significant other. In each of these situations multiple contexts influence multiple perceptions and performances in each individual, all of which continuously evolve each individual’s identity and the relationships itself.
The review and synthesis of these foundational elements of symbolic interactionism, although by no means exhaustive, focuses on meaning making within interactional, behavioral situations emphasizing and recognizing the self as established in single and multiple interactions. Through the interactions, individuals are able to perform aspects of the self within given contexts and are able to understand that within certain interactions a performance, either in a positive or negative light, offers a version of their identity which others may acknowledge and anticipate. That is, in order for an individual to understand and situate themselves in a given interaction, they must know themselves, their own role, the role of the other within the interactions and be able to move the established understanding of those collective concepts forward, consciously or subconsciously. This is accomplished in order to fully comprehend their position as well as the other’s position. This ability to change perspective in and through the acknowledgement of the generalized other also includes the individual’s ability to interpret the meanings of the other and transform meaning in a collective attempt of interactional understanding. Thus, the evolution of individual identities within a family context is continuously negotiated, redefining who they are and their social roles and positions within the family in and through everyday symbolic social interactions.

Now that a basic understanding of the foundational elements, scholars and concepts have been established through family examples, symbolic interactionism, through the perspective of Herbert Blumer, will be addressed. Blumer’s perspective of symbolic interactionism stems from the Chicago School of sociological thought. Although both the Iowa and Chicago schools legacy of research remains imperative and
poignant in many disciplines, the Chicago School offers an interpretive perspective to the theoretical framework. Because this review concentrates on the importance of father-son relationships and masculinity conceptualized through an interpretive methodological paradigm and collection of narratives, the Chicago School’s and specifically Herbert Blumer’s framework of symbolic interactionism will be examined. As illustrated below, Blumer not only offers succinct arguments for an interactional perspective of meaning making and identity but also offers insight into methodological argumentation and understanding specific to this study. Through the work of those scholars before him, including James, Cooley and Mead, Blumer formulates a cohesive understanding of the concepts utilized before him and innovative concepts of his own when moving symbolic interactionism forward.

**Blumer’s Symbolic Interactionism**

The majority of the review and synthesis of Blumer’s work below stems from his 1969 book *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Although Mead is often situated as the founding father of symbolic interactionism, Blumer’s explication, articulation and interpretive perspective of the theory takes precedence in this review. Thus, it is imperative to take a close look at this text in order to more fully understand the concepts from which contemporary communication scholars, and other disciplines, derive much of their theoretically driven research. Initially, Blumer (1969) establishes and conceptualizes the fundamental premises of symbolic interactionism as: (1) human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; (2) the meanings of these things are derived from, or arise out of, the social interactions that
individuals has with others; and (3) meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by individuals in dealing with the things they encounter (p. 2). Therefore, it is important that human beings take into account the actions of others as a function of understanding their own meaning making processes and the actions of others as influential to their own social actions and interactions.

Theoretical assumptions. Symbolic interactionism situates meaning as “social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact” (p. 5). Furthermore, meaning is created through a process of interpretation. An individual must not only acknowledge the existence of the thing creating the meaning (i.e., communication with the self) but must negotiate the existing meaning in order to make sense out of present and future interactions. Meanings are, thus, transformed and revised to each new situation within this process. That is, the individual becomes an object unto himself. Individuals recognize in specific contexts, for example, that they are a student, baseball player, boyfriend, son, brother, and are able to interpret, understand and negotiate portions of their self/identity. Not only this, but the acknowledgment helps them to negotiate their own space before and within interactions.

From this perspective the individual acts towards others, comprehends their own identity, as sees themselves as a distinct self. Again, we find that an individual within the context of a father-son dyad must recognize and interpret his self, identity and role within the relationships in order to be a functioning participant in the social interactions with the other individual. Each individual knows or comes to know their role in terms of their performance of self (i.e., masculine self) and establishes that foundational self as
perceived within the dyadic context. What Blumer is suggesting is that individuals must adapt and transform themselves to the interactions in which they are presented. Thus, individual actions within an interaction may be revised, repaired, intensified, and silenced in an effort to interact according to a given context. Although a son may know generally who his father is in any given context and interaction, he is able to adapt his own performance to the performance of his father if the interaction and context changes positively or negatively.

**Social interactions.** Moving the concepts of self and multiple contexts forward, another foundational premise of symbolic interactionism asserts that fundamentally human groups and society exist in actions, must be seen in terms of actions, and consists of people engaging in actions. Blumer (1969) succinctly states that “Social interaction forms human conduct” (p. 8). This portion of Blumer’s argument is paramount when adding the concepts of masculinity to this study. As a part of larger society, interactions within relationships, such as father-son relationships, reflect larger societal ideologies. These ideologies, such as masculinity, are also influenced by the relationships. For example, individual men perform, exist and interact in the mundane symbolic interactions of everyday life (i.e., father). These interactions constitute selves and the performance of those selves within larger social institutions (i.e., families). As the interaction occurs continuously in multiple contexts, they expand to even larger context (i.e., business) and begin to influence and impact the way in which these institutions operate. There exists a simultaneous influence of self, identity, social role and social structure all emerging in and through social interaction. Thus, masculinity, father, son and father-son relationships
are both cause an effect, are influenced and influential, are constructed and deconstructed in and through symbolic interactions.

**Triadic nature of meaning.** After considering the construction of the self, identity, social roles and structures within interactions, Blumer offers insight into the nature of meaning and effective communication. One of the most important concepts that exists within Blumer’s iteration of symbolic interactionism is the extrapolation of the triadic nature of meaning. With elements of the looking glass self and the generalized other, Blumer further solidifies the importance of knowing the self and other within communication. As Blumer (1969) discusses, there are three elements that must occur in order to communicate effectively. There needs to be: (1) an indication of what the sender wants the receiver to do; (2) an indication of what the sender intends to do; and (3) a signification of the joint action that both understand may occur (p. 9). This becomes increasingly important when actions taken are perceived as normative or patterned performances. As Blumer (1969) states, “If there is confusion or misunderstanding along any one of these three lines of meaning, communication is ineffective, interaction is impeded, and the formation of joint action is blocked” (p. 9). Also, Blumer further suggests that recognizing the role of the other individual and the other individual recognizing you within the interaction is imperative to effective communication.

Another fundamental argument asserts that human beings are social creatures. Unlike other sociological and psychological ideologies set before him, Blumer (1969) posits that individuals are not just respondents to outside social stimulus but are in fact a part of the social world (p. 13). Being an active part of the social world involves having
the ability of interpretation in the wake of new interactions. This interpretative ability could be situated as interactional adaptability and reflexivity. An individual within a given context has the ability to adapt to and be reflexive in the interaction based on the establishment of known social roles, structures and norms. An individual engaging in a social interaction may not only understand the normative, expected performances and roles within the interaction but may also adapt their own performance as a result of a change in the interaction. This may then lead to a reflexive view of the interaction in which the individual transforms how they will see themselves, the others, the situation and the social world differently in the future. With the addition of interactional adaptability and reflexivity the individual, “has to cope with the situations in which [they are] called on to act, ascertaining the meaning of the actions of others and mapping out [their] own line of action in the light of such interpretation” (p. 15).

When speaking on the connection and cohesion of actions involving more than just one individual, Blumer suggests that a large portion of social interaction occurs in repeated patterns when considering an action that involves more than one person. Together with the concepts of self, social role, the triadic nature of meaning, and interactional adaptability and reflexivity, individuals have a general understanding of how they will act towards the other in the interaction as well as the other individual understanding the patterned interaction from which they can also act. That is, they have a perception of what each must do and how each must act in order to interact in the normal patterned way (p. 17). However, Blumer continues by emphasizing that even though we have a comprehension of the past interactions with the other, there is still a need to enter
into a new interaction with the other individual with further interpretation. Assuming concrete knowledge of an interaction before the interaction takes place may inhibit effective communication for the present and future interactions.

The concepts explicated above offer a brief but concise glimpse at many of the fundamental theoretical elements within symbolic interactionism that are utilized within the current study. They help to explicate the communicative phenomena that exist when researching father-son relationships and masculinity. Now that a review of the fundamental concepts has been addressed, the Chicago School and Blumer’s foundational arguments for interpretive methodological research within symbolic interactionism will be examined.

**Interpretive Methodology**

As Blumer suggests, interpretation is an integral portion of the social world. Thus, when creating meaning of and in the social world, a close, interpretive approach to examining the experiences and interactions of individuals would only be appropriate. Whether the methodological portion of research involves interviewing, focus groups or diaries, symbolic interactionism not only helps to theoretically explain identity construction and interactions between individuals and groups but also asserts the methodological and pragmatic means in which research should be accomplished. Blumer suggests that researchers need to begin to extend research that is most often accomplished from a post-positivistic paradigm to studies that examine the everyday social world. Furthermore, Blumer (1969) asserts that, “To form an empirically satisfactory picture of intelligence, a picture that may be taken as having empirical validation, it is necessary to
study intelligence as it is in play in actual empirical life” (p. 31). What Blumer is suggesting here is a methodological switch from a measure based post-positivistic view of methodology. That is, Blumer places the importance of stepping away from a deductive perspective of research (e.g., adhering to scientific protocol, engaging in replication, testing hypotheses, and using operational procedure) and move towards an inductive perspective which examines phenomena within the social world. Not to say that the post-positivistic paradigm of research does not hold merit, but, specifically in the application of symbolic interactionism to the area of sons’ narratives surrounding father-son relationships and masculinity, the interpretive perspective of which Blumer speaks is best.

Additionally, Blumer argues that the only way to achieve a greater understanding of social behaviors, interactions and phenomena is to go directly into the empirical world. The empirical world, as Blumer (1969) defines is, “the world of everyday experience, the top layers of which we see in our lives and recognize the lives of others” (p. 35). Once researchers take it upon themselves to examine the empirical world, they are able to achieve a better understanding of the individuals and groups that exist in the social world. This is because the researchers exist with the other individuals as well. In studying the individuals, groups and the interactions, interpretive, naturalistic research lifts the veil that may have been covering the interactions of the group. This is accomplished not by deductively placing preexisting operationalizations or measurements on the group but by getting close to the interactions and letting them inform the research.
**Exploration and inspection.** In further describing the importance of naturalistic investigation directed to an ongoing empirical world, Blumer offers two specific elements of inquiry that will be considered briefly: exploration and inspection. Exploration is the way a researcher establishes a close, thorough relationship with a portion of the social world of which they are not familiar and:

> is the means of developing and sharpening [their] inquiry so that [their] problem, [their] directions of inquiry, data, analytical relations, and interpretations arise out of and remain grounded in the empirical life under study. (Blumer, 1969, p. 40)

Exploration can be accomplished on many levels of interpretive methodology (e.g., direct observations, interviews, letters, diaries). The elements involved in naturalistic methodology also call for the researcher to have a good representative sample from which to study and collect data.

But it seems that the most important part of Blumer’s exploratory inquiry is the ability of the researcher to be reflexive. As stated above, the ability to be an effective communicator stems in part from interactional adaptability and reflexivity. Here, Blumer is advancing these concepts within the symbolic interactionist methodological perspective to encompass the role of the researcher. Although this is not explicitly stated in the text, Blumer adheres to the concepts of interactional adaptability and reflexivity stating that the researcher needs, “to be constantly alert to the need of testing and revising his images, beliefs, and conceptions of the areas of life he is studying” (p. 41).

Exploration, the first part of naturalistic, interpretive scientific inquiry, leads the researcher to inspection. Inspection is the process of analysis that the researcher must go through in order to find the meanings and intricacies of the social world, social groups,
individuals and interactions. Essentially inspection constitutes the rigorous process and methods of analysis of data emerging from direct, naturalistic observations of the social world. Furthermore, inspection, Blumer would argue, helps the researcher step away from the larger aggregate nature of post-positivistic research and concentrate on flexible, imaginative, creative and free methodological shift. This methodological turn seeks to identify the nature of the analytical element by intense scrutiny of its instances in the real world.

Blumer (1969) continues acknowledging the presence of researcher bias positing that without the element of inspection “one is captive to one’s prior image or conception of the relations” (p. 46). Furthermore, when describing the nature of methodological orientation, Blumer suggests that researchers need to envision a social world from the perspective of the social group that we are studying. In addition the researcher needs to understand that the meaning of the objects from the world of those individuals being observed can only be explained and described by those individuals. It is, thus, the duty of the researcher through the symbolic interactionist perspective to then to try to understand to the best of their ability what the meanings of the objects are to those individuals.

After addressing symbolic interactionism from historical, theoretical, pragmatic and methodological perspectives, contemporary research utilizing symbolic interactionism as well as the advancement of the theory into the specific areas of father-son relationships and masculinity will now be examined.
Contemporary Symbolic Interactionism

Scholars from varying disciplines utilize symbolic interactionism in varying ways. The review here concentrates on contemporary symbolic interactionist scholarship which addresses identity within family relationships, father-son relationships and masculinity. Adding to the review and synthesis of the symbolic interactionism literature already explicated, LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) offer another concise review of symbolic interactionism from a family studies perspective recapitulating seven assumptions foundational to the theoretical conceptualizations of symbolic interactionism: (1) individuals act towards things on the basis of the meanings they have for them; (2) meanings arise in the process of interactions between individuals; (3) meanings are negotiated and modified through interpretations utilized by individuals negotiating symbols they encounter; (4) individuals are not born with a self but develop self-concepts through social interactions; (5) self-concepts provide an important motive for behavior; (6) individuals and small groups are influenced by larger cultural and societal processes; and (7) it is through social interaction in everyday situations that individuals negotiate the details of social structure. Each of these assumptions operates within three basic themes of the meaning for human behavior, the development and importance of self-concept and assumptions of society (p. 143-144). Although the information offered here is similar to the more comprehensive review above, it is important to illustrate the salience of such reviews given by other family scholars to add to the importance of symbolic interactionism to family scholarship.
More specifically addressing research surrounding family issues and symbolic interactionism, through interviews and descriptions narrated from the family caregiver, Piercy and Dunkley (2004) assess the meanings assigned to home healthcare service by family caregivers. The researchers utilize symbolic interactionism as a theoretical framework from which the caregivers were able to make meaning out of the interactions with the health services. Piercy and Dunkley found through interactions home health aides offered patients an opportunity for respite; a time and place to rest and take a break from a difficult situation. Patients were able to more fully make sense of their conditions through the interactions with the health services.

Stemming from a communication perspective, symbolic interactionism has been utilized as a theoretical framework in research surrounding commuter wives negotiation of identity (Bergen, 2008). In this particular study Bergen utilizes symbolic interactionism to explain how commuter wives juxtapose their own experiences with the experiences of their social groups and their interpretation of their marriages as set against heteronormative marriage. Additionally Suter, Dass, and Bergen’s (2008) utilizes symbolic interactionism to explicate their research on the negotiation of lesbian family identities in their own families, as a social process, through management of structure and process and their negotiation of motherhood roles through the uses of rituals and symbols. Yet another study conducted through a symbolic interactionist framework focuses on non-biological lesbian mothers’ construction of a parenting role (Bergen, Suter & Daas, 2006). Here, Bergen, Suter and Daas examine lesbian family symbolic resources which legitimate parental identity for the non-biological mother. The studies
reviewed above offer legitimacy to the saliency of symbolic interactionism as a credible theoretical framework to study families and identities.

Examining the role of identity and fatherhood, Hyde, Essex and Horton (1993) utilize symbolic interactionism, and more specifically identity theory, to examine influences and attitudes towards fathers’ parental leave as illustrated through interactions of family salience and sex role attitudes, family salience and work salience, as well as family salience and co-worker attitudes. Identity theory extends symbolic interactionism by adding the elements of identity commitment (i.e., the degree an individual performs a certain identity) and salience (i.e., hierarchy of identities) (Hyde et al., 1993, p. 619). More specifically, other studies researcher utilizes this extension of symbolic interactionism to examine four components of fatherhood (i.e., responsivity, harshness, behavioral engagement, and affective involvement) from an identity theory framework (Fox & Bruce, 2001). Fox and Bruce (2001) found that the identity theoretical framework was “effective when accounting for fathers’ commitment behavior” (p. 410). Additionally, research focused on paternal identity and daily interaction (Marsiglio & Cohen, 2000) as well as positive fatherhood identity roles resulting from positive cognitive appraisals utilized when explaining the involvement of fathers (Pasley, Futris & Skinner, 2002).

Although these studies contribute to the breadth of knowledge surrounding identity and roles within family relationships, parenting, fatherhood and symbolic interactionism, a gap in research occurs when specifically researching father-son relationships and more specifically father-son relationships and masculinity. Because of
the significant gap in literature, research concentrating on father-son relationships and masculinity from a symbolic interactionism perspective offers much needed theoretical, methodological, pragmatic scholarship and insight into the development of the self, identity, role and society in regards to father-son relationships and masculinity. From a communication standpoint few studies have properly addressed father-son relationships and masculinity. By exploring these areas of research utilizing symbolic interactionism this study can offer new insights into how everyday interactions or the recall of those interactions of fathers and sons influence identities and roles within father-son relationships.

Although symbolic interactionism offers a solid theoretical foundation when addressing the construction of identity, roles, relationships and the perceptions therein, in order to further explain the intricate elements of father-son relationships, the influence that each individuals’ identity has on that relationship, and the sense making processes involved, concepts of narrative will also be utilized within this study.

**Narrative Conceptualizations**

In addition to the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, narrative ideologies stemming from the multiple conceptualizations within the narrative paradigm also aid in exploring and explaining participants sense making processes within the context of this study. More specifically, after consideration of identities and roles within the context of every day interactions in father-son relationships, participants’ storytelling, stories and narratives about their experiences with their fathers will aid in making sense of their and their fathers’ identities, roles, relationships, performances and perceptions of
masculinity within their relationships. Narrative offers great insight into this sense making process. Furthermore, the combination of symbolic interactionism with narrative allows for the current study to address multiple ways of making sense of their social world both through the interactions themselves and through the telling of stories surrounding those interactions.

Definitions of narratives, narrative theory, stories, and storytelling are often as varied as the researchers who study them. There are multiple ways in which the terms have been conceptualized, operationalized and defined throughout the history of narrative and narrative theory (Barthes & Duisit, 1975; Chase, 2008; Fisher, 1984; Koenig-Kellas, 2008; Labov, 1982; Riessman, 2008; Sandelowski, 1991; Somers, 1994). As the differentiation and defining of the terms “story” and “narrative” have often been misconstrued within communication scholarship, the terms for this study are explained below in order to make sense out of the existing terms. The term “story” is utilized as a singular communicative event in which the individual articulates an experience to the researcher. As Koenig-Kellas (2008) succinctly states, “The term story is often used to describe an individually constructed discourse unit” (p. 244). In addition to this definition, the term “narrative” is conceptualized as the collective storytelling event. Thus, several stories iterated by participants collectively represent the construct of that individual’s overarching narrative of identity. Furthermore, the term “storytelling” is used when describing the individual’s (re)iteration of experiences. To further specify, within the context of an interview an individual may offer an experience that impacts their own performance of masculinity. This telling of the experience is labeled a story. The process
of the telling of the experience is labeled storytelling. In the cases where individuals offer several stories concerning their experiences, or in cases where individuals offer several stories explicating their individual or combined experiences, the label of narrative is applied to their experiences.

Narratives and storytelling are vital to understanding the meaning and sense making processes within identity. The importance lies in the actual (re)telling of the story. When an individual (re)tells a story, the telling of the story holds special meaning to the individual and the researcher/audience as a part of the storytelling experience. The telling of the story is often as important as the story told (Madison, 1993). The co-construction of the storytelling event, in which the researcher and respondent are involved, becomes a part of the narrative. Narrative, thus, constitutes the way in which an individual makes sense of the world (Koenig-Kellas, 2008) through varying contexts, interactions and experiences.

In further discussing narrative perspectives, Langellier (1989) offers a typology which categorizes different theoretical areas by which narrative can be studied. In this explanation Langellier addresses narrative as a “both/and” with regards to methodology and theory. These areas examine personal narratives as: (1) story-text; (2) storytelling performance; (3) conversational interaction; (4) social process; and (5) political praxis. This typology offers solid constructs from which to examine performance as an integral part to storytelling, to explore stories as integral elements to larger narratives texts, and to understand narratives as complete stories performed in an interaction between the researcher and the respondents. Utilizing elements of narrative as theory and
methodology, together these elements aid the researcher and the participants as a means
to understand individuals, roles, relationships and masculinity – the foundational areas of
research within this study.

Life experiences encompassing the presence of self, roles and the interactional
nature of the relationship become imperative when conceptualizing this study from
symbolic interactionism and narrative perspectives. Again, the combination of these two
ideological frameworks melts well together when further understanding sense making
through narratives and interactions. When speaking about narratives as interaction
Langellier (1989) states that:

[P]articipants not only operate as interactional partners in conversation, but they
also enact their social roles in relationship to each other. Interaction takes place
not between neutral, equal participants but within social and cultural matrices
marked by difference in, for example, gender, age, race, and class. (p. 260)

Here, Langellier is establishing the importance of multiple perspectives when addressing
every day interactions and performances of identity, a foundational concept within the
current research study. This explication becomes important when conceptualizing the
utilization of both symbolic interactionism and narrative as frameworks for this study
examining father-son relationships and social constructs in which identities, roles and
relationships are formed.

Examining another of the components involved with conceptualizing narrative for
this study, Langellier (2001) suggests that narratives as a social process combines both
text and context and speaks to ongoing social processes that affect and are affected by the
narratives iterated. Because of this, context becomes a large part of narrative and the
storytelling process. Again, it remains important to understand that narrative and
storytelling both construct identity and also become an important sense making agent. By telling stories surrounding a fathers/sons’ experiences of relationships and masculinities they are not only able to create a story that has meaning for them in the past but are also able to share the story with others within the moment reconstituting the meaning for them in the present. Self, performance, role and relationships all become a part of identity construction within the parameters of a narrative experience and aid in the exploration of the self and the relationship which is vital when examining father-son relationship and masculinity.

**Implications to Father-son Relationships, Identity, Gender and Performance**

As alluded to several times in the review and synthesis above, the development of self, identity, roles, relationships, and the perceptions of individuals involved within the sense making of everyday interactions are integral elements to understanding symbolic interactionism and narrative as theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Specific to this study, performance, identity and roles of fathers and sons remain foundationally based within the everyday interactions and perceptions of father-son relationships. What the son thinks about himself, what he thinks about his father, what he thinks his father thinks of him in past, present and future interactions becomes imperative when considering the development and sense making of identities and, in this case, masculine identities. Furthermore, the amount of interactions, the quality of the interactions, whether positive or negative, and the influence of those interactions on the two men has drastic and lasting implications on the identities of the men through their life spans. Symbolic interactionism and narrative as theoretical and conceptual frameworks offer a tremendous glimpse and
insight into the process and development of individual identities and the roles that they perform in everyday mundane inactions and over the life course.

**Father-son Relationships**

Within father-son relationships both theoretical frameworks offer great insights into how and why the relationships operate in the manner they do and as well as aides in understanding how and why the individuals negotiate the identities and interactions.

Stemming from a symbolic interactionist perspective, Stryker (1959) suggests that the development of the self is both gradual and continual. Stryker discusses the development of the self through the increasingly complex experiences of children stating that:

> [A]s the child moves into the social world he comes into contact with a variety of persons in a variety of self-relevant situations. He comes, or may come, into contact with differing expectations concerning his behavior, and differing identities on which these expectations are based. Thus he has, through the role-taking process, a variety of perspectives from which to view and evaluate his own behavior, and he can act with reference to self as well as with reference to others. (p. 116)

Again, the date of the research is noted; however, the implications of the research on the current study warrants a closer look at Stryker’s work. Thus, as Stryker notes, the roles children experience in the social world offer them relevant behavioral perspectives and expectations which they can integrate into their developing identities. This is particularly important as one of the most pertinent roles which a male child performs is son and one of the most pertinent contributors to his identity is the role of father.

Important here is the addition of narrative as a means to negotiate those roles and relationship. Within the current study the theoretical implications address sons perceptions and negotiations of these imperative relationships in and through their storytelling, stories, and narratives.
Arguing further for symbolic interactionism as a poignant theoretical basis for this review and synthesis and its implications for father-son relationships, Blumer (1969) suggests that:

\[\text{[J]oint interaction, whether newly formed or long established, has necessarily arisen out of a background of previous actions of the participants \ldots [and] brings to that formation the world of objects, the set of meanings, and the schemes of interpretation that they already possess. (p. 20)}\]

Much like the position of Stryker above, adding conceptualizations of narrative to existing ideological constructs only furthers the understanding of interactions and relationships with regards to fathers, sons and their masculine performances. With regards to interaction, both the previous interactions with fathers and the interactions with their sons offer men an identity construction and sense making space. Storytelling, stories, and narratives regarding participants’ father-son identities (i.e., masculine self), roles, relationships and performances interactions will further acknowledge and expand the theoretical assumptions of both symbolic interactionism and narrative frameworks.

**Identity, Gender and Performance**

Examining more closely the implications of symbolic interactionism and narrative concepts on elements of identity, gender and performances as large components of interactions and perceptions within father-son relationships, the construction and making sense of identity remains an integral contributing factor to individuals within this study. Being able to make sense within interactions relies heavily on understanding your own positionality within those interactions. Knowing the self, where identity comes from, and how to negotiate and make sense of that identity within interactions specifically in
narratives surrounding father-son relationship is vital to this study and exploring it through symbolic interactionism and narrative.

A significant part of identity is gender - socially constructed performances, characteristics, roles, and ideologies surrounding the biological sex category which individuals subjectively and objectively internalize, associate with, ascribe to, and/or socialize. When considering gender in the context of this study we must consider gender performance and performativity (i.e., addressing the implications of the body, embodiment and the performance of self as continuous and fluid) (Butler, 1988), the way in which individuals present themselves in everyday interactions (Goffman, 1959), and exploring ways in which individuals “do gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987) in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding. Thus, the performance of gender as a part of the self, identity and role has significant implications to narratives, interactions and relationships.

Specifically looking at father-son relationships, masculinity, and the performance of gender identities therein, the positions of both fathers’ and sons’ identities become and remain influential on the interactions inside and out of the dyad. Furthermore, perceptions, a vital component to symbolic interactionism, of each others’ masculinities, or masculine selves, within the interactions also influence the way each individual is perceived, observed and interpreted in each situation. This becomes imperative to understand because within interactions each individual offers contextual performances when in communication with the other. In and through those performances fathers and
sons must navigate and negotiate the performances as contextual clues to their own identities and the identities of the other in the interactions.

For example, fathers, within their own social roles and identities, have a certain set of ideas that they foresee themselves and sons fitting into, the “normal” gendered performance of a man, the roles of father and son, the roles of mentor and mentee, and the roles of advisor and advisee. The father’s identity and roles come from a lifetime of symbolic interactions in which he has formed an understanding of who he is, how others see him and how those perceptions influence his interactions. These guide his perceptions of his identity and roles as well as his performance of self. However, these parameters of self and other may be different from the perspective of the son. Here, symbolic interaction offers the foundational understanding of the constructing principles in the interactions whereas narrative theory offers insight into how participants can make sense of those past, present and future interactions.

Furthermore, as the son matures and develops, his own identity, specifically his masculine self, may begin to change. Within this change, the masculine self that the father helped develop through years of interactions may need and require maintenance, repair and change. Particularly in the certain life stages, their own identities and concepts of masculinity can truly be challenged and thus become uniquely their own. That is, instead of having just their father’s concepts of masculinity to help in the development of their masculine self, they begin to pull from other masculinities that surround them. This includes negotiating the importance of performed social norms, values and meanings that are salient within a given societal contexts (Rank & LeCroy, 1983). Individuals learn to
interpret and give priority to the values and meanings that take precedence for them. Specifically when considering abstract concepts such as performance, gender, and masculinity, an individual within interactions can draw from the most salient forms of masculinity that they observe to be the best for their own self.

Simply, as father and son interact throughout their lives, symbolic interactionism, as within the context of the current study, and its foundational tenets help scholars and individual men to understand the known (knowledge accumulated from interactions that have already taken place), the knowing (knowledge accumulated during present interactions) and the will-come-to-know (knowledge that will inform and help guide future interactions); narrative gives men the space to talk about their experiences and makes sense of them.

**Conclusion**

The main goal of this chapter was to review and synthesize the literature surrounding the theoretical, methodological, pragmatic assumptions of symbolic interactionism and narrative pertaining to identity, performance, role formation, father-son relationships and masculinity. The efforts taken to achieve this review have helped to further the understanding of these areas of scholarship specified. However, the significant gap in literature necessitates this particular research in the areas of father-son relationships and masculinity from symbolic interactionism and narrative perspectives. The importance of the review lies in the further understanding of the literature that already exists pertaining to symbolic interactionism and narrative paradigms and also lies
in the future theorizing and research to be accomplished when both frameworks are utilized collectively to help explain communication phenomena.

In addition to offering this study a solid basis for both the researcher and the participants to explain and make sense of identity formation within father-son relationships, from a strictly theoretical perspective, additions to symbolic interactionism and narrative such as interactional adaptability and reflexivity and the reiteration and defining of storytelling, stories and narratives, both theories could be utilized more readily within communication scholarship and specifically within the interpretive methodological paradigm. In addition, as calls for studies concerning gender, familial interactions, narrative and innovative methodologies regarding perceptions and impacts of fathering have shown (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2005; Marsiglio, 1993), research in the areas of father-son relationships and masculinity through a symbolic interactionist and narrative lens offer communication scholars, other disciplines and clinicians greater insight into the complex scholarship surrounding identities, perceptions and relationships that exist within father-son dyads which have not yet been researched or comprehensively understood.
CHAPTER III

METHOD AND PROCEDURES

Recruitment, Participants, and Data Collection

Recruitment

To be included in this study, participants had to be adult males at least 18 years of age. After IRB approval was gained through the university, participants were recruited in three phases. First, male students from my past courses were e-mailed and asked if they would be willing to participate in this research study. Attached to the e-mail was the Research Flyer, Qualification Questionnaire, and Project Information Sheet (See Appendices A, B, and C). If interested the possible participants were asked to review the attached documents and respond to the e-mail. Once initial contact had been made, I responded to the e-mail asking about convenient times and places to conduct the interview. Arrangements for the interviews were made following these e-mailed messages. Second, male participants were recruited through word-of-mouth. Through casual conversations around the university individuals often inquired as to the topic of my dissertation. After these conversations, e-mail addresses were exchanged. After this occurred, the same protocol was followed as stated above. Last, snowball sampling was utilized. Initial participants either offered or were asked to further recruit participants. Flyers were given to the participants to hand to their acquaintances. Interested individuals
were prompted to e-mail me. Once initial contact was made the protocol utilized above was again employed.

**Participants**

Through recruitment procedures 19 participants agreed to take part in the interview process. Participant demographic information was obtained through a brief Demographic Questionnaire (See Appendix E). The participants were all from the United States. They ranged in age from 19 to 37 years of age with an average age of 25 years. Fifteen participants self-identified as white with two participants identifying as American of Mexican descent; one identifying as Bi-racial/Black/white; and one identifying as Other. Seventeen participants self-identified as heterosexual with two identifying as gay. Seven participants were partnered, engaged, or in a long-term relationship. Four participants were married. Eight participants were single. In terms of the educational level, participants were highly educated. Eight participants had some college; four were college graduates; and seven had graduate degrees. Undergrad degrees included Communication Studies, Political Science, Business, and Conflict Resolution. All graduate degrees were achieved in Communication Studies. Household income ranged from $0 - $200,000 per year. Ten participants ranged in the $0 – $25,000; five ranged from $25,000 - $50,000; one ranged from $50,000 - $75,000; one ranged from $125,000 - $150,000; and one ranged from $175,000 - $200,000. Interestingly, all participants were the biological sons to their fathers. The participants were in families in which three were only children, seven were in families with two children; eight were in families with three children, and one was in a blended family with five siblings. As stated above, three of the
participants were only children; six were middle children; five were the oldest sibling; and five were the youngest sibling.

**Data Collection**

Nineteen interviews were collected. The interviews were conducted in various locations depending on time and convenience. Two interviews were conducted in the university’s Communication Department conference room; one interview was conducted in a common space within the Communication Department offices; one interview was conducted in a participant’s home; and one was conducted at my apartment. The remaining 14 interviews were conducted in a private Communication Studies’ Graduate Teaching Instructor office on the university’s campus. In all instances the settings were quiet, calm, and comfortable for the participant.

For each interview, a space was organized in which I was sitting directly across from the participant. When the participant entered the room he was greeted. After initial cordial conversation, the participant was handed a copy of the Research Flyer, Qualification Questionnaire, Project Information Sheet and a copy of the Research Study Consent Form (See Appendices A, B, C, & D). These documents were to be kept for the participants’ records. Additionally the participants were given a brief Demographic Questionnaire and the Consent Form which they were prompted to fill-out. After the Demographic Questionnaire and Consent Form were completed, I reviewed, again, the purpose of the study. Additionally during this time I told the participants that the interview process was completely voluntary, confidential and at anytime during our conversation that they could refuse to answer any question or stop the interview. When
the participants had verbally acknowledge this statement and agreed to take part in the interview, the audio-recorder was turned on and the interview began.

Each interview process was semi-structured and open-ended. That is, questions were oriented to initiate a conversation between the participants and me pertaining to their father-son relationship, masculinities, perceptions and performances. From these initial questions and the coinciding conversational answers I was able to continue the interview and guide our conversations by incorporating interview questions very similar to those listed below. At times in the conversation I would revert back to the predetermined interview questions in order to re-focus the conversations (See Appendix F). Regardless of the order in which the questions were asked or the exact manner in which they were incorporated into the conversations, each question utilized within the interview process was directly related to the research questions for the study asking directed questions concerning participants’ experiences and narratives about masculinity and their relationships with their fathers. Again, the initial interview questions were used as a starting point from which conversations were built, and from which participants were able to tell their stories and narratives.

After completion of the interviews, the participants and I digressed into cordial banter. Participants were directed to the Project Information Sheet which offered professional resources in case of adverse effects from the interviews. Finally, participants were paid $50 drawn from grant monies acquired through a departmentally organized fund and then thanked for their time. In most cases the participants and I shook hands; in other a handshake and a hug were more appropriate. Directly after the participant left the
room, I immediately began to take notes on the interview process. Intricate details of how the interview proceeded, points of interest surrounding the participant or a particular point in our conversation, anything that was noteworthy and critical to the interview. After my notes were written I concluded my interview process.

As stated above, the interviews were audio-recorded. The interviews lasted between 35 to 60 minutes with an average length of 42 minutes. After the interviews were collected the data were transferred from the audio-recording device to my personal computer. A separate file was created in which the audio files were placed. Once the interviews were transferred, the existing files on the audio-recording device were deleted. At this point participants were given a pseudonym.

Interviews were transcribed by an outside organization. The interview audio files were sent as attachments to emails to the transcriptionist with corresponding participant pseudonyms. The transcribed interviews resulted in 21,357 single-spaced, consecutively numerated lines of data. As mentioned earlier, each participant was assigned a pseudonym at the time of the transcriptions that coincided with the initial transference pseudonym. Identifying information was changed to general referents in order to maintain confidentiality. Once the transcripts were complete by the outside organization they were sent back to me in word files. The interview data were saved in the predetermined folder and in audio form, recording device format and in iTunes. Having two audio formats for the interview recordings allowed me the convenience of listening and analyzing in multiple spaces.
Analysis

The analysis for this study incorporated several phases. This first phase began immediately after the interviews transpired. After the interviews were complete and the participant exited the room, I immediately took notes on the points in the conversation that stood out as prominent. These retrospective notes, in addition to listening to the interview again directly from the recording device, helped to ground me in the immediacy and potency of specific moments. This was particularly helpful when recognizing and coding moments of performance (e.g., hand gestures, posture, body position) and immediately salient themes within participant narratives. Additionally this allowed me to concentrate and recall what and when each participant emphasized in content, dialogue and performance within the interview process. Especially when concentrating specifically on instances of dialogic and performance, listening and then recording dialogic and performative codes immediately in a document following the interviews was imperative. This occurred after each interview.

Then, after the transcripts were received, the second phase involved me listening to the audio-recordings, reading and verifying the transcriptions, making any needed additions or changes, and noting any initial areas of interest. Coinciding with the second phase, the third phase of the analysis began by printing out copies of the transcripts with 2.5” right margins. This allowed me the space on the right side of the transcripts to make multiple notes and markings that coincided with the coding, contextual/thematic, performative, dialogic, and masculinity schemes explicated below and for marking specific instances of interest. That is, within the space provided, I created rows in the
margins labeled for masculine, performative, contextual/thematic and dialogic codes respectively. Within each of these rows I was able to mark when instances of each theme utilizing the codes which stemmed from pilot studies.

As Riessman’s (2008) thematic narrative analysis focuses on the presence of themes within participant narratives, the third phase involved a re-listening of the audio-recordings in which I paid close attention to specific themes (e.g., historical, family, sex and gender) that emerged from the data. These themes were noted in the margins throughout the interview transcripts as stated above. For example, when a participant would speak about his experiences that incorporated stories concerning his romantic relationships in the context of his father-son relationship, a code would be placed in the margin next to the line number that coincided with the emerging theme; in this instance a (RO) (See Appendix G). Additionally, as I marked the code within the margin I always would underline terms and phrases within the data itself in order to draw attention to that particular area of concentration. In instances where there were a larger areas of data pertaining the specific codes brackets were also utilized to maintain organization. In doing this throughout each interview, repetitive codes could be visualized and noted. I went through this phase of the analysis multiple times for each interview and over all interview data. AS codes began to emerge and because of the varying codes that existed I needed to revisit and re-listen to the data in order to acknowledge the instances of codes.

As the research questions addressed themes as a means to make sense of the data, the fourth phase of analysis once again incorporated another listening to the data. In this listening I paid close attention to the overarching themes which the participants were
referring. These themes could be independent of the previously analyzed themes or could be new additions. As themes became more prominent, they were noted in the margins often with a differently colored pen, pencil or marker. As with the coding process reviewed above, prominent themes and corresponding exemplars describing those themes were then organized and explained in a separate document. As this became a very clear and organized manner in which to address the salient themes I utilized this as common protocol throughout the analysis process.

In phase five, I listened to the data again this time concentrating on the larger recurring themes in which the participants were orienting their narratives. As stated directly above, when themes began to repeat within the data they were noted in the margins and then, when they became more prominent, were organized with coinciding exemplars in a separate document. These documents were utilized later when the analysis was complete and the following chapter was created.

The process of analyzing the data was a fluid process. That is, although there were phases to incorporate within the process most of the time the coding was fluid yet sporadic maintaining the coherence and continuity of participant narratives. Therefore it was important to be able to analytically oscillate back and forth through the multiple codes contexts and performances.

**Coding Explained**

As a means to analyze the data to the best of my ability dialogic, performative, contextual/thematic, and masculine codes (see Appendix G) were created specifically for this study to deepen the analysis and move Riessman’s methodology forward. The codes,
based on alphabetic representation of larger concepts and actions, enabled me to note specific instances in which these codes were addressed in the data. As stated above, these codes were incorporated in the analysis process in order to make sense of the interviews and shed light on participants’ specific narrative experiences.

**New Coding**

Utilizing Riessman’s foundational ideology, it became apparent that creating new codes and a new coding process would help in addressing data. The new codes not only addressed preexisting elements but also addressed direct occurrences of dialogic, performative, contextual/thematic, and masculinity codes vital to this study. Thus, to deepen the analysis of the narratives within this study, I created new coding schemes. These new coding schemes helped to categorize instances within the interviews in which themes surrounding dialogue, performances, contexts/themes, and masculinity emerged as imperative to the narratives.

**Dialogic codes.** As a means to further understand the instances of dialogue and their importance to this study, individual dialogic codes were created to record when dialogic instances became apparent. The dialogic codes implemented were as follows: Vocal Inflection (VI), an emphatic peak or lowering in vocalization; Mimic (MI), taking on the vocal characteristics of another; Pause (P), a lapse or meaningful break in conversation; Dramatic Pause (DP), a longer lapse or meaningful break in conversation; Hurried Speech (HS), purposefully speaking quickly and intentionally; and Local Dialect (LD), intentional change in language to emphasize region.
Performative codes. Similarly, instances of specific performative acts within the interview process were also deemed imperative to further explore during the narrative analysis. Thus, I also found it important to create a performative coding scheme illustrating instances of performative acts that emerged as integral to the analysis of participant narratives. Although performance was a ubiquitous part of the participant narratives, the instances noted within the analysis were marked because of their integrated significance within the conversations. The performative codes that were created for this specific analysis were as follows: Gaze (G), conscious or subconscious contemplative aversion of eyes; Hand Gestures (HG), specific, coordinated movements of hands and arms; Posture (POS), specific, coordinated position of body; Uneasy Gestures (UG), specific acts of uncomfortability; Hyper-masculine (HM), overt, intentional or unintentional masculine acts; Closed Body Position (CBP), embodying, occupying a smaller space; and Open Body Position (OBP), embodying, occupying a larger space.

Contextual/Thematic codes. Furthermore, contextual/thematic codes were created in order to make better sense and deepen the narrative analysis. Although it can be argued that contexts/themes are embedded in all of the conversations throughout the interview process, the instances noted and coded in the analysis bring these specific contexts to the forefront on those particular moments in the conversations. Thus, noting the specific contexts/themes became imperative to understanding the overarching guiding narratives presented within the interviews. The contextual/thematic codes that were created for this portion of the analysis were as follows: Interpersonal (I), reference to relationships; Romantic (RO), reference to romantic relationships; Father-son
Relationship (FS), reference to a father-son relationship; Family Relationship (FAM), reference to family relationships; Friendship (F), reference to a friendship; Mediated (ME), reference to mediated contexts; Technological (T), reference to technology use and/or issues; Ethic (E), reference to ethics or ethical issues; Cultural (C), reference to culture or cultural issues; Race (RA), reference to race or racial issues; Religion (RE), references to religion, religiosity, or religious issues; History (H), reference to history or historical periods of time; and Sex and Gender (SG), references to gender and/or sexual issues.

**Masculinity codes.** Specifically when introducing masculinity into this study, it became increasingly imperative to introduce a coding scheme that aided in illustrating the presence of masculinity within the interview process. In order to address this issue I created a coding scheme that allowed me to note instances of masculine performance or ideology within the narratives. Similar to the statement referring to contexts above, it is important to acknowledge that masculinity was embedded in almost all of the conversations throughout the interview process. The instances noted and coded in the analysis of participant narratives bring these specific elements of masculinity to the forefront on those particular moments in the conversations. The following codes were created and placed within the transcriptions during the narratives analysis: Masculinism/Patriarch (MP), reference to macro-cultural masculinity constructs; Masculinity (M), reference to micro-cultural masculinity constructs; Multiple Masculinities (MM), reference to contextual masculinities; Hegemonic Masculinity
(HM), reference to superordinate and subordinate masculinity constructs; and Manhood Acts (MA), reference to individual physical acts of masculinity.

(Re)Listening and (Re)Visiting

Within this portion of the analysis the acts of listening and re-listening to the transcripts and visiting and re-visiting researcher notes with the codes present aided in indicating moments of each code. Thus, (re)listening and (re)visiting of the data offered greater insight into the analysis of the narratives collected. It also helped to keep me close to the interview experience and the experiences of the participants.

Verification/Validity

Several forms of validation were utilized in order to achieve the most credible and rigorous research for this study. I included exemplars, audibility, researcher reflexivity and thick, rich descriptions. Initially, exemplars were used to offer the reader explicit examples of the emerging and salient data through direct narrative samples. That is, prominent examples from the transcriptions helped explicitly illustrate where and how the data spoke specifically to father-son relationships and perceived, performed masculinity. Additionally often lengthy and in-depth exemplars from the interviews added insight into the narratives and experiences of the participants.

Furthermore, audibility was assessed in developing credibility. Suter (in press) conceptualizes audibility as, “a data quality check to ensure transcripts match recorded talk” (p. 11). The process allowed me to listen to the audio recordings of the interviews to make sure that they matched and coincided accurately to the transcripts. In addition to ensure matching of the recordings transcribed, audibility contributed another level of
reassurance that the data recorded closely represented the performance of the narratives as close to the actual performance as possible.

Researcher reflexivity also enabled me to contribute thoughts, feelings, beliefs and biases into the analysis process. As a son to my father I too am a member of this research’s demographic. Thus, this particular step in the process of credibility became imperative for a deeper understanding of the experiences and narratives of the participants. I drew upon the experiences of the participants as well as my own. Notes accumulated through the process increased my comprehension of the sense making involved in the research process. The reflexive nature of the process allowed me to be aware of any biases that may have existed in me and the participants as well as helped to more accurately analyze the data from the multiple perspectives. Together with researcher reflexivity, thick and rich descriptions of the many details involved in the research process from conceptualization, collection, interviews to analysis were utilized as another means of creating validation and credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Finally, in order to achieve participant validation I incorporated member checking. Member checking referred to the process of taking the data collected back to the participants in order to confirm the credibility of the data and the narratives collected. In addition, after the findings of the research had been explored and organized into themes I also referred back to the participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Suter, in press).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, the recruitment of participants, participants’ demographic information, the process of data collection were specifically addressed. Additionally, the
specific steps taken and phases of analysis, and coding process were explored. Furthermore, in order to further explain the analysis process, explanation and rationalization of new coding as additions to Riessman’s (2008) thematic narrative analysis as well as the specifics of those codes were also addressed. Finally the verification process which integrated exemplars, audibility, researcher reflexivity and thick, rich descriptions and member checking was acknowledged. The following chapter will address the results of the multi-phased analysis.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

As a means to specifically address the research questions explicated in this study, analysis of the interviews contributed major themes, corresponding subthemes as explanations and explorations of the communicative and interactional phenomena under investigation. Stemming from RQ1 which asked what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the performance and perceptions of masculinity within their father-son relationships, the following three themes emerged: (1) traditional masculinity; (2) responsibility; and (3) non-traditional masculinity. From RQ2 which asked what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the construction of sons’ identities, roles and relationships within father-son relationships, the following three themes emerged: (1) perceptions of father(ing); (2) sons’ perceptions of self; and (3) turning point perspective emerged. RQ3 which asked what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding father-son contextual differences/similarities offer insight into both the performance and perception of masculinity and father-son relationships, resulted in four main themes: (1) history/family; (2) romantic/interpersonal relationships; (3) culture; and (4) sex and gender. Lastly, RQ4, which asks what themes stemming from sons’ dialogue and performances within the context of interviews offer insight into their narratives surrounding father-son relationships and masculinity, gained further comprehension in to
specific *dialogic and performative* instances within participant narratives. Each of the research questions and the corresponding findings are addressed below.

**Research Question One: Perceptions of Father/Son Masculinity**

To begin, *RQ1* asks what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the performance and perceptions of masculinity within their father-son relationships. By asking the questions “Does your father consider you a masculine man and what does that mean to you, what does it mean to him?” or “Can you describe your father?”, themes emerged enveloping masculinity and father-son relationships. Below the following three themes *traditional masculinity, responsibility*, and *non-traditional masculinity* will be addressed further.

**Theme One: Traditional Masculinity “Be/Being a man”**

The first theme that emerged from the data specifically addressed in *RQ1* was traditional masculinity. Within 100% of the interviews, the phrase “be a man” or “being a man” appeared in participant narratives. These phrases framed within the contexts of the conversations both implicitly and explicitly addressed traditionally masculine characteristics as established within a Western ideological framework. That is, predominant masculinity characteristics such as being tough, tall or big in stature, respected and respectful, responsible, physically, emotionally, even ideologically strong, emerged as imperative within every interview. Although the statements were made and oriented within differing times within the interviews, in every narrative the overarching theme of “being a man” referred directly to everyday interactional masculine
performances of the father which influenced the sons’ perception of his own performance of masculinity and the identities, roles within those relationships.

**Traditional masculine characteristics.** Specifically when addressing masculinity, participants described themselves and their fathers in terms of characteristics that exist in contemporary Western society. These characteristics such as those briefly stated above reify normative ideologies surrounding masculinity. For the purpose of this study questions were asked of the participants in order to gain further insight into the construction and constitution of masculinity within the relationship held with their fathers. By addressing these issues within the context of participant narratives the theme of traditional masculinity offers a glimpse into contemporary performances of masculinity as seen in the experiences of participants.

Participants described their fathers within the parameters of traditional Western masculinity. Traditional Western masculinity refers to the images, representations, ideologies, and performances of characteristics and traits constructed by contemporary culture, media, institutions, and social groups which create guidelines, parameters, and constructs in and by which men constitute their masculine identity. Within this framework participants were able to explain “how their father was” within everyday terms and interactions and how those interactions influenced the way they perceived their fathers and themselves in regards to their performance of masculinity. The following examples were exemplars in that they were able to explore their fathers’ performance of masculinity in a succinct and descriptive manner. Brady, a 21 year old white male of Irish
heritage, offered this story when asked about the characteristics that defined his father.

He stated that:

He’s always been kind of the, I guess fighting type. Like if something was said to him that he didn’t really agree with and would kind of go to a fighting mentality . . . he’s always been interested in sports. He, he likes football, he likes to watch all that stuff. Um, he was fairly active with sports . . . we’ve always had like the same love of cars . . . but he’s always had like, he’s always had a moustache as long as I can remember . . . Always had like a very masculine appearance [and] I’ve never, I’ve seen him cry once, one time. (Lines 365-406, italics added)

Within this example we see that Brady described his father in terms of traditional masculine characteristics incorporating ideological, physical and emotional characteristics. Typical, normative characteristics establish men, masculine men as the types of individuals who are not afraid to fight, who are active in and like to watch sports, know about and like to work on cars, and even have dominant male features like facial hair. Again these characteristics are established through cultural and mediated contexts against which men establish their own masculine performances. Similar characteristics appeared consistently throughout participants interviews. For instance, Alex, a 31 male of mixed heritage, was asked to describe his father. In response, Alex described his father in terms of masculine characteristics of which he associated. He stated:

One of his favorite things to do is to puff his chest up real big and walk, and he’ll be the gorilla and kind of walk play off of the idea of being ultra masculine. He’s competitive, he’s outdoorsy. His favorite days are the ones where he’s moving around one of the nineteen internal combustion engines that he owns up at the cabin, uh, cutting things down with chainsaws. I mean he, he likes what I would call masculine outdoorsy things; things that boys of his age were encouraged to do when they were growing up. He’s definitely, he seems very masculine to me . . . when I hear masculinity I always think of confidence, I think of physical prowess and abilities, strength, you know, a lot of things that my dad had. My dad was a state champion wrestler. He’s a stocky man. He’s not very big, but he’s thick. He could buck hay bales like anybody. (Lines 258-283, italics added)
Here again Alex emphasizes ideological and physical characteristics of his father considered to be traditionally masculine in Western culture. He reiterates several of the characteristics in which Brady spoke, additionally focusing on being big in stature, outdoorsy, confident, and active in life and sports. Stephen, a 21 year old white male, also described his father by stating, “I would describe him as like really stoic, he’s like the classic American male that’s really tall and has a really deep voice but doesn’t say a lot” (Lines 352-354). Stephen continued to construct an image of the traditionally masculine Western man by integrating ideal, tall, and quiet, in the description he told of his father. Still another participant offered this explanation of his father; a man he exclaimed was a very traditionally masculine man. Matthew, a 27 year old male American of Mexican descent, stated:

I mean he has a tattoo on the back of his head for God’s sakes, you know. The skull and a naked chick with angel wings and a naked chick with devil horns, you know, and he drives this bad-ass beautiful ’98 big ass Road King Harley, and he’s just, he’s got this goatee that’s black and gray and shaved head and he’s like six feet tall and weighs about three hundred and fifty pounds. No joke. He’s just a big, intimidating man. (Lines 397-407)

Matthew’s description of his father takes into account all the other dominant characteristics stated above and adds a very pointed and colorful explanation of his father.

Although the characteristics described above were specific to each participant’s father, in the exemplars and in every interview, participants’ fathers were compared to what the fathers and sons perceived as traditional Western masculinity characteristics and performances; characteristics and performances similar to those iterated here.
Again participants offered a glimpse into what they saw as traditional masculinity as performed by their fathers. These characteristics reified the ideological norms established in contemporary cultural and mediated contexts. To the participants each of their fathers’ performances was an everyday example of how their fathers performed their masculinity and how their masculine performances established how they saw being a man. Furthermore, it addressed the masculinity that they would hold as a standard for their own masculine identities and roles.

**Theme Two: Responsibility**

Moving forward from describing fathers’ explicit masculine characteristics and further addressing *RQ1*, the second theme of *responsibility* emerged in 84% (16 out of 19) of participant interviews. Auhagen and Bierhoff (2001) suggest that:

> [R]esponsibility is understood as a social phenomenon and as a concept or construct which is construed and interpreted individually. The concept of responsibility implies at least three relations: Being responsible for something, towards someone, and in relation to an instance. Responsibility includes aspects of morals, of action, and of consideration of the consequences of action. (p. 63)

Although the definition describes responsibility as an individual interpretation, by acknowledging its social significance, integrating this definition into the context of father-son relationships is warranted. Furthermore, participants’ narratives which constitute the theme and corresponding subthemes emphasize the relationship implications of responsibility as Auhagen and Beirhoof suggest. Therefore responsibility within the context of this theme is seen as a socially significant concept that integrates what individuals understand and acknowledge as ramifications, implications, and consequences to their own or others actions within their relational experiences.
Within the first exemplar, Jeremiah, a 27 year old white male, explicitly stated responsibility as being integral to “being a man”. Here, Jeremiah recalled a conversation that he had with his father; a conversation that drew great importance to him in his life at the time of the interview. He stated:

To me, being masculine is being responsible, regardless of to what . . . because that’s what [my father] always did, you know, he was responsible to my fam[ily], to my mom and myself whenever we needed it regardless of what that looked like. And I don’t know if that necessarily is a masculine trait, or ought be a masculine trait, but when someone says be a man, to me it doesn’t connotate, you know, dress a certain way, talk a certain way, look a certain way, but rather, for me, it embodies a conduct, a disposition, which is always responsibility and obligation. Because that’s what he’s always stressed to me. (Lines 300-317)

The exemplar above illustrates the importance of responsibility as an integral characteristic of being a man. Although Jeremiah stated that it does not matter to what you are responsible, other participants were more specific when describing the characteristics that were imperative to being a responsible man. To explicate further, in addition to the overarching theme of responsibility, subthemes of responsibility explicated below, responsibility for you actions, responsibility to family, and monetary responsibility, emerged in multiple conversations within the interview process.

**Subtheme one: Responsibility for your actions.** The first subtheme that emerged from the larger theme of responsibility was responsibility for your actions. Participants who spoke of this subtheme framed this type of responsibility in terms of coming of age stories. Most often the stories explicated focused on experiences in which the son made a crucial mistake (e.g., getting arrested, failing a college course, going to jail). After this mistake was made actions were taken by the father to ensure that the son
would learn from the mistake. The resulting lessons learned were a large portion on the sons’ path to becoming “more of a man”.

David told a story about his father and the time that he got arrested and sent to jail. David stated:

I call him, I’m like, dad, it’s bad news, can you come pick me up, and he’s like, I’ll pick you up in the morning, you’ve got to suffer this one out . . . I spent the night in jail. He want[ed] to make sure I learned, you know. (Line 379-391)

As in David’s story, sons were forced to take responsibility for the actions they had made. Here, it was David’s father that took the negative experience of going to jail and turned David’s experience into a space where he could learn to take responsibility for his actions and “take it like a man”.

In another example Jeremiah told a story of a party where the police were called. He drove to the party and was drunk. Instead of driving away from the party drunk knowing the police were patrolling the area he decided instead to take responsibility for his actions and call his father anticipating dire consequences. After explaining this situation in depth, he spoke of his father taking him back to his car in the morning without incident. Jeremiah stated:

I ended up calling my dad. I was like I don’t know what to do and explained the situation. He said, alright, I’ll drive down, I’ll get your car. He drove me down and we got it the next morning. And he didn’t say shit to me. He said, well, I’m glad you didn’t drive. It’s that kind of stuff, where I expected to get in a bunch of trouble because, you know, I did come from such a strict family. But I didn’t, right, that allowed me to kind of earn his trust, and so he was all I’ll come to him when I do have real problems or issues. (Lines 632-650)

Within Jeremiah’s story we see that he was expecting to get reprimanded for his actions. He was expecting a consequence to his actions that was consistent with other trouble that he had experienced. Instead his father took the opportunity to teach Jeremiah
a lesson about taking responsibility for his actions and exhibiting qualities a responsible man.

Jeremiah went on to explain that along with this ride they had a brief conversation surrounding Jeremiah’s responsibility as a man in so much that he did the right thing in calling instead of driving and hiding the incident from his father. Jeremiah’s experience, and similar experiences explicated by other participants, offered insight into how men should act – own your actions and the results of those actions. In doing so and receiving positive reinforcement after the incident Jeremiah was led to a deeper understanding of himself and his father.

**Subtheme two: Responsibility to family.** The second subtheme that emerged in the larger theme of responsibility was responsibility to family. Within interviews 68% of participants spoke of responsibility to family. Specifically within the context of the larger theme of responsibility and addressing RQ1, participants who mentioned responsibility to family related “being a man” to their family interactions. In these instances participants often integrated narratives addressing the importance of family and family values learned from the actions or inactions of their fathers. Family values within the context of the interviews are defined as exhibiting, wanting, embracing regardless of circumstances, and having an orientation towards and responsibility for maintaining the well being and continuation of positive family systems. Often family values encompassed a moral servitude, an ability to take control of the family during troubling times, taking action to protect the family, and reinforcing a family value previously established.
More specific to father-son relationships, responsibility focused on the responsibility participants felt to their families as a result of (in)actions of their fathers. In this, participants witnessed the overwhelming presence or absence of their fathers and adjusted the responsibility that they had to their families accordingly. This established the perception of them as men within their own identities, roles in the family and relationships to their fathers.

In this example Jordan, a 23 year old interracial male, told a story of remembering his father as a child and how his father instilled family values and family-oriented responsibility as a large part of “being a man”. He stated:

[H]e was never big on quitting no matter how much [you want to]. Every marriage has its problems, every relationship has its problems, and no matter how much they fought, no matter how much me and my brother, how bad we thought, we thought it might have been, he was always in it to the end. (Lines 249-254)

In this instance the father was demonstrating to his son how to “be a man” by taking care of your family regardless of what may happen. Implicit in his story Jordan, and in others participant stories of responsibility to family, spoke of perseverance, determination, vigilance and a strong work ethic when it came to negotiating family. Jordan’s experience of his father in regards to his family was very positive. However, as stated above there were instances in which participants described their fathers as negative examples, instilling in the sons what it was like to not exude responsibility to their families. In this the sons took it upon themselves to reestablish their roles in the family and reestablish what responsibility to family meant to them.

A large portion of the narrative told by Vincent, a 29 year old white male, surrounded the negative feelings that he had towards his father and the effects that his
father had on their relationship and their family. In his narrative Vincent told of his father’s inability to remain connected to the family after losing all of his money, divorcing his mother, and succumbing to his addictions. As a result, Vincent took the initiative, and the responsibility, to maintain the connections that he had with the rest of his family. This extended from his immediate family to the family he intends on creating himself with his fiancée. Vincent very blatantly stated that he wanted to have a more responsible existence as a member of his family, “as contrasted with like how my father was, it’s those moments, you know, I don’t ever want to do that to her” (Line 437-438).

Both Jordan and Vincent reiterate when addressing the moral, practical, and relational implications of family interactions that responsibility to family was a large part of becoming a man. Whether that meant emulating the actions of their father or redefining what responsibility was, both Jordan and Vincent offered insight into their experiences and the experiences of the other men within this study.

**Subtheme three: Financial responsibility.** The third subtheme to emerge from the data underneath the larger theme of responsibility was financial responsibility. Within the current study financial responsibility involved a focus on the participants’ or their fathers’ (in)ability to maintain financial stability, and financial responsibility to themselves and/or to their partners, significant others, and families. When discussing this particular sub-theme, 53% of participants described events in their lives in which they realized the importance of maintaining financial responsibilities as a specific masculine characteristic. To the participants beginning to be financially independent from their parents, making their own money, recognizing the need for dependence from their

100
parents, or taking control of the finances for their families all established the saliency of financial responsibility as imperative to their masculine identities, and integrated relational roles. Again, we see that the influence of fathers’ actions or inactions affected how sons saw their fathers’ roles within their relationships and the roles fathers had in their families. If fathers were financially savvy and sound sons tended to emulate their actions. If sons saw their fathers as financially inadequate they chose to take the financial responsibility into their own hands. In both instances, this was an integral step in becoming more independent and being seen as a more of a man.

Ben, a 27 year old white male, addressed the implications of his father’s role as provider for his family and how the lack of that role influenced his perception of his father’s masculine identity and the entirety of his relationship with his father. He stated:

He’s very financially irresponsible . . . you know, stereotypically, he doesn’t provide for the family, my dad quit his job, he quit from [his company] when I was fifteen or sixteen and he was making like a lot of money, probably eighty or ninety thousand dollars a year. Quit that because he didn’t like it . . . My parents are really, really struggling for money because my dad has kind of put them in this position and he is not so stereotypically masculine as, you know, the provider. He was for a long time but he’s not now and he really struggles with that and it’s just, it’s just weird to me because we never struggled for money when I was growing up and now when I leave home my dad has made this choice that’s affecting everybody. (Lines 236-315)

Ben’s exemplar reiterates other participants’ stories regarding financial responsibility and independence as imperative to their overall masculine performance and perception. That is, in order to be perceived or seen as a man they must have the ability to financially take care of themselves and their significant others.

Reiterating this point Vincent said that, “he’s proud of my resourcefulness because he admires how much I get out of so little” (Line 619-621). From Vincent’s
perspective, his father, who had lost all of his wealth and relied in the past on Vincent for help, demonstrated very clearly what not to do; in essence, Vincent’s father’s financial irresponsibility reinforced to Vincent that a large portion of being a man envelopes taking financial responsibility for yourself and to your family.

As other participants acknowledged, maturing or learning lessons on becoming a man were met with a financial responsibility. Often the acknowledgement of financial responsibility came from participants’ stories surrounding the absence of their fathers growing up. Participants stated that they would have liked their fathers to be around more as they were growing up. However they knew that in those times when their fathers were not around that they were most of time at work, taking financial responsibility to their families. Robert said that “[I]t was weird because I remember as a kid he would not be home a lot. He was always working probably until seven, eight, nine o’clock at night. Often times we’d go to bed without my dad being there” (Line 29-35). Here again this reiterates the focus on the participants’ or their fathers’ (in)ability to maintain financial stability, and financial responsibility to themselves and/or to their partners, significant others, and families as a large part of the narratives collected.

Theme Three: Non-traditional Masculinity

To reiterate, RQ1 asks what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the performance and perceptions of masculinity within their father-son relationships. Responding to questions such as “Can you describe the relationship that you have with your father?”, or “Can you describe your father?”, dominant themes emerged enveloping masculinity and father-son relationships that focused on non-traditional characteristics of
Western masculinity. One hundred percent of the interviews addressed non-traditional Western masculinity characteristics.

Within the context of this study non-traditional masculinity refers to masculine characteristics, performances and ideologies that challenge or go against normative masculine characteristics, performances, and ideologies established within contemporary interpersonal, cultural and mediated frames of thought. As stated above, characteristics of masculine men involved holding physical prowess, being engaged in sports, cars, and outdoorsy activities, as well as being quiet and respected. More specific to this study, when exploring non-traditional masculine characteristics, participants often went beyond just the physical characteristics that their fathers had. Although participants did include some physical characteristics such as explaining that their father was not good at sports, participants expanded their perspectives and perceptions of their fathers in terms of performative and ideological standards of masculinity. That is, participants focused on more ideological understandings of masculinity.

As a performative example Danny, a 21 year old white male, talked about the lack of change in the way that his father was towards him throughout his life. Instead of adhering to the normative ideals of traditional masculine fathering, one of physical and emotional distance, Danny tells of his father’s continued closeness stating:

I still give my dad a huge hug every time I see him [and] I don’t think that’ll ever change . . . We’ll sit down on the couch and I’ll just lean up against him and he’ll have his arm around me, we’ll snuggle, so to speak. [T]hat’s just the way it’s always been. (Line 347-373)

Here we see how important it is to Danny for his father to continue to be an important physical part of his life regardless of what masculine constructs may exist within the
contemporary notions of traditional masculinity. Rather, the performances as an overarching ideological establishment of his father’s non-traditional masculine performance reified an already strong relational bond.

To further expand upon non-traditional masculinity, participants related narratives in which they not only explored their fathers’ characteristics that establish non-traditional masculinity but they also illustrate aspects of their or their fathers’ identities and/or roles which were perceived as feminine or un-masculine in the context of their father-son relationships. As a result, two subthemes emerged concentrating on the role of emotion in masculinity, and nurturing and open masculinity.

**Subtheme one: The role of emotion in masculinity.** The first subtheme to emerge from the data underneath the larger theme of non-traditional masculinity was the role of emotion in masculinity. Within the Western perspective of masculinity, emotion and the display or embodiment of emotion often receives a negative connation. Defining emotion within this study is exacerbated by the fact the scholarship surrounding emotion, and fields of study devoted to the conceptualization of emotion, have been attempting to find a unifying definition with much contestation. However, considering the need for a foundation conceptualization for this study Izard (2010) offers a definition that contributes a tremendous amount of insight:

> Emotion consists of neural circuits (that are at least partially dedicated), response systems, and a feeling state/process that motivates and organizes cognition and action. Emotion also provides information to the person experiencing it, and may include antecedent cognitive appraisals and ongoing cognition including an interpretation of its feeling state, expressions or social-communicative signals, and may motivate approach or avoidant behavior, exercise control/regulation of responses, and be social or relational in nature. (p. 369)
Although this definition is very descriptively thick in emotion scholarship discourse, it offers a solid construct from which to advance this study’s conceptualization of emotion. Thus, moving forward with the conceptualization above, emotion within the context of this subtheme and within the context of participants’ narratives is the action, value, display, embodiment, reaction, and understanding regarding emoting within the context of participants’ relational experiences with implication to their and their fathers’ identities and roles.

Within the participants stories there was often a hesitation when talking about their emotions in regards to their or their father’s identity, relationship, and masculinity. The hesitation came from the awareness of another man’s perception of them and their fathers. If a hesitation was not perceived participants would offer qualifications in our conversations such as “I know this is weird” or “I know this goes against what he was supposed to do” in order for, in some instances, the participants to feel comfortable speaking about their emotional experiences. In this, participants reified the notion that it is not masculine to show emotion as it is perceived as a sign of weakness. This attitude towards emotions generally emerged from the attitudes that learned from their fathers.

Here, William, a 37 year old white male, focused an experience of his father’s traditional orientation around emotional interactions. Speaking of a time in his life where his girlfriend had cheated on him William stated:

He didn’t care about my feelings, he didn’t care about my girlfriends, didn’t care about any of that stuff. If I had problem with a girlfriend, I remember vividly at fifteen years old dating Stephanie, she had just slept with somebody and I was brokenhearted. It was my love at fifteen years old and I went to tell my father and he said these are not problems that I deal with. If you have a problem with your girlfriend, go talk to your mother . . . And so I think, again, in those interactions
where we’d always look to try to get something from dad . . . but were largely pushed away to mom to help deal with those emotional issues. (Lines 672-690)

In response to his father’s traditional masculine perspective, William altered the way that he performed his own masculine identity. Because of his father’ emotion distance, William decided to appropriate more emotional characteristics within his own life; with his father and within other interpersonal relationships. This example is important here because, although William’s father embodies a very traditional masculinity, the evolution of men embracing emotion in their relationships is leading to a greater understanding and implementation of non-traditional masculinity behavior. William’s decision to disrupt the traditional masculine pattern is repeated in many other participant stories in which fathers also displayed emotionally distant masculine characteristics.

All participants acknowledged their own and their fathers’ performance, perception and/or perspective on emotions. Within participant narratives emotions were addressed on multiple levels. These levels included speaking about their fathers emotionless interactions as well as their fathers performing more feminine roles (e.g., my father did most of the cooking and house work), and expressing emotions more akin to a feminine style of emoting (e.g., my father was always saying he loved us and was always around for us when we needed anything).

In contrast to William’s descriptive story of his father and his perceptions of emotions in masculinity, Jeremiah offers his father’s alternative perspective and performance of emotions. More specifically when speaking about his father when he was growing up Jeremiah states:

My dad takes on roles that would typically be considered feminine, because he likes to talk about his feelings, and, you know, as I’m about to say this, I don’t
agree that these are feminine, uh, but they are feminine stereotypes. (Lines 257-260)

Here, Jeremiah tells the brief story about how his father was when he was growing up. Within his story he continues to state that his father compensated for the emotion distance of his mother. Not only was his father taking on the physical characteristics that would be considered more feminine but he was always appropriating non-traditional emotional characteristics as well.

These two exemplars offer opposing performances, perceptions and perspectives of non-traditional masculinity from two different perspectives. The first offered a glimpse of how the implications of traditional masculine characteristics cause sons to move away from those displays and performances. The second example demonstrates a father’s direct vulnerability and emotional characteristics within the context of the father-son relationship. Although they stem from two perspectives, both embrace emotion as a pivotal, imperative addition to masculine performances within the identities and roles of both fathers and sons within their relationships.

**Subtheme two: Nurturing and open masculinity.** The second subtheme that emerged in the larger theme of non-traditional masculinity was nurturing and open masculinity. Within the context of this subtheme, the concept of nurturing or nurturing masculinity implies the performative and ideological framework of masculinity that acknowledges and encourages confidence and comfort in accepting identity and performative characteristics regardless of what they may be. This applies to characteristics that may contradict normative masculine characteristics (e.g., tall, strong, active in sports), performances (e.g., sitting with your legs crossed, talking with a lisp,
body positioning and posture), and ideologies (e.g., normative cultural constructs and thought regarding masculinity) within the context of interpersonal relationships and specifically father-son relationships. Furthermore within the context of this subtheme, open implies a meaning of being communicatively open in dialogue, performance, and fundamental ideology in regards to another’s characteristics, performances, and ideologies surrounding masculine identities, roles and performances.

All participants, to a certain extent, acknowledged and described their own and their fathers’ performance, perception and/or perspectives regarding nurturing and open masculinity as coinciding or conflicting with what “normal” men, in the Western traditional perspective, were allowed to exhibit and embody. In this example Alex described his father as he remembers him growing up and how his father’s nurturing and open nature influenced his identity and how it shaped their relationship, then and now. Alex stated:

I have a lot of traditional memories of my dad as a very young child, but all the particulars that I can remember are a very different kind of nurturing masculinity . . . I mean I was hurt a lot growing up. I had a lot of surgery, and like a good dad I never heard “be a man”, I never heard any of that. Every time I was tired or hurt or exhausted, it was, “okay, well, go on in, you don’t need to be out here, you don’t need to do whatever” . . . He was always very willing to acknowledge a lot of the constraints that I had, even when other people would make fun of me he was always pretty good at it. He was always very eager to encourage me to be who I wanted. I remember on backpack trips when I was like eleven I was going through this spandex and buzz cut kind of, you know, cool, early nineties, late eighties horrible merger that happened there, right. And his comment was, “you know, you really do show your colors out here in the woods, don’t ya. You’re not afraid to just be yourself.” . . . You know, a lot of other dads might have said that a lot worse . . . Uh, so, you know, I think that’s notable. (Lines 1002-1046)

Alex’s experience of his father’s nurturing and open fathering had great bearing on the perception that he had and has of himself, his father, the roles that both of them
assume and the relationship itself both then and now. Within the interactions that he had and continues to have with his father Alex is able to be comfortable and confident in all aspects of his identity, role within the context of his father-son relationship. The support that his father demonstrated to him growing up challenges normative masculine concepts of fathering and Alex’s understanding of “being a man”. Here, Alex’s father was able to nurture Alex’s difference, to embrace those sometimes awkward times in identity formation, and to allow Alex to be open to how he views his himself, his father, and his role in his relationship. It also allows room for Alex to explore different aspects of his identity all while knowing that he is accepted and loved. This further exemplifies and solidifies the saliency of having a nurturing and open mentality regarding non-traditional masculinity. In other participants’ experiences similar remembered events in their father-son relationships of nurturing and open fathers offered insight into their own identities, roles and relationships similar to Alex.

Bringing both subthemes together, participants reiterated the need and want to have more emotional available, open and nurturing relationships with their fathers. Important to this concept was the maturing of the men and the relationship itself. As the relationship between father and son matured, both father and son were able to acknowledge each others’ sometimes diverse identities. As time passed they were able to get past the awkward, trying stages of relational development and accept each other for their differences allowing room for more emotionally, open, and nurturing relationships to exist.
Focusing on RQ1, participants addressed the themes traditional masculinity, responsibility, and non-traditional masculinity in and through their stories, narratives, and understanding of the contemporary culturally “normal” characteristics, performances, and ideologies surrounding masculinity. As they told their stories the larger themes of traditional masculinity, responsibility, and non-traditional masculinity culminated in the subthemes taking responsibility for actions, responsibility to family, financial responsibility, the roles of emotion in masculinity, and nurturing and open masculinity respectively. This further addressed what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the performance and perceptions of masculinity within their father-son relationships.

**Research Question Two: Identity, Roles and Relationships**

Stemming from the basic tenet within symbolic interactionism which posits that identity, roles and relationships are formed in and through everyday interactions, RQ2 asks what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the construction of sons’ identities, roles and relationships within father-son relationships. By asking questions such as “Can you describe the relationship that you have with your father?”, “How was your father raised?”, and/or “How would your father describe you?”, participants told stories and narratives addressing how their and their fathers’ identities, roles were constructed in and through the relationships. A vital portion of participant narratives enveloped their perceptions of their fathers. Often participants offered stories that encapsulated how they saw their fathers’ experiences of being fathered as well as how those experiences influenced their fathers’ fathering, and how this influenced their identities as sons and men, as well as their relationships with their fathers and others.
As a result of their stories and narratives three themes emerged: (1) *perceptions of father(ing)*; (2) *the influence of the son*; and (3) *turning point perspectives*. These theme enveloping participants and their fathers’ identities, roles and relationships will be addressed further.

**Theme One: Perceptions of Father(ing)**

The first theme to emerge from the data was the *perceptions of father(ing)*. Within this study perceptions (i.e., what participants thought about their fathers) and meta-perceptions (i.e., what participants thought their fathers thought about them, or what they thought their fathers may have thought about their own experiences) had a great deal of importance within participant responses to the interview questions. Retrospectively calling on events, participants spoke of how they saw, or perceived, their fathers to be in the moment. Moreover, they also spoke about what they think their fathers may have thought about in that same moment. Thus, when speaking about the evolution and maturation of the relationship participants answered questions and offered stories about their fathers, how their fathers were raised, and the possible impact of the fathers’ fathers on the current relationship. Responding to the previously stated interview questions 100% of the participants told stories of how their grandfathers parenting or lack thereof contributed to the relationship that they have with their fathers and how they perceived their fathers as a person (identity), as a father (role), and as a relational partner (relationship). Revisiting Jordan, a 23 year old of Ethiopian and American heritage, he spoke about his father and the influence his father’s father had on him and their relationship. Jordan was connected very heavily to his father’s narrative which included
his coming to America for his education. Additionally Jordan focused of his father’s effort in being a strong father-figure and example of a man as his father’s father was not a strong figure to lead as an example. When talking about his father’s experience Jordan stated:

I almost think that he looks at his childhood and he kind of hopes that the mistakes he made with his father [he won’t] make the same mistakes with me . . . I’m guessing he choose to raise me as a result of the mistakes that his father made as a father or the good, the good things that he saw from his father as a father. (Lines 397-415)

Here, Jordan tells very succinctly that his father learned about fathering from the experiences that he had with his father. The “mistakes” that Jordan speaks of not only encompass his father’s father’s mistakes but the potential mistakes that his father made as a son. Within Jordan’s story we see how the interactions with fathers and the perceptions that participants held of their fathers influence how they view their fathers as individuals and as fathers.

In another exemplar Stephen, a 21 year old white male, described his father’s upbringing and the influence of his father’s experience on his own. He began by saying that “[My dad] didn’t know his father. And so when my dad’s dad died he took on like the father of the house role . . . so my dad never really had a consistent father” (Line 484-494). After this I asked about how Stephen felt this influenced the way that his father was with him and his siblings. He responded very candidly:

I felt like he always, he just always has this like idea that he doesn’t know what he’s doing . . . so when he used to hit us and like abuse us like right after we would have to wait in our room . . . then he would come down like an hour later and apologize and always say like, I’m sorry, I didn’t have a dad and like I don’t really know what I’m doing, I’m trying my hardest. (Line 505-519)
Stephen’s reiterates the importance of the perceptions and metaperceptions of fathers in both “normal” and extenuating circumstances. His ability to make sense out of his interactions in the context of the interviews allows him to see his father’s abuse, both during and after the actual events, as repercussions of his father’s experiences growing up. As in other participants’ narratives, Stephen retrospectively addresses his father’s behavior and is able to exonerate and even rationalize why his father did what he did. In the process of coming to terms with the perceptions and metaperceptions he has of his father Stephen was able to acknowledge his own identity and relational patterns as a result of his father’s experience as influence on his own.

Similarly Vincent’s perception of his father reiterates many of the views that Stephen addressed in his stories. In the same manner as Stephen, Vincent is able to rationalize his father’s behavior as a result of the relationship his father had with his own father. “[D]ad would talk about, you know, if you think I’m bad, you know, your granddad would have, would have taken the belt to you by now” (Line 236-238). His ability to rationalize helped him to have a perception of his father that justified how he felt. Vincent continued stating, “Just like me, I think my father’s got things about his own dad he’s never forgiven him for” (Line 257-258). Vincent’s story and his ability to make sense in the context of those storytelling experiences culminated in the following story in which he collectively acknowledged his own perception and metaperception of his father is a very pointed experience growing up. Vincent said:

[O]ne of the most vivid memories I have of my father is he was threatening to whip me, and he was referencing my grandfather as he did it and he had me kind of bent over the bed and he was, he got his belt off and I remember he paused for a second and then he whipped the bed next to me. (Line 277-281)
Vincent paused for an extended period of time after he told this story. He was quiet and subdued by the process of making sense of what had transpired in the past and in the context of our conversations. He came back to the conversation with a deep breath then very emphatically stated, “[N]ow I look back on it and it’s just, oh, he must have been working through something” (Line 331-332).

Again we see the importance of the perceptions of fathering when making sense out of sons and fathers identities and roles within father-son relationships within participants storytelling, stories and narratives. These exemplars illustrate the importance of fathering patterns in the identities and roles of the participants’ fathers. Reiterating these stories allowed the participants a space to acknowledge the lives and experiences of their fathers’ and offered them some explanation as to why their fathers acted as they did, parented as they did, and interacted the way they did whether those experiences reflect positively or negatively on the relationship.

**Theme Two: Sons’ Perceptions of Self**

The second theme to emerge from the data regarding RQ2 was the sons’ perception of self. Within the context of this theme sons’ perceptions and metaperceptions are conceptualized as thoughts that sons had about themselves in the context of father-son interactions and relationships; and metaperceptions are what sons thought their fathers thought of them within the context of father-son interactions and relationships. Within the narratives participants were able to comment on and explore how they saw their own identities, roles and relationships as a result of their perceptions and meta-perceptions. The narratives that emerged from the interviews concentrated on
the sons’ ability to see themselves in the context of father-son relationships and the influence that relationship has on their identities and the perceptions they had of themselves. Additionally, the fathers’ performances and/or behaviors at times had positive and negative implications for the participants’ perceptions of themselves. That is, participants told stories that explicated how their interactions changed their perceptions of themselves and the way they were, are, and will be as individuals. They addressed the perceptions of who they were, who they are and at times how they want to be in the future.

To explain this further I revisit Stephen as he explains his feelings, the perceptions that he has of himself, and how the patterns that he witnessed in his father manifest themselves in his own behavior. He works through the issues of knowing how he is as a result of being his father’s son, as a result of his father, and how he consciously struggles to overcome his implicit and explicit tendencies. Here Stephen describes how being able to see those patterns in himself and addressing those perceptions that emerged within our conversations was the first step to altering how he saw himself in the relationship that he has with his father and other important interpersonal/romantic relationships. Stephen stated:

I guess the thing that I focus on the most is how to not abuse relationships like my father has. I’m very wary that I’m being stubborn like my dad and there’s certain times when I get upset and I yell, I will do the exact same hand movements and body positions of my father. I notice it, and I’m like, uggghhh! And so it’s always me focusing on how to not turn out like him in the ways that I don’t want to turn out like him. And so I never want to hit anyone. I won’t let myself get angry enough to want to hit people. I won’t do that. And when I drink and I get too drunk then I know that I’m doing it consistently, I’m like, holy fuck I’m turning into my father! I need to not do this. I need to watch out for this because I don’t want to be like him. (Lines 871-894)
Here, we see the struggle that Stephen has in negotiating his own identity. The perception of self allows Stephen, as well as other participants in this study, to get an outside perspective of who they are. Talking through these issues gives them a glimpse, a perception, of who they are in the context of their father-son relationships and in other relationships as well. Stephen is able to acknowledge that he is definitely a product of his father’s genetic make-up. Because of this he continuously keeps himself in check in regards to behaving like his father. He, like many participants, utilized their storytelling as a means to step outside of themselves and to see themselves from a different perspective; thus, engaging in clear perceptions of themselves.

Further addressing \textit{RQ2} and the focus on the construction of identities and roles within father-son relationships I asked “How would your father describe you?”. This question inquired into the sons’ perceptions of themselves as seen through their fathers’ perceptions; or, their metaperceptions – what they think their fathers think of them. Within the narratives a majority of the participants spoke about what they “thought” their fathers thought of them or what they “hope” their father would say about them.

In an interesting example of making sense of identity and role from the perceptions and meta-perceptions of self, Danny, a 21 year old student, had a more difficult time answering the question directly. He struggled to think about himself from an outside perspective or even what he thinks that his father thinks of him. In the moment he was addressing his perception of self within the context of a conversation for the first time. Danny states, “[Y]ou know, it’s so hard. I hate talking about myself and what other
people think about me. That’s just never something I’ve been comfortable doing” (Line 714-719). He very briefly listed some characteristics that he “thought” his father would say about him but immediately moved the focus of the answer from him to his father. Here, he assimilated his perceptions and metaperceptions by exploring his father’s action and saying that he was like his father in those situations.

In other conversations participants divulged more information regarding the metaperceptions they have of themselves. After asking the question “What would your father say about you?”, Phillip, a 28 year old white male, stated very clearly, “I think that right now in my life he would say that he is proud of me” (Line 581). Philip continued telling me that as he became more confident in what he was studying and working towards he became happier with himself. As a result he told me that his father, seeing him begin to settle into the man that he was, although never explicitly stating those words, was proud of his son.

John, a 25 year old student of Norwegian descent, reiterated the pattern of what he thought his father thought of him. When talking about his choice to continue to ski and the accomplishments he has in his chosen sport John said, “I think I hear other, always other stories from others when he talks about me, so. I think he’s proud of me, uh, for what I accomplished” (Lines 825-830). John, much like other participants described accomplishments in his life; he gave his perceptions, and from those perceptions and the reflective conversations from others was able to deduce meta-perceptions of his father. Thus, John was able to further negotiate his identity, and the roles that he facilitates within the relationship that he has with his father.
From these examples we see the saliency of sons’ perception of themselves within the context of father-son relationships. We also see the importance that their own perceptions and metaperceptions, again what their fathers thought of them, have on their identities and the roles that they play in each participant’s father-son relationship. Each of the participants either implicitly and/or explicitly addressed the perceptions of self and the influence that their perceptions had, have and will have on the construction of their identities, roles and relationships within father-son relationships.

**Theme Three: Turning Point Perspective**

The third theme that emerged from the data addressing *RQ2* was *turning point perspectives*. (Un)expected events within collective or individual experiences often have the ability to change the way that identities, roles and relationships are perceived and performed. Individuals experiencing turning points are often introduced to new perspectives and altered relational dynamics (Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Baxter, Braithwaite & Nicholson, 1999). Specifically, Graham (1997) suggests that:

> [T]urning points . . . capture a critical moment, event or incident that has impact or import [and] . . . trigger[s] a reinterpretation of what the relationship means to the participants. These meanings could influence the perceived importance of and justification for continued investment in the relationship. (p. 351)

Within the context of father-son relationships, often times turning points (in)voluntarily occur in order for fathers and sons to realize and address the importance of the relationship that they had, have and will have in the future. Turning points emerged in 100% of participant interviews.

To explicate further, Jordan told a story about moving away for college as the catalyst to understanding himself, his parents, and the role that they played in nurturing
him as a young adult. He then moved on to talk about how his experience on his own changed his perspective on who he was and is. Jordan stated that, “The first time I had to handle myself on my own and you don’t realize that the responsibility that comes with being an individual until you’re away from your parents for the first time” (Lines 580-583). Jordan’s experience of being on his own caused him to see himself and the roles that his parents held in his life as a young adult. It was not until he moved away and had to be accountable to himself away from his parents’ care that he fully recognized within himself that something needed to change. The turning point allowed him to alter, renegotiate and challenge his identity in order to move forward independent of his parents; to realize that he was his own man.

Alex offered two instances that focused on turning points within his father-son relational experience that helped him realize more about the relationship that he has and will have with his father. The conversation began by Alex telling the story of his father’s brother killing himself. Alex stated that at this point, he was fourteen, it was the first time he saw his father cry. Alex said, “[Dad] was the one to tell us and he didn’t even get through the sentence that Uncle Bruce was dead before he was just sobbing, sobbing, sobbing, sobbing, sobbing” (Lines 496-498). Alex continued his narrative regarding the turning points in the relationship that he had with his father he then began talking about his father’s diagnosis with prostate cancer. After finding out that his father was in the clear, as he stated “for now”, Alex continued stating:

I would say that maybe that would be one of those moments that make people want to start a relationship with my dad that I’d never had. And like I said, it just really underscored how fortunate I feel, you know, that I have that relationship with my dad. (Lines 540-544)
In many instances like Alex’s, particularly for participants who were a little older, there were more than one turning point event or experience inside or outside of the relationship they had with their fathers that had direct effects on the relationship itself. William told a story of his grandfather’s funeral. During this time in his narrative William was working through the times in his life where he thought his father would always be distant. He was afraid that as he great older that there would be no time to really get to know his father as a “real” person. Instead he felt he would be stuck in the physically and emotionally distant relationship that had been established throughout his life. From there, within William’s narrative he was able to begin to see himself and his father from a different perspective. He stated:

I didn’t hug my father I think until I was twenty-six years old. The first time I said I love you was twenty-seven. We shook hands until that day. The first day I think that I told him I loved him was right before I started my Master’s program. My grandfather had passed away, his dad had passed away, and that was the first day I saw my father cry in my whole life it wasn’t until that day that my grandfather’s service that I saw my father cry, and I think that was the day that I recognized that, you know, my dad had more emotion than he had ever let on. And so it was, it was cathartic for me because I never cried, particularly in front of my father, because I’d been raised with phrases from, you know, walk it off, rub some dirt on it, boys don’t cry, that, you know. So it was, it was an interesting day to see his humanity, and it was an interesting day to find my own humanity and to find when we were done we, my dad commented [that] he was very proud of me and I said thanks, I loved him, and, yeah, it was a pretty cathartic day I think in that sense . . . And it changed our relationship. (Lines 422-503)

Here, we see how the turning point not only changed the trajectory of his relationship but offered him and his father a cathartic experience that was shared together. Within the vulnerable space that was created at the funeral, both men were able to open up to each other in a very close, emotional and physical way. It was their vulnerabilities that allowed for them to set the new trajectory of the relationship. William
continued to say that now in their relationship they are more open in talking about how they feel with regards to everything, not just their relationship. In a sense, they were offered the ability through the vulnerable space to have a collective deep breath in the relationship – a breath that allowed for a continued understanding of both of their identities and roles as men, as son, and as father, within the context of their relationship.

Turning points, as stated above, are (un)expected events within collective or individual experiences that often have the ability to change the way that identities, roles and relationships are perceived and performed. In the exemplars offered above and in every narrative participants consistently spoke about times in their lives in which their relationships reached **turning points** from which that relationship changed with their fathers. Although it could not explicitly be said that the identities and roles of the their fathers changed through these turning points, the participants explored these moments as catalyst to change their identities and roles within their relationships and often the trajectories of the relationships.

As a result of their storytelling, stories and narratives participants addressed RQ2 which enveloped participants’ identities, roles and relationships. The three themes emerged: (1) **perceptions of father(ing)**; (2) **the influence of the son**; and (3) **turning point perspectives**. It was clear through participants narratives that in and through their interactions with their father, through their own perceptions and metaperceptions of themselves, their roles and relationships themselves that the participants were able to gain further insight into who they were, are and will be as they continue to negotiate their
identities within the context of the relationships they have, or do not have, with their fathers.

*RQ2* addressed the individual identities roles and relationships of participants as they spoke about themselves and their fathers in the context of their relationships with their fathers. The perceptions of their fathers, themselves, and the turning points that challenged, altered, and changed the trajectory of those relationships was the main focus of participants interviews. Participants offered insight into their experiences and the experiences of their fathers and others as a result of the stories and narratives they told.

**Research Question Three: Contextual/Thematic Codes**

Moving forward, *RQ3* concentrates on more specific themes that influence the performance and perceptions of masculinity and father-son relationships. In and through participants narratives the themes that emerge offer insight that are foundational to how identities, roles and relationships are formed as well as how participants see their and their father’s masculinity. Thus, *RQ3* specifically asks, what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding father-son contextual differences/similarities offer insight into both the performance and perception of masculinity and father-son relationships? Stemming from this question four themes emerged from participant narratives: (1) *history and family*; (2) *romantic and interpersonal relationships*; (3) *culture*; and (4) *sex and gender*. Below themes, similarities and differences regarding participant performances and perceptions of masculinity and father-son relationships will be further explored.
Theme One: History and Family

The first theme that emerged from the data concentrated on participants’ historical and family themes. One hundred percent of participants commented on the historical and family contexts of their father’s experiences growing up. Situated in participants’ narratives historical and family contexts were established as the constitutive, foundational bases for the construction, maintenance, and solidification of identity and role characteristics within, but not limited to, father-son relationships with regards to historically and familial significant people, places, or events.

Most often participant narratives were situated in stories of their father’s father and the historical difference in the times they were raised. Participants acknowledged that their fathers’ experiences growing up were much different than their own. Additionally, participants reiterated the literature surrounding the culture of fathering and fatherhood which emphasizes the difference in the generation of the father and the son as a rift that caused struggle between fathers and sons (LaRossa, 1988).

When first establishing himself within the context of the interview, and after I asked him “Can you tell me a little bit about how you grew up?”, William immediately began to divulge information about the aspects of his family and family history. From his perspective it was imperative to guide my understanding of his identity within the significance of his and his family’s history. William focused very heavily on the historical context of his father’s father, his father, and the time in which his father was born and raised. William stated:

[B]orn in 1945 he was raised with a value system that was not only traditional, but the value system that I think that animated how people worked, their hard work,
no one gives you anything, I think that that impacted my dad quite a bit. My
grandfather taught himself to fly planes at the age of sixteen, had his first car at
twelve. So my dad had been raised with these narratives, that this is what a man
does, no one gives him anything. My dad was always taught to stay home, watch
your mother . . . So I think in that sense I think my dad was raised with a very
masculine way where a traditional way of interacting in both his home spaces and
relationships with others . . . combine that with my dad’s experience in the service
and his time in Vietnam, my dad had a very, I think, though way of looking at the
world. (Lines 555-608)

Here, William offers an explanation in which the historical differences between
him and his father not only allowed for him to gain an appreciation for his father and the
hard work he encountered throughout his life but also the appreciation for the work ethic
that his father’s experiences in that time reflected upon him. By focusing on historical
and family contexts William is able to explicate why this is vitally important to his
identity as situated in the relationship that he has with his father.

In another example, Mark, a 21 year old white male, spent quite a bit of time
talking about his future and his inability to move forward with his plans to join the
Marines because his father did not see the decisions that he has made to be beneficial to
him as man and did not coincide with their collective family history. Mark states:

I mean he freaked out, he, his dad was in the Navy before, he retired before my
dad was adopted, but my dad was like you’re going into the Navy or the Air Force
because that’s where your family history is, and I was like hell I’m going into the
Navy or the Air Force. I’m going where I want, you know. (Lines 1106-1110)

Here, both Mark and his father, utilize their family’s presence in the military as a means
to define their identity. Mark wants to make his own way in his decision to join the
Marines carving out room for his own unique identity formation whereas his father wants
him to remain close to Mark’s family identity by joining the Navy.
The importance of the *historical and family* theme lies in the foundational, guiding force it creates with Mark and his father as well as other participants in this study. The narratives told were driven by the overtly imperative aspects of collective, historical and family aspects, and individual identities. In this participants attempted to remain connected to their family and family history. It is important to acknowledge that even in instances where sons were moving forward against the history and family established or if they were in continuing family and historical patterns, in both instances the themes were, are and will guide their identities, roles and relationships as a result of the significance they see from a historical and familial perspective.

**Context Two: Romantic and Interpersonal Relationships**

The second theme that emerged from the narratives concentrated on participants’ *romantic and interpersonal relationships*. Forty-two percent of participants commented specifically on romantic and interpersonal relationships within their narratives. Situated in participants’ narratives romantic and interpersonal themes were established as the constitutive, foundational bases for the construction, maintenance, and solidification of identity and role characteristics within, but not limited to, father-son relationships with regards to romantic and interpersonal relationships and the significant people, places, or events therein. Within the romantic and interpersonal coding many instances emerged in which participants concentrated heavily on their romantic and/or interpersonal relationships as foundational to their narratives of their father-son relationships and masculinity. These themes guided their perceptions of the relationships with their father and often reflected on their performance of masculinity.
As a means to further explain, Robert, a 29 year old American of Mexican descent, tells a story of the relationship that he has with his wife. Within this relationship his narrative is set against the dominant masculinity narrative that his father established growing up. As he explains, his father saw women, and particularly his mother, as objects of his needs and wants; individuals who were there to be at his beck and call. Additionally his father also placed a misogynistic masculinity toward women and other marginalized groups. Here, Robert explains that the relationship with his wife usurps the previously overpowering pull that his father’s perception once had on his performance. As a result Robert moved away from his father’s understanding of gender-specific relationships and performance of identity and concentrated heavily on creating change in his own identity and roles which were nurtured by the relationships he held with his fiancée and his mother. Robert stated, “To see the way my dad treats women . . . objectifying them, um, seducing them, and trying to be somebody he’s not teaches me over and over again to just be the best person I can with [my partner]” (Lines 414-421).

In this portion of his narrative Robert establishes his father as a negative ideal, something not to follow, as he continuously works to be a man unlike his father in his romantic and interpersonal relationships and as an individual. Later in the narrative Robert continues to tell stories of his father’s misogynistic tendencies. Below Robert tells a story of the comments his father made regarding the relationship that he has with his partner. His father remarked that once Robert was married it would be the end of his life. Resenting this comment and the ideology behind it Robert continued:

I was like, listen dad, that’s not the way it is at all. I have a very good relationship with [my partner]. We’re equals. He’s like, yeah, well she always gets what she
wants or, and really getting into this stereotype and I said, well, dad, maybe your relationships are that way, and maybe that’s the way you react to women but I think that [my partner] and I have a much deeper relationship and a much more honest and, and, um, equal relationship. (Lines 611-617)

Robert illustrates the importance that his relationship has in the context of how he performs his masculinity and how he negotiates the interpersonal and romantic relationships that he has with specific individuals in his life. The relationship he has with his father and the perceptions of his father had and have direct implications to other relationships in his life and the manner in which he treat individuals.

Within other narratives participants also utilized the way in which their fathers negatively interacted with others as a catalyst to change the way that they were within their own interpersonal and romantic relationships. Additionally, participants also utilized the manner in which their fathers romantically and interpersonally interacted as a framework and a guide from which they could negotiate their own relationships.

Matthew oriented his narrative surrounding his interpersonal relationships around the example that his father demonstrated throughout his life growing up. As he explains his father knew everyone in his hometown because of the work that he did. As a younger man Matthew saw his father and the way in which he interacted with individuals of different socio-economic statues and ethnicities. He spoke about how, no matter who they were or where they came from, his father would treat them all with respect. His father would know them and take the time to talk with them. Matthew said:

I swear to you, when I go into San Diego and I’m with my dad no matter where we go somebody knows him. If you’re a rich white man, a poor black man . . . It doesn’t matter who you are, my dad can talk to you. (Lines 295-303)
Matthew continued that this left an impression on him in that he saw how his father was with others and how this influenced the perspective he had of his father as a man. Although Matthew did not agree with other aspects of his father interactions, performances, and behaviors, the overarching ideologies established in his interpersonal relationships offered Matthew a positive example of how to be a man and guided Matthew’s perspective of how to treat others, thus influencing his identity and roles within romantic and interpersonal relationships. Here again participant narratives illustrates that both similarities and differences in how son and fathers addressed romantic and interpersonal contexts influenced their identities and roles within the context of father-son relationships.

**Context Three: Culture**

The third theme that emerged from the data concentrated on participants’ perspectives of culture. Situated in narratives participants’ perspectives of culture were established as the constitutive, foundational bases for the construction, maintenance, and solidification of identity and role characteristics within, but not limited to, father-son relationships with regards to salient cultural characteristics, identities, and the significant performances, people, places, and/or events therein. Within the cultural coding many instances emerged in which participants’ narratives concentrated heavily on their specific cultural identity characteristics as foundational themes to their narratives. Furthermore, it is important to note that culture situated within participants’ narratives was not limited to culture stemming specifically from racial or ethnic backgrounds. Although these are a part of the cultural context, culture here was also expanded to intellectual and socio-
economic culture, in one specific case, blue-color versus white collar cultural constructs. Regardless of the kind, the theme of culture guided participants’ perceptions of the relationships with their father and often reflected on their performance of masculinity.

Thirty-five percent of participants mentioned their ethnic, racial or other significant cultural heritage within the contexts of the interviews. The deep degree of association with that particular part of their identity warranted closer exploration. In fact, all six of these participants were unable to talk about their culture, as explicated within this study, as separate from themselves, their father-son relationships and their masculinity. Much like the themes that are illustrated above, participant narratives continuously reverted back to or stayed concentrated on this particular theme as foundational, guiding aspect of their identity and as an influential, integral portion of their continued identity construction.

Throughout his narrative Stephen continuously returned to and focused on his father’s blue-collar roots and his lack of institutional education. Stephen saw his father’s difficult life growing up and work environment as integral to his fathering skills. In several instances Stephen told stories that surrounded his and his father’s education and intellect. Particularly imperative to Stephen was his ability to utilize his intellect to move beyond his father’s actions and to “be above” his father’s abusive behaviors that he tried to rationalize now and growing up. In this instance I asked Stephen what, if anything, caused any changes in the relationship he had/has with his father. He stated:

I think me going on in education. I’m like considered the smartest one in my family, which it was a like black sheep growing up. But I think that changed my relationship with my dad a lot. I think looking back he, he used to be super
intimidated by the way that I could speak and he couldn’t because he barely graduated high school. (Lines 655-664)

Immediately following this portion of his narrative, Stephen continued saying that it was particularly poignant that he would always talk back to his father after instances of abuse would happen. In talking back he would argue with his father that what he was doing was not right – Stephen, as he saw it, was using his intellect to push back against his father. Although it was often received negatively by his father, Stephen’s contestations reinforced that the cultural differences, a blue-collar uneducated culture of behavior placed against a confident soon-to-be white collar educated culture, guided his trajectory towards an identity formed in contrast to his fathers. Stephen offered a narrative that concentrated on the very specific difference in culture that he had from his father. This guided and reified the individual that he wanted to be.

As another particularly salient example Jordan, who concentrates on similarities between him and his father, talks about his Ethiopian heritage as a point of pride and connection to his identity and father. Jordan focuses on his father’s story of overcoming great obstacles to achieve success in America. He stated:

[W]hen I got older I kind of learned about my heritage more. [W]hen you learn more and more about your Ethiopian heritage, which is millions of miles away, you learn how special it is and how you’re one-of-a-kind in a country full of so many different cultures. And it kind of brings you so much more closer to that side . . . then it also reminds you that you have this other side that you don’t want to neglect. (Lines 701-715)

Here, Jordan, as he did several times throughout his narrative, explores what it means to be a part of a very unique culture; a very unique part of his identity. Jordan utilized this appreciation and acknowledgement of his cultural heritage as a foundational guiding force, as motivation to work hard, be a good son, a good, masculine man, and do
well in his life. All of these things as he states were important aspects of his identity, his father’s identity and his cultural identity. Thus, not only did this situate his father’s narrative of identity, role and relationship but it also, in the context of Jordan’s cultural identification, situated his own identity, role, relationship and mode of drive and encouragement.

Together with these two exemplars, both similarities and differences emerged from narratives concentrated on the culture of the participants. Again, it is important to reiterate that the concept of culture situated in participant narratives enveloped ethnic, racial, and intellectual, and socio-economic status. Furthermore, concentrating on these contexts participants were able to illustrate how the similarities and differences that exist between them and their fathers influenced constructed identities and roles within father-son relationships.

**Theme Four: Sex and Gender**

The fourth theme that emerged from narratives concentrated on participants’ sex and gender. Situated in narratives, participants’ perspectives on sex and gender were established as the constitutive, foundational bases for the construction, maintenance, and solidification of identity and role characteristics within, but not limited to, father-son relationships with regards to salient sex and gender performances, characteristics, identities, ideologies, and the significant people, places, and/or events therein. More specifically, in the context of participant narratives sex was most often spoke about in participants and their fathers’ self-identifications, beliefs and ideologies regarding sexual orientation. Furthermore, within the context of the current study gender was most often
spoken about in terms of gender roles, performances, and open versus closed-minded beliefs and ideologies in regards to gender.

Similar to the culture theme, 42% of participants explicitly spoke of sex and/or gender within their narratives. The saliency of this theme and the importance of sex and gender within the framework of this study warranted addressing it further. Specifically when addressing RQ3, drastic deviations regarding participants’ views of sex and gender often caused rifts in the relationships they had with their fathers. Whether the conflict stemmed from ideological perspectives on marginalization or from participants own sexual orientation, the focus on sex and gender as an explicit area of concentration was apparent in the narratives.

Matthew, a 27 year old American of Mexican descent and self-identified gay man, offered insight into this particular theme when speaking about himself and his father. Matthew rooted his identity in his own unique performance of being a gay man. He spent quite a bit of time speaking within the constructs of multiple masculinities without using those exact words. As a member of the gay community he situated his performance as more masculine than most but did not consider himself to be overly masculine. This stemmed from his perceptions of his own performance, the performances of his father and those performances within the gay community. Here, the foundational element encompassing his identity construction, his ideological positionality, and his performances were/are largely guiding by Matthew’s ability to negotiate his sex and gender inside and outside of the relationship he holds with his father.
Elaborating on this, within his narrative Matthew told what his father thought was masculine. His response was very brief and immediate, “Not gay” (Line 461). He continued describing his father’s masculinity and the role that it plays within the relationship and the challenges and fractures that often result. Offering further explanation to his father’s ideological standpoint on homosexuality and masculinity Matthew distinctly described that coming out to his father, an event that was unexpected and not by his design, caused his father’s perception of Matthew’s masculinity to change immediately. From his perspective Matthew’s core identity did not change, his role within the relationship did not change, nothing to him had changed. However, his father’s perception of him changed and thus changed the relationship. Later in his narrative Matthew spoke about his father’s perception of him as a masculine man. In a similar response he responded just as quickly and bluntly, “No, because I’m gay” (Line 579). His father’s perception of him changed the perspective of himself, his role, the relationship and his own masculinity.

Matthew and his father still have an amicable, positive relationship. They have learned to negotiate Matthew’s sexual orientation, mostly on the part of his father. However, in other participants’ narratives the differences within the sex and gender context were not reconcilable. The beliefs of what it meant to be gay or gendered queer were too much against the core identities of the fathers that it did, in fact, create physical and ideological distance between fathers and sons.

Vincent demonstrated this very succinctly within his narrative. His father, a very misogynistic and distant man who had left their family during Vincent’s adolescence,
established a view of women, gay men, and other marginalized groups that left a lasting impression on Vincent. In establishing these beliefs as a crucial part of his masculinity, Vincent’s father gave him an idealistic ideology and performances of what not to do. Commenting on his own perspective of women and masculinity Vincent emphasized how important it was to have an open and inclusive ideological stance when it came to masculinity stating:

Especially the way I look at women, too, because I inherently look at women as strong figures and I gravitate towards women who can take care of themselves, not because I have any issues taking care of somebody, but that’s just what I’m used to (Lines 750-758).

Here, Vincent illustrates how he drew from his mother’s strength and feminine masculinity in the absence of his father. Because of this the heteronormative gender performances and roles that operate in contemporary culture were renegotiated and re-formed in the interactions and experiences that he had as a result of his father-son relationship. At the core of his identity construction and its continued formation Vincent concentrated his narrative very heavily on gender performances, roles and ideologies.

The exemplars above address the value placed on sex and gender from the perspective of the participants. Although only 42% of the participants explicitly focused their narrative with a concentration on sex and gender masculinity was talked about ubiquitously throughout the entire study. The importance within these participants’ narratives lies in the foundational, guiding, and motivational aspect of sex and gender when constructing, challenging, reifying and altering their identities and roles situated in their father-son relationships.
Addressing RQ3 which asked, what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding father-son contextual differences/similarities offer insight into both the performance and perception of masculinity and father-son relationships, resulted in four main themes: (1) *history/family*; (2) *romantic/interpersonal relationships*; (3) *culture*; and (4) *sex and gender*. These themes were the unique, situated, and foundational concepts which guided participant narratives surrounding the construction, challenging, reification, and alteration of identities, performances, perceptions, metaperceptions, and roles within father-son relationships. Furthermore, in the development of these themes participants were able to give insight into the similarities and differences that exist(ed) within the parameters of their father-son relationships and the importance that the similarities/differences were to the construction of their identities. As a result the saliency of these specific contexts with regards to participants’ identities, roles, relationships, and perceptions and performances of masculinity were also addressed.

**Research Question Four: Dialogic and Performative Codes**

Within the context of participant interviews the role of dialogue and performance was paramount to achieving a more complete understanding of participants’ narratives. Whereas RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 addressed identities, roles, relationships, and the perceptions and performances of masculinity in and through themes and respectively, RQ4 concentrates on the dialogue and performances of narratives vital to the explanation and explorations of overarching participant narratives. To further the understanding of father-son relationships and masculinity from the perspective of the son RQ4 incorporated not only Riessman’s (2208) thematic narrative analysis but also introduced
and had implications for dialogic/performative narrative analysis. RQ4 asked, what themes stemming from sons’ dialogue and performances within the context of interviews offer insight into their narratives surrounding father-son relationships and masculinity. Thus, dialogic and performative codes were explored.

To address RQ4, this particular portion of the analysis explored the mundane everyday interactions of conversations (e.g., turn-taking, gestures, gaze, and dramatic pauses) as narrative constructs. The manner in which the participants spoke, did not speak, acted, reacted or remained still also became a valuable part of participant narratives. That is, participants became a part of an atmosphere in which their idiosyncratic movements, gestures and vocalics help constitute and construct their overarching narratives. The dialogic and performative codes created for this particular study reinforced ideologies contributed by narrative theory and symbolic interactionism all of which exist as fundamental elements of both thematic narrative analysis and dialogic/performative narrative analysis. Furthermore, this portion of the analysis became vitally important to this study because of its focus on the performance of masculinity. Performance here is not just the individual characteristics, actions, or inactions of participants. Instead, in combination with dialogue, participants’ overall performances were taken into account as valuable and vital tools in constructing their narratives.

Within the context of male relationships there is often a tendency for men to act a certain way around other men. Most often these reactions are due to the adherence of social norms and behaviors established within the constructs of hegemonic masculinity. Thus, within these interactions men are often forced, consciously or subconsciously,
behave in certain ways in order to be perceived as masculine, to be perceived as men. Because of this, a rule of performance existed within participant narratives. However, as participants’ narratives evolved, a comfortable space was created that allowed for the participants to let their guards down; to forget that they were having a conversation about masculinity and more importantly to, at times, step outside of their own normative masculine performances. Thus, their dialogue and performances within their narratives changed. To expand upon this, I offer the exemplars below.

The exemplars that follow did not happen as a result of any specific or strategic interview questions and were integral portions of participant narratives. Here, participants’ narratives conjured up physical and emotional, dialogic and performative responses that were not planned. The importance of this portion of the analysis was that the responses came from a very visceral, raw space and offered a glimpse into the participants’ identity. This glimpse added to the salience of the narratives that they were telling and sharpened the focus of the meaning behind the narratives.

As an example, a question was posed that in one, two, five, ten years the participant has a child. The child comes to that participants, their father, and asks, “Daddy what was Papa [enter last name] like?” I would follow that by asking the question, “What would you tell your child about your father?” The question was constructed in order to further understand the sons’ perception of his father’s identity and role within the context of their relationship.

Alex had a particularly strong response to this line of questioning. Within his response almost all aspects of his performance altered in some manner adding saliency to
his overall narrative. Initially situated in a very masculine way – rigid posture, legs crossed wide, one foot over the opposing knee, sitting back in his chair, occasionally swinging slightly from side to side, looking intently at me while speaking, arms crossed - his body and language characteristics, his performance, began to change after I asked the question. After a long pause Alex responded with dialogue that was different than it had been in the rest of our conversation – lower tone, slower, and more deliberate. He responded:

That’s a really emotional question. Um, because I don’t know. I don’t have a good answer for that and that worries me. That bothers me, that feels like a failing . . . I am just instantly critiquing [everything] coming to mind saying that’s just not doing [my dad] justice. I would say that he very, very clearly loved his family. It was always clear to me that he loved his family, that he loved his wife. He would always say I love you. Like he was always goofing with mom, you know. I would want that to be one of the first things that I told my son about, was just how unfashionably in love with his family he was. (Lines 638-647)

Within his narrative Alex demonstrated a very clear emotional, physical, dialogic and performative change. During the initial advancement into his narrative response, he began to change how he sat. Instead of the rigid masculine posture described above, he sat up in his chair and stopped moving back and forth. As he started to answer the question he began to ever-so-slightly look away from me, fixing his gaze out of the window in the office. He placed both feet on the floor. His knees were brought together. His shoulders, broad and open before, were rolled forward. His arms crossed tightly before unfolded allowing his hands to clasp softly together, every so often rubbing them together, even fidgeting with the wedding his ring on his finger. His gaze would move from out of the window towards the floor, never directly focusing his gaze at me as before.
As he continued to describe his father as he would want his son to know him Alex was, in those moments, having the conversation with and to himself. Within this portion of the interview he was taken out of the situation, out of the room in which the interview was taking place and subconsciously let his masculine dialogue and performance relax. No longer was he performing the normative masculine role within the interview space. Instead, his concentration was on another time. He was cognitively in another moment.

As Alex’s narrative continued his “normal” masculine performance began to subconsciously re-emerge. His posture once again became rigid, he began to sit back in his chair, re-cross his legs and arms, and he began again to look more confidently as his voice returned to its “normal” tone, volume and inflection.

Vincent offered another powerful example of how performances can change within the context of a narrative and add to the potency of participant narratives. In this example Vincent was recalling and telling a story about one of his most vivid memories growing up and stories of his father’s father and how he was raised. Vincent began very slowly and as he worked his way through the story began to change the way that he talked. To this point in our conversation Vincent had been very fidgety and seemingly uncomfortable in the space; swinging back and forth in his chair, fidgety with his hands, adjusting his clothing from time to time, continuously changing the way he sat, folding and unfolding his arms, moving his gaze from me, to the floor, to the window and back again.

Moving his narrative forward, Vincent’s performance was beginning to change. He began to speak softer, slower, and with pause. Vincent’s fidgeting stopped. As he had
been moving around sporadically throughout our conversation he now was sitting legs together, hands placed gently on top of them, shoulders hunched and leaning forward, hands rubbing together, and gaze focused intently on the ground in front of his feet. Vincent began:

[T]his is one of the most vivid memories I have of my father is he was threatening to whip me, and he was referencing my grandfather’s as he did it and he had me kind of bent over the bed and he was, he got his belt off and I remember he paused for a second and then he whipped the bed next to me. And he said just it’s alright and then he just turned around and walked out. (Line 276-286)

After he finished this portion of the story Vincent just sat quietly. He didn’t move and his gaze remained on the ground and still. There was no posture, or awareness of another, and there was no conscious performance in that space.

Allowing for Vincent to take the time needed to process his own story, he finally returned to speaking after a long pause to finish his story. For the entirety of that particular story Vincent really did not move. He was having a conversation with himself about that event in his life. Bringing the story to a close his quietly looked up from his steady gaze at the floor and said, “Yeah, I hadn’t thought about that in a long time” (Line 336). Here, Vincent’s illustrates again the importance of performance, especially masculine performance, and narratives. Similar to Alex’s performative response above, exploring the performance of these men within a masculine space reiterates the saliency of their narratives as they both worked through their thoughts on their father-son relationships and their identities and roles therein.

These were not isolated events. Although the reaction may not have been as profound as Alex’s and Vincent’s all the participants demonstrated significant changes in their performances within our conversational space. It could be argues that these narrative
performances could be seen as performative themes. Most often these changes happened throughout participant narratives more specifically when participants spoke about more vulnerable issues, or just as simply as participants becoming more comfortable within the narrative experience.

Overall, the dialogic and performative elements of the interviews resulted in a very telling and salient portion of participants experiences. Furthermore, when addressing RQ4, participants’ responses emphasized the importance that dialogue and performance had when integrated with the analysis of narratives surrounding their father-son relationships and masculinity.

**Conclusion**

This chapter detailed the results which came as a result of the analysis of participant data. Analysis of interviews contributed major themes, corresponding subthemes, and explanations of the communicative and interactional phenomena under investigation. Stemming from RQ1 which asked what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the performance and perceptions of masculinity within their father-son relationships, the following three themes emerged: (1) *traditional masculinity*; (2) *responsibility*; and (3) *non-traditional masculinity*. From RQ2 which asked what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the construction of sons’ identities, roles and relationships within father-son relationships, the following three themes emerged: (1) *perceptions of father(ing)*; (2) *sons’ perceptions of self*; and (3) *turning point perspective* emerged. RQ3 which asked what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding father-son contextual differences/similarities offer insight into both the performance and perception
of masculinity and father-son relationships, resulted in four main themes: (1) history/family; (2) romantic/interpersonal relationships; (3) culture; and (4) sex and gender. Lastly, RQ4 which asks what themes stemming from sons’ dialogue and performances within the context of interviews offer insight into their narratives surrounding father-son relationships and masculinity gained further comprehension in to specific dialogic and performative instances within participant narratives. The following chapter will discuss and explore the results of the current study with regards to implications to several areas of concentration including symbolic interactionism, narrative conceptualizations, traditional and non-traditional masculinity, perceptions and turning points, and father-son relationships. In addition, the following chapter will also address the current study’s limitations and address areas of future research to be explored.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

This study illustrates how 19 adult men talked about their perceptions and performances of masculinity and the influence that each has on the identities and roles within the context of the relationships with their fathers. Within this study I demonstrate how these individuals construct and make sense of their masculine identities, their roles in their relationships with their fathers and others, and the father-son relationship within the context of our interview conversations. Masculinity within father-son relationships remained the focus of the conversations and the study. Within the parameters of the conversations themes emerged focusing on traditional and non-traditional masculinity traits and the perceptions and metaperceptions of the father and the son. Additionally, specific themes imperative to identities, roles, relationships and performance of masculinity were demonstrated throughout the participant narratives.

When first exploring the importance of the study, addressing gaps in knowledge helps to focus the discussion. As stated above, research on father-son relationships remains prevalent in masculinity studies, sociology, psychology and family communication. The importance of the field of research focusing on father-son relationships can be expressed in a recent edition of *Qualitative Inquiry* that was dedicated specifically to individuals within father-son relationships, relationship dissolution, identity performance and embodiment, and reconciliation within those
relationships (Alexander, Moreira, & kumar, 2012; Bochner, 2012; Colins, 2012; Pelias, 2012; Sparkes, 2012). Additionally research on masculinity and its application to culture also remains a large and imperative part of the cultural and masculinity studies.

Publications such as *Men and Masculinities, Masculinities Studies*, and *Psychology of Men and Masculinity* strictly focusing on men and masculinity continue to produce intriguing scholarship incorporating multiple fields of study. Thus, the area of masculinity studies continues to be imperative within the areas of gender, and cultural studies. However, a dearth in scholarship still exists within communication that coalesces the two fields of study illustrating a lack of scholarship that specifically focuses on father-son relationships, masculinity and the influence of each on the other. More specifically there is very little research that utilizes qualitative, narrative concepts and methodologies, and symbolic interactionism from the perspective of the son; a needed and imperative perspective to study.

The current study addresses these gaps in scholarship not just in communication but also in cultural studies, gender studies and social psychology. When integrating identities, roles and relationships together and focusing more specifically on father-son relationships and the implication and influences of masculinity from the perspective of the son from a symbolic, narrative, communicative perspective, this study adds knowledge and addresses the importance that emerges when allowing men the space to offer narratives regarding these specific areas. Below I will address the multiple and significant contributions that this study offers in the areas of symbolic interactionism,
narrative conceptualizations, masculinity studies, family communication studies as well as limitations of the study and areas of future research.

Implications to Symbolic Interactionism

Blumer’s (1969) iteration of symbolic interactionism helps to explicate how and why individuals make meaning of their selves, social roles, relationships and societal experiences in and through social interactions. Especially considering everyday interactions of fathers and sons over the life span of the relationship, symbolic interactionism offers deeper understanding of the relationship dynamics and also the unique identity construction (e.g., masculine identity) of the individuals interacting within the relationship. Although symbolic interactionism has roots in sociological scholarship established in James (1892), Cooley (1902), Mead (1934), and Blumer (1969), the current study illustrates the necessity to reintroduce this theory as significant in explaining and better understanding gender and family communication phenomena. Specifically, the implications of this study to symbolic interactionism exist in four areas of contribution and concentration: (1) father-son relationships; (2) masculinity; (3) interactional adaptability and reflexivity; and (4) exploration and inspection.

Father-son Relationships

Initially when talking about this study’s implications to symbolic interactionism, father-son relationships is the first area that should be addressed. As Blumer (1969) suggests, individuals interpret, re-interpret, negotiate, and re-negotiate their identities, roles and relationships within each interaction. The importance here lies in the acknowledgement that each interaction between father-son, consciously or sub-
consciously, can alter the trajectory of the relationship. As individuals mature and change through multiple stages of development so can the roles and relationships.

Stemming from participant narratives it is clear that everyday interactions, the foundational element to meaning making, construct, alter, challenge and have the ability to change identities and roles within father-son relationships. For example, the most often subordinate roles participants fulfilled growing up and the identity characteristics that accompanied those roles were/are in continuous negotiation. By focusing on individual identity construction and negotiation as an integral aspect of interaction, individuals will begin to understand the roles that they fill in the relationships and understand how and why they are that way in relation to their father/son. Thus, illustrating that identity, roles and relationships are co-constructed within interactions, men can see that each individual has an influence on how the relationship was, is, and will be as participants in this study illustrated. Symbolic interactionism allows for a theoretical explanation of how and why fathers/sons can take control of their relational experiences and (co)construct a relationship that they wish to engage. Furthermore, sons/fathers can better comprehend where their fathers’ patterns of fathering and behavior stem and begin to rationalize those behavioral patterns. Basic knowledge of symbolic interactionism can ultimately lead to deeper insight into father-son performance, identity, role and relationship understanding.

In addition to offering insight into father-son relationships symbolic interactionism also contributes a great deal when conceptualizing masculinity and the way it influences and is influenced by father-son relationships.
Masculinity

The second area of concentration to be addressed as a significant area of contribution to symbolic interactionism is masculinity/masculinities. Stemming from Blumer (1969), masculinity/masculinities as larger constructs embedded in society can be conceptualized as “joint actions – a societal organization of conduct of different acts of diverse participants” formed from multiple individual interactions adopted and performed by “collectivities” or aggregate groups (p. 17). As such Blumer (1969) continues suggesting that, “In dealing with collectivities and with joint actions one can easily be trapped in an erroneous position by failing to recognize that the joint action of the collectivity is an interlinkage of the separate act of the participants” (p. 17). Thus, exploring direct ties with the current study, unique individual performances within interactions (e.g., an effeminate man interacting with a masculine man) construct larger roles, relational, and societal constructs. The contribution here is in understanding that individual interactions ultimately influence and build larger societal constructs. Moreover, everyday interactions can have significant effects over time on how masculinity/masculinities are perceived. This is paramount to this study’s integration of masculinity with father-son relationships because it helps to explicate how masculine ideologies and performances can resist, reify, alter, and/or change throughout generations; essentially, how masculinity is constructed within interactions.

Additionally when conceptualizing masculinity as an integral part of society, drawing from Mead (1934), Blumer (1969) adds that:

Human society is made up of individuals who have selves (that is, make indications to themselves); that individual action is a construction and not a release, being
built up by the individual through noting and interpreting features of the situations in which [they act]; that group or collective action consists of the aligning of individual actions, brought about by the individuals’ interpreting or taking into account each other’s actions. (p. 82)

This study reiterates what is stated above emphasizing that as a larger social construct masculinity is both influential on father-son relationships and influenced by father-son relationships. There exists a simultaneous influence of/on self, identity, social role and social structure all emerging in and through social interaction. Thus, masculinity, father, son and father-son relationships are both cause and effect, are influenced and influential, are constructed and deconstructed in and through symbolic interactions.

Within participant interviews it was clear that masculinity as an overarching construct established in dominant mediated, cultural, interpersonal and family discourses had great bearing on how fathers parented their sons and governed their attitudes towards how their sons “should” be. However, the important implication to symbolic interactionism here is that through interactions negative patterns of masculine ideologies and performances demonstrated by participants’ fathers (e.g., misogyny, abuse, marginalization, closed-mindedness) could be altered or positive aspects could be reified. Thus, as family and interpersonal communication continue to address critical thought and theory into its research, integrating symbolic interactionism and its basic tenets of interaction as catalyst for change in identity, roles, and relationships, and larger social structures becomes imperative for the future interpersonal and family research.

**Interactional Adaptability and Reflexivity**

The third area of theoretical concentration and contribution is interactional adaptability and reflexivity. Although these concepts are new with regards to the
foundational elements of symbolic interactionism, the implications of the concepts can help to move the theory forward in contemporary communication and gender scholarship. From the perspective of the sons, having the ability to think and talk about their father-son relationships helped in acknowledging changes that occurred and also changes that could or should occur in order to make positive steps in their relationships.

Addressing this issue Blumer (1969) posits that individuals are not just respondents to outside social stimulus but are in fact a part of the social world (p. 13). As a part of the social world individuals have the ability to acknowledge, interpret, and change the way in which they interact with others and, thus, change the way they are perceived within those interactions. By changing how we interact we then have the ability to change the social world and how it operates with and around us. Continuing this line of thinking, Blumer additionally suggests that we must understand the existing patterns of interaction in order to enter into future interactions with the ability to change and communicate effectively. The contribution here is in the integration of the reflexive element. Reflexivity envelopes a more introspective acknowledgment and processing of interactions before, during, and after social interaction; adding a critical perspective to interpretation.

Within the context of father-son relationships each individual in the dyad has the ability to adapt to and be reflexive in interactions based on the establishment of known social roles, structures and norms that exist. Sons engaging in social interactions with their fathers may not only understand the normative, expected performances and roles within the interactions but may also adapt their own performances as a result of a change
in the interactions. Depending on the outcome of the interactions this may lead to a reflexive view of the interactions in which the sons transform how they will see themselves, their fathers, the situations and the social world differently in the future. With the reflexive thoughts in mind, sons can interactionally adapt their behavior within each interaction and ultimately change their selves, role and relationships.

Essentially what interactional adaptability and reflexivity is adding to symbolic interactionism is that within the interactions of two individuals, specifically fathers and sons, having the ability to acknowledge the previous patterns of interaction and then wanting that pattern to change, the individual can adapt their own patterns of interaction in order to alter the interaction patterns of the other. Thus, they are adapting their behavior in order to get the identity, role or relationship they desire. In order to achieve this desired effect the individual has to have a reflexive view of themselves as they are within the relationship. Furthermore, if an individual also conceives of the idea to want to change, challenge, or resist larger societal constructs, such as dominants masculine performances, integrating interactional adaptability and reflexivity makes those changes possible.

**Exploration and Inspection**

The fourth area of theoretical contribution to symbolic interactionism is exploration and inspection. As qualitative methodology still remains a marginalized form of methodological inquiry within certain conversations is the communication discipline, reintroducing Blumer’s concepts of exploration and inspection may offer communication scholars and researchers a credible, foundational basis from which to stand. In his
iteration of exploration and inspection Blumer offers elemental conceptualizations of why it is so imperative to study participants and phenomena closely and in-depth and how that should be accomplished.

Exploration is the way a researcher establishes a close, thorough relationship with a portion of the social world of which they are not familiar and:

is the means of developing and sharpening [their] inquiry so that [their] problem, [their] directions of inquiry, data, analytical relations, and interpretations arise out of and remain grounded in the empirical life under study. (Blumer, 1969, p. 40)

Utilized in combination with exploration, inspection is the process of analysis which aids in exploring the meanings and intricacies of the social world, social groups, individuals and interactions.

More specifically, Blumer’s idea of exploration and inspection offered me, and may offer other researchers, a better way to make sense of the research process through a closer qualitative framework of understanding. Together these concepts deepened my understanding of the phenomena that existed within my interactions with the participants. Symbolic interactionism and its focus on social interaction as the basis for understanding, constructing and maintaining roles and relationships demonstrates that research exploring mundane everyday interactions helps to establish a close comprehensive understanding of the phenomena and individuals under investigation. This study, operating under Blumer’s basic assumptions of exploration and inspection, further acknowledges the grounding of qualitative research in these foundational methodological constructs and advocates these elements as a positive contribution to qualitative research methodologies and inquiry.
Narrative Conceptualizations

Just as symbolic interactionism is vital to understanding meaning making processes within social interactions and helps to explain how and why individuals make sense of themselves and others within social roles and constructs, concepts within the narrative paradigm also adds a tremendous amount of insight into sense making processes in social interactions and specifically within participant narratives. As such, areas of contribution to narrative stemming from this study are: (1) definitions of storytelling, story, and narrative; and (2) narrative as symbolic interaction.

Storytelling, Story and Narratives

Within the context of participant narratives and drawing from previous conceptualizations of prominent narrative scholars (Barthes & Duisit, 1975; Chase, 2008; Fisher, 1984; Koenig-Kellas, 2008; Labov, 1982; Riessman, 2008; Sandelowski, 1991; Somers, 1994), the definitions of storytelling, story and narrative as conceptual foundations to this study proved to be concise, cohesive and organizationally sound. The basis of understanding participant experiences was in viewing storytelling as the acts/actions/performances/performative embodiment of entering into and creating dialogue with another individual in order to (re)iterate a story/narrative from individuals’ life experiences. As demonstrated within participant narratives storytelling took multiple forms and was very individualistic in the context of each participant’s interview. How they told their stories emphasized and punctuated the stories told and was often as telling of their experiences as the narratives themselves.
Within this study *story* was conceptualized as a singular communicative event or discourse unit (Koenig Kellas, 2008) in which individuals’ articulate experiences to other individuals; and *narrative* was conceptualized as a collective storytelling event. With regards to story and narrative, participant interviews often had multiple stories and narratives within one interview experience. Multiple stories were often told constructing overarching narratives. Additionally, narratives could encompass the whole of the interview process or could be multiple as well.

Stated very simply, storytelling constructed stor(ies), stories constructed narrative(s); storytelling, stories, and narratives helped make sense of participant experiences. The importance here is that the three conceptualizations above combine to not only explain the sense making processes of the participants but they also offered solid explanatory foundations to organize and understand participants’ meaning making processes as a researcher.

In further contributing to narrative, the oversaturation of “unique” and “individualistic” perspectives would often deter scholars from entering into the scholarly conversation. However, as fundamental understandings of narrative research focus on individual experiences, unique and individual experiences essentially are what make narrative research so imperative. Thus, although the conceptualizations of *storytelling*, *story* and *narrative* are not completely unique within the whole of narrative scholarship, solidifying these conceptualizations as valid, credible and basic conceptual elements in narrative research becomes significant in communication scholarships’ larger understanding of narrative. Using these conceptualizations and their basic principles
helps solidify the language surrounding narrative research and offers scholars a common ground on which to stand when researching narratives or from a narrative paradigmatic perspective.

**Narrative as Symbolic Interaction**

Symbolic interactionism and narrative remain imperative theoretical and conceptual frameworks within sociological, psychological, anthropological and communication areas of scholarship. In most respects these ideological frameworks and their basic assumptions are addressed separately. However, many of the basic assumptions and theoretical underpinnings of symbolic interactionism and narrative intersect within the context of this study. As such, after researching, interpreting, analyzing, and exploring this study from both frameworks, ideological integration in future research endeavors will contribute a great deal of knowledge and understanding to areas of scholarship focusing on identity, roles, relationships and larger societal and cultural constructs.

Blumer (1969) suggests that interpretation is a vital portion of making sense out our social world. A part of that interpretation is the ability of individuals to make sense out of their everyday interactions. Interacting with one another is one of the most basic elements of being a human being and is vital to sense making. Being narrative beings, or homo narrans (Fisher, 1984), within interactions storytelling and (co)constructing stories and narratives help to make sense out of our identities, our roles, our relationships, one another and the world itself.
The core of this project examines the identities, roles and relationships that existed, exist and will exist between father and sons. It was in and through the stories and narratives told that participants were able to make sense out of their experiences. Thus, within this study, the tenets of symbolic interactionism as narrative helped explain the sense making process explored within the interview process. Not only this, but narrative as symbolic interaction also allowed me as the research to make sense of participant narratives and the process of analysis of those narratives.

Further addressing narrative as symbolic interaction and reiterating points addressed in chapter two, Langellier (1989) states that:

> [P]articipants not only operate as interactional partners in conversation, but they also enact their social roles in relationship to each other. Interaction takes place not between neutral, equal participants but within social and cultural matrices marked by difference in, for example, gender, age, race, and class. (p. 260)

Langellier is establishing the importance of multiple perspectives when addressing everyday interactions and performances of identity, a foundational concept within the current research study.

To explain more simply, when we are involved in conversation with someone we often tell stories about where we come from and who we are in order to establish the very basics of ourselves with the other person and vice versa. Exchanging stories, narratives with another person helps us to understand who that person is, who we are in relation to that individual, and helps us to negotiate the interactional, sense making space. Explicating this further and more specifically drawing from this study as reiteration of narrative as symbolic interaction, participants were able to recall their experiences with their fathers through their stories helping them to interpret and (re)assign meaning to
those experiences through narratives. The importance is that this contributes and informs several perspectives of narrative inquiry and helps to further explain the importance of narrative to symbolic interaction and symbolic interaction to narrative.

It is imperative to reiterate that throughout the remaining discussion the concepts and ideologies stemming from symbolic interactionism and narrative conceptualizations are embedded throughout. The sense making processes that participants negotiated were all imperative to understanding and solidifying this study’s perspectives and symbolic interactionism and narrative ideologies.

Moving forward from the theoretical contributions and implications of this study, the following sections will specifically address the research questions posed to guide this study. For each research question underlying areas of implications, contributions, and explanations are explored.

**Implications to Masculinity**

Within this study conversations surrounding masculinity were ubiquitous and clearly influential on participants and their narratives. Stemming from *RQ1* which asked What themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the performance and perceptions of masculinity within their father-son relationships, the themes *traditional masculinity* “be/being a man”, *non-traditional masculinity*, *responsibility*, and subthemes of *taking responsibility for actions*, *responsibility to family*, *financial responsibility*, *the roles of emotion in masculinity*, and *nurturing and open masculinity* emerged from the data. When asked about their perspectives, performances and perceptions of masculinity and those of their fathers, participants offered a wide range of insight into their specific
experiences. From these narratives participants were able to explicate what masculinity was to them within cultural, interpersonal, professional, and relational areas of their lives. Below this study’s contributions and conceptualizations of both traditional and non-traditional masculinity are discussed in further detail.

**Traditional Masculinity “Be/Being a Man”**

Traditional masculinity, its dialogic and performative characteristics, and the conduct and ideologies that surround it are an intriguing cultural, historical and contextual phenomenon when integrated with father-son relationships. When researching masculinity, particularly when addressing a more specific area of focus, it becomes increasingly difficult to conceptualize and define what masculinity is, and what implications it has on individuals and their identities, roles, and relationships. Accordingly, Messerschmidt’s (2012) attempt to address the current academic onslaught of masculinity references and conceptualizations only reinforces that concepts of masculinity are still evolving. Furthermore, Messerschmidt also addresses the necessity to explore masculinity from local, in this instance family, contexts in order to gain a better understanding of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2012). Thus, concentrating on individuals’ experiences of masculinity within the context of father-son relationships contributes greater insight to those larger masculinity constructs.

**Idealistic masculinity.** As specifically referenced above, within the context of father-son relationships, the influence of masculinity has great bearing on identity construction, roles and relationships as examined in and through interactions and
performances. Within the context of narratives each participant offered an idea of what they and their fathers thought to be considered normative traditional masculinity. Each participant offered narratives that explained that even though their own experiences and interactions with their fathers did not adhere to the normal traditional masculinity characteristics the ideal characteristics were always present. These idealistic characteristics of masculinity often established within contemporary film and media such as being heroic, muscular, tough, emotionally and physically distant, reserved, in control (Deese, 2010) established a reference from which their own and their father’s identities, roles and the relationship was measured against. Positioning masculine characteristics and traits associated with “normative” hegemonic masculinity the current study reinforces the ideology in contemporary masculinity studies that regardless of whether not men adhere and exemplify the common characteristics associate with hegemonic masculinity they still consciously or subconsciously live within the constructs of hegemonic masculinity (Logan, 2012; Messerschmidt, 2012).

Furthermore, participants often would state that they did not truly understand what the specific characteristics were for traditional masculinity. Instead they would talk about the characteristics that they thought were traditional, and what they thought their fathers may think to be traditional. In the end, their own conduct, the actual actions and interactions of the men, and the conduct of their fathers, even though at times it was considered to be traditional, were far from what they “expected” a performance of being a man was.
Challenging traditional norms. Interestingly, according to the Male Role Norms Inventory – Revised, in which seven subscales assess individuals’ dimensions of traditional masculinity ideology, the subscales integrated avoidance of femininity, negativity toward sexual minorities, self-reliance, aggression, dominance, non-relational sexuality, and restrictive emotionality as their main focus (Levant, Smalley, Aupont, House, Richmond, & Noronha, 2007; Levant, Rankin, Williams, Hasan, & Smalley, 2010). These conceptualizations of traditional masculinity stemming from years of psychological work (Levant et al., 2006; Mahalik, et al., 2003) are problematic with regards to masculinity as it is talked about in the current study. Yes, there are instances of those characteristics embedded in certain cultures such as high school (Pascoe, 2007; Steinfeldt, Vaighan, LaFollette, & Steinfeldt, 2012) and the military (Brown, 2012); however, it was the negotiation, challenging, and altering of these characteristics in forming individual masculine identities that makes the current study relevant with regards to contemporary masculinity studies and definitions of traditional masculinity.

Participant conceptualization of masculinity. In this study masculinity was something continuously in flux and negotiated within the cultural and historical presence of traditional characteristics. That is, masculinity was and is a negotiation of identities, roles and relationships that continuously change within participants’ interactions.

Within contemporary communication literature, Sparkes (2012) describes the experiences of his father growing up and the negotiation of his masculinity with regards to how his father saw him being active in sports. Sparkes continues explaining that how he sees his own son through their everyday interactions ties his own experiences with his
father to his experiences as a father. The current study offers further commentary to why those everyday interactions, as noted by Sparkes (2012), are so imperative to the construction and negotiation of masculinity. From the perspective of participants’ father-son relationships, fathers embodied and performed a dominant, traditional, normative form of masculinity to them, the participants. The performative, ideological reference that their fathers offered was the traditional form of masculinity from which they constructed their own early in their lives. Later in their development through other social, interpersonal, romantic, professional interactions participants began to consider whether or not the performance of their fathers’ masculinity was a form that they would wish to emulate or deny. Often times they would move away from the traditional performance that they witnessed within their father-son interactions as a result of negative experiences. However, many participants offered narratives in which the migration away from their fathers’ performances resulted in a time to explore their own identities and performances, solidify who they were in those performances, and then return to acknowledge the significance of their fathers’ masculinity later in life once they had time to negotiate their own masculine identities in and through the social, interpersonal, romantic, and professional relationships. Integrating symbolic interactionism as foundational to this study, this is a solid example of how interactional adaptability and reflexivity operates to change father-sons identities, roles and relationships.

Focusing on the specific themes that emerged from participants’ narratives and specific to this study, many of the traditional characteristics of masculinity were pushed to the side. Although the characteristics were talked about within narratives and were
established as check points of what to or not to do on the path to becoming a man, the themes surrounding responsibility identified new perspectives on and intriguing contributions to traditional masculinity conceptualizations not often seen in contemporary communication or masculinity research.

**Responsibility**

Responsibility as a macro theme within the context of the study was the focus of participants’ interviews when considering how masculinity was, was to be performed, as well as how it was taught to them in the context of the relationships with their fathers. Ideas of responsibility mostly stemmed from the influence that their fathers had on them and their view of what a man was “supposed to do”. Within narratives responsibility was not explicit but most often implicit - not being told or shown directly in conversations or interactions but in witnessing subtle performances by their fathers. These experiences were important to sons’ understanding of growing up to be a man in the traditional Western ideas of what a man is and what he should do. As Miller (2008) states:

> These ideas of care-taking, hard work, and duty to family coalesced for my father into what I believe defined his idea of “manhood” throughout his life – the concept of responsibility . . . he clearly defined manhood as an acceptance of responsibility for self and family. This responsibility was multifaceted. Responsibility meant behaving in a “moral” way. Responsibility meant taking care of others. Responsibility meant owning up to obligations. Responsibility meant disciplining these values in others. These various meanings of responsibility permeated the rest of his life through his decisions about child-rearing, family economics, friendship, and politics. (p. 164)

As Miller suggests taking on responsibilities of multiple types securely placed her father on the path to becoming a man. Although Miller did not explicitly speak to masculine identity formation, the current study adds to this scholarship by introducing the acknowledgement that responsibility did in fact reinforce fathers’ influence on sons’
masculinity. Very similarly participants offered narratives that explicated the exodus out of childhood into the beginning of manhood; taking on responsibilities for what they did, who they are, and for those around them.

**Taking responsibility for actions.** A portion of the overarching theme of responsibility was the understanding that a certain times in your life you must acknowledge that it is your responsibility as a man to take control of your own situations however dire they may be. Through this understanding participants reiterated that in their experiences they understood that it was no longer their parents’, or more specifically their fathers’, responsibility to take control of their lives.

Addressing the importance of responsibility within contemporary scholarly conversations, Garfield and Isacco (2012) noted, advancing Lamb (2010)’s concept of fathering responsibility, that urban father’s were able to have a great deal of responsibility with regards to their childcare outside of paying for their childcare (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, Levine, Lancaster, & Altmann, 1987). Additionally, Nixon, Whyte, Buggy and Green (2010) as a part of a larger research endeavor focusing on masculinity and fatherhood in socially and economically disadvantaged men concentrated a portion of their findings on sexual responsibility and taking control of your actions with regards to promiscuity and partner responsibility. These contemporary studies reiterated past research that focused on patterns of responsibility situated in the historic conceptualizations of fathering (LaRossa, 1988, 2004, 2005; LaRossa et al., 1991). Furthermore, patterns found in Garfield and Isacco (2012) and Nixon et al. (2012) demonstrated that fathers’ roles most often perceived as the breadwinners of the family
could be altered in the development of new concepts of father roles. Regardless, these patterns negative perspectives of responsibility, as well as those emerging from the current study, were then passed down to sons in the presences or lack responsibility illustrated by fathers.

**Responsibility to family.** Participants discussed several ways in which they maintained a level of responsibility to their families. These responsibilities came both implicitly and explicitly. These lessons were taught in a manner that demonstrated the need to be a part of your family through whatever situations may emerge. Participants spoke of instances of abuse, abandonment, addiction, geographical distance, emotional distance, family historical suffrage, and divorce through which they had to persevere. In overcoming these familial obstacles, they were taught through the actions of their fathers or actions of their own the need to be responsible to their families. This form of responsibility was imperative to participants understanding the intricacies of becoming a man in the eyes of their families and specifically their fathers.

In outlying instances, and a large contribution to understanding fathers-son relationships and masculinity, participants took responsibility to family and applied it to dissolution of the relationship they held with their father. Specifically in times of relational crisis the son took over responsibility for the family when the father became or made himself absent (e.g., going to jail for domestic abuse, moving out of the house because of divorce, getting kicked out because of marital issues, losing or changing jobs). In these situations the lessons learned from the interactions with the father took
precedence over that relationship itself and was usurped by the overall care and well-being of the family as a whole.

Financial responsibility. Contemporary scholarship surrounding responsibility most often discusses lack of responsibility and the role of the father within paying child support, or absent fathers not wanting to be a part of their child’s life (Natalier & Hewitt, 2010) resulting in a negative perception of their masculinity. Scholarship also included instances in which parental patterns of financial responsibility can also be influential on the financial responsibility of their children (Kim, LaTaillade & Kim, 2011). Additionally, Romo (2011) utilized Communication Privacy Management theory as a means to explore how and what information parents share with their children in regards to families’ financial information. Although these studies began to scratch the surface concerning the importance of financial responsibility, each of the studies stopped short when integrating masculine identity within the conceptualizations of their financial research.

For participants in the current study, the financial aspect of responsibility came through as important when they first moved away from home. Regardless of the situation, whether going away to college or wanting personal independence, participants initially realized that they were no longer underneath the financially watchful eye of their parents. They needed to take care of themselves financially in order to live the lifestyles that they chose. In many situations the participants spoke about the experience of not really realizing that they had so much dependence on their family for monetary reasons. In these instances, once they had moved away from that financial security, they were able to
understand the implications of financial responsibility on masculinity and their ability to act like a man or become a man.

Additionally, participants who had moved on from their experiences of undergraduate college explained that their experiences of masculinity and financial responsibility changed as they got older. Through these stories it was not so much that they knew they had to learn to be financially responsible in order to be considered a man; however, it was the father who saw them as financially successful and able to take care of themselves and their own families. Witnessing this and acknowledging its importance solidified the ideas to their father and to them that they had arrived to a certain degree of masculinity in their financial responsibility and success.

**Implications to Non-traditional Masculinity**

Traditional, idealistic masculinity as represented in participant narratives assumes that men should be strong, heterosexual, monolithic, respected, respectful, outdoorsy, physically present, and responsible. These characteristics also represent “common” cultural assumptions of masculinity as constituted through cultural constructs (i.e., mediated representations of white, heterosexual, Western masculinity). If this was the case, *if* these characteristics represented all that was masculine in the performance of their fathers, *if* their fathers had to embody all or even some of those characteristics, none of the participants’ fathers would have been very masculine men. Moreover, none of the participants would have considered themselves masculine men either. Does this make them un-masculine, or effeminate? The question becomes, what characteristics did their
fathers also embody and perform that offered a complete version of what it was to be man, or masculine, to both fathers and sons?

What we are looking at here is a redefining of masculinity within the context of sons, fathering, and father-son relationships. We are trying to figure out how masculinity can on one hand still guide, control and manipulate men’s performance and perceptions in trying to fulfill what Lair and Strasser (in press) suggest is a “real and powerful fiction: an ideal against which all men are compared, but none can ever fully achieve”, while allowing men to perform outside of those guidelines redefining one interaction at a time the cultural norm of what masculinity really is in conduct, or interaction. When considering masculinity as a common occurrence or performance Hanke (1998) suggests that masculinity refers to what a particular culture takes as common sense notions of what it means to be a man, or in the case of this study, what it means to be a father/son. But if masculinity entails a form of common sense then what part of fathers’ and sons’ understandings are common if each experience and interaction is different? Here we begin to acknowledge the existence of a rift between what masculinity is as an ideological perspective and what masculinity is as communicative symbolic interaction, or cultural versus conduct masculinity (LaRossa, 1988; Wall & Arnold, 2007).

The roles of emotions, nurturing, and openness in masculinity

The current study found that within the Western perspective of traditional masculinity, open masculinity and/or emotions and the display or embodiment of emotions often receive a negative connotation. These more feminine aspects of masculine identity are often considered to be characteristics that are, in fact, not masculine. Situated
in scholarship surrounding gay masculinity or feminine characterizes of masculinity, Sanchez and Vilain (2012) illustrate a masculine counter-narrative which exists exemplifying that non-traditional masculinity envelopes more feminine, often labeled gay, masculinity. This counter-narrative of traditional masculinity has begun to enter in the more normative concepts of masculinity.

Participant narratives reified this cultural ideology offering narratives that illustrate in many aspects of their relationships, both with their fathers and with other individuals, that it is not masculine to show emotion as it is perceived as a sign of weakness. When exploring the ideologies behind masculinity, bodies and emotional life Seidler (2007) suggests that:

> Often men feel that they have to conceal their vulnerabilities if they are not to “lose face” in front of others. They have learned that emotions are a sign of weakness and that male identities are to be affirmed through showing self-control . . . . [M]en have learned to harden their hearts against feeling since emotions are deemed to be “feminine” and so a threat to male identities. (p. 13-15)

Although showing or embodying emotions, allowing an open and honest masculinity, and/or performing any number of “unmanly” characteristics may go against the normative traditional performance of masculinity, the contribution here lies in acknowledging that within participant narratives emotions, vulnerabilities, and/or openness were addressed on multiple levels, not just as negative identity characteristics. The acknowledgement came in the form of stories exploring their own and their fathers’ performance, perception and/or perspective on emotions. Here, participant narratives coincided or conflicted with what “normal” men, in the Western tradition, are “allowed” to exhibit and embody.
Encouraging alternative masculinities. When discussing the implications of alternative forms of masculinity, such as those masculinities that would incorporate more nurturing, emotional characteristics, set against “normative” and traditionally Western masculinity Seidler (2007) suggests that buying into the ideologies established through a Western hegemonic masculinity “sustain[s] a discourse that unwittingly works to silence an exploration of diverse cultures of masculinity” (p. 11). That is, as the current study looks to move forward regarding alternative forms of masculinity we must not define alternative masculinities in terms of the Western ideologies. This would in fact further silence those masculinities that influence relationships positively as the current study illustrates within son perspectives of father-son relationships. Allowing men comfort and confidence in their own performance of masculinity no matter how non-traditional within Western ideologies, will encourage a contemporary culture of masculinity and fathering that is, in fact, more nurturing, vulnerable, and open to multiple performances of masculinities.

More specifically locating fatherhood and emotionality therein Johansson (2011) explored four case studies of men in Norway and their perspectives on fathering. Johansson suggests that through their experiences of parenting that fathers are able to develop “usable and valuable communicative and emotional skills” (p. 177). As the contemporary idea of what fathering and the role of emotions in fathering continues to evolve addressing and renegotiating fathers’ roles, scholarship similar to the current study will continue to be imperative when negotiating fathers’ ever-changing experiences of fathering. Reiterating this position, Johansson (2011) succinctly illustrates the complex
and possible development in fatherhood and masculinity and the gradual movement
towards more gender-neutral parenting (p. 178). The current study not only reinforces
Johansson’s perspective of fathering but furthers the understanding of the positive
implications and influences which stem from non-traditional masculine performances and
ideologies.

Moving forward with this understanding in mind, the following section addresses
this studies implications and contribution to perceptions, perspective and turning points.

**Implications to Perceptions, Perspectives and Turning Points**

A large portion of the theoretical underpinnings of this study situated in symbolic
interactionism and narrative paradigms concentrated on the construction of identities,
roles and relationships within father-son everyday interactions and making sense of those
interactions in and through conversations. More specifically the current study drew from
the retrospective understanding and the narrative storytelling of participants’ experiences
of interactions they had with their fathers. From this basic understanding *RQ2* asked what
themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the construction of sons’ identities, roles
and relationships within father-son relationships. The themes *perceptions of father(ing),
sons’ perceptions of self*, and *turning point perspective* emerged and offered insight into
participant narratives and aspects of fathering and being a son. Below this study’s
contributions and implications stemming from these themes will be addressed in detail.

**Perceptions of Father(ing)**

Symbolic interactionism relies heavily on the concepts of perceptions and meta-
perceptions when forming, interpreting and (co)constructing identities, roles and
relationships. As basic tenets and foundational concepts of symbolic interactionism situated in the generalized other and looking glass self (Blumer, 1969; Cooley, 1902; James, 1892; Mead, 1934), perceptions become imperative to this study and its acknowledgement of and contributions to how father-son relationships and masculinity are understood.

Contemporary research focusing on the perceptions of fathers and fathering often focus on mothers’ perceptions of fathers’ involvement and the fathers’ own perception of his role within infant children’s lives (Trembly & Pierce, 2011). Additionally, Krampke and Newton (2011) found that adult-daughters’ perspective of fathers (e.g., deceased, divorced, step-father) reinforced the notion that intact families offer more positive perspectives of parents. Although these studies are important to the continuation of scholarship on perceptions of fathering from the perspective of mothers and daughters, they also reinforce the need for communication scholarship to address the sons’ perspective of fathers and the importance to fathers, sons and father-son relationships.

Within the current study participants drew from their past, present and introspectively constructed future experiences and offered a perspective of their fathers and contemporary fathering. One of the initial recurring narratives that emerged from the current study surrounded their fathers “not knowing what to do” when they were growing up. These narratives stemmed from stories surrounding their father’s style of fathering. Examples included fathers who were never around growing up, fathers who were abusive and dismissive, and/or emotionally and physically distant fathers. Sons’ were constantly negotiating the behaviors of their fathers and working through their interactions
throughout their narratives. Here again, we see the importance and contributions of narrative interaction as a means to understand their fathers’ behavior and its implications to their own experiences.

**Generational implications to fathering.** Often in the generation of the sons’ fathers represented in the current study their experiences as children and the gender roles that were established in their parent-child relationships did not allow them as fathers to be active nurturers, or competent disciplinarians for some of the participants. The fathers knew how to father by the examples their own fathers set. Thus, when speaking about how the relationships changed over the lifespan of the sons, in all situations, the sons stated that as they grew up and matured fathers became more confident in how to interact with them. The fathers were able to draw on the relationships that they had with their fathers, with other men and thus began to treat their sons as young developing men. The developing and maturation process of the sons allowed for more comfortable relational partnerships with sons. Although this may have had either a positive and or negative influence on the sons, within the narratives of the sons they discussed this in terms of an excuse of why fathers were not the best fathers that he could have been. “He really didn’t know how to father, probably because of the relationship that he has with his dad” (Stephen, Line 234).

It was situations like this that were imperative to understanding the perspective of the sons when concentrating on how fathers acted and even more so how and why the sons compensated for the fathers performance in the relationship. Dick (2011) posits that:

> Given that the determinants of fathering behaviors are culturally influenced and socially constructed, and that they change over time, it is important to recognize
the way a man enacts the role of fatherhood is greatly influenced by a multitude of factors, many of which derive from his internal motivations and lived experiences. Fathering also alters in complexity throughout life as both the father and his child continually negotiate external influences and demands with internal needs, drives, and conflicts. Understanding the complexities of men’s relationships with their own fathers has been the missing link in understanding how men construct their fathering role. How one was fathered influences how one fathers. (p. 108)

There was no doubt that sons had a real, fundamental understanding that their fathers fathering and communication styles stemmed from the way in which fathers communicated and fathered them. Most intriguing and a significant contribution to father-son scholarship was that even in situations in which the fathering was negative, sons were able to retrospectively adjust the perspectives and perceptions of their fathers because they knew the situations from which their fathers came. They wanted to feel that the relationship that they had with their father, no matter how dire it may have been, had some redeeming quality about it; that it and they mattered within the context of that relationship.

**Moving beyond the father.** From this point in their narratives participants moved forward and talked about how they would take what their fathers did as fathers, the conduct of their fathers, and use it with their own children. What would they pass forward? What would they leave behind? In this they offered interesting perspectives of their fathers and fathering by taking the most important, as they saw, portions of their father-son relational experiences and placing them in the fore. The question, “What will you tell your children about your father?” allowed the space for the men to think about their perceptions of their fathers.
Participants told stories about what they would change about their fathers and the relationships if they had the opportunity. The question caused pause in the majority of the participants. It was a difficult question to answer in that participants needed to acknowledge their own roles and the roles that their fathers held in their relationship. Some participants said that there was nothing that they would change if they had the opportunity. However, the remaining participants, regardless of their positive or negative experiences, wanted a more emotionally, physically close father and one who was more invested in the relationship from an early age. As in other instances within narrative experiences, there were participants who recognized the turmoil that led to the relationships they had with their fathers and that within those tumultuous relationships that the changes in the relationship would only have been those in the past. The future, as they saw it, would be better without a relationship their father.

From the discussion above, the contributions of this study stem from the intersection of symbolic interactionism, narrative, father perceptions, and emotional inclusive fathering. Furthermore, this study’s valuable implications to father-son relationships, masculinity studies and communication continue to build upon each other. Continuing the focus on implications stemming from RQ2, culture and conduct of fathering is addressed below.

**Culture versus conduct.** Recent scholarship has indicated a concern over whether or not there has been a shift in the culture of fatherhood in which fathers are more nurturing and invested in the relationships they have with their children (Johansson, 2011, Wall & Arnold, 2007). It seems that this debate is most concerned with the role
that fathers play in their relationships with younger children. This younger demographic is not represented within the current study. Within the context of this study where participants’ average age was 25, it seems as if the relationships and roles of fathers differ significantly from the relationships that each of them had when they were growing up. This is quite significant in its contribution because it illustrates that the culture of fatherhood and the conduct of fathering is relative to the age of fathers and sons. As sons, fathers, and relationships mature so does the amount of involvement and investment that each of the members of the relationships had, has, and will have in the future of the relationships.

Very simply, the culture of fatherhood implicates an ideological framework from which fathers try to demonstrate and apply an idealistic fatherhood (e.g., this is what fathers are supposed to do). Conversely, the conduct of fathering is pragmatically what fathers do in their everyday parenting lives. The conversation concerning the culture and the conduct of fathers as well as the difference between agency, structure and ideology continues still (LaRossa, 1988; Wall & Arnold, 2007) within the context of this study. Here the participants were, to a certain extent, aware that the perceptions of the performances of fathers generally have changed over the last several decades from when their fathers were raised. However, the culture, or the ideology behind how fathers are supposed to be, and the conduct, or how fathers really are, remains separate in some instances. Much like the idealistic fiction that is masculinity, fatherhood and fathering also operate under and abide by ideals; again, things that fathers ought to be doing to be a good father. The acknowledgement of this within the context of this study brings
validation to the argument surrounding the separation between culture and conduct. Participants knew that their fathers were trying to be good fathers in their performance as a prescription to the culture or fatherhood norms; however, the conduct, or everyday interactions, was not in the same lines as the optimal fathering performance.

Past research has demonstrated that there is a shift in the involvement and role of fathers in the lives of their children both in culture and conduct (Lamb, 2010; Floyd & Morman, 2006). The current study further demonstrates that there is in fact a change in the fathering. However, the change that is illustrated within this study suggests that the change that occurs in father-son relationships is consistent with the maturation of the sons and the fathers collectively. There are examples of both fathers who are heavily invested and nurturing, fathers who remain distant both physically and emotionally, and fathers who have been ex-communicated from the relationship all together. Thus, these examples reaffirm the difference and necessity of separating culture versus conduct.

**Sons’ Perceptions of Self**

Scholarship on father-son relationships continues to be a prolific area of communication research. Research over the past two decades as reviewed above has concentrated on father-son relationships and the roles of life stages on father and son work relationships (Davis & Tagiuri, 1989); the involvement of sons and daughters in the care of impaired parents (Dwyer & Coward, 1991, Ikels, 1983); generational differences, similarities and the influence of those perspective on differing generation (Vaillant, 2006); and parents’ response to sons’ sexual orientation (Willoughby, Malik, & Lindahl, 2006). Each of these studies offers a unique lens through which sons’ perceptions of
parental-child relationships can be explored. However, research addressing the identities, roles within father-son relationships strictly from the perspective of adult sons has been very limited. This study concluded that how fathers were parenting and the perceptions of fathering styles had different effects on individual sons’ experiences and the perceptions of the sons themselves.

Interestingly, much like scholarship concentrating on satisfaction and solidarity in later life partners (Dickson, Christian, & Remmo, 2004), it seems that as sons develop and mature there is a tendency to want to have positive perceptions and perspectives of the relationships that sons have with their fathers. This is interesting because as the average age of the participants was 25 years old the narratives that they offered were of positive retrospect. That is, they wished to talk about and tell stories regarding the experiences that they had with their fathers in a positive light. This was regardless of the negative experiences they may have encountered growing up. As Katz (2002) suggests “Once the son is an adult, it appears that it is the son’s personal growth and his coming to forgive, accept, and take responsibility for himself that have greater influence in bridging the gap in the father-son relationship (p. 37).

Moreover, even though there were instances of abuse and neglect, these participants tried to manage and negotiate the relationships they had with their father in a way that drew on the positive elements of events and characteristics in their relational experiences. Although they often spoke about how they did not want to grow up and be like their fathers they were able to draw from whatever positive effects their fathers had on them and integrate those positive characteristics into their own identities and perhaps,
when the situation warranted, into the relationships that they may have as fathers in their future.

**Sons’ meaning making in narrative interactions.** Much like they did when considering the perspectives of fathers, participants drew again from their past, present and introspectively constructed future experiences in and through their narratives and offered a perspective of their own identities and roles within father-son relationships. The perspectives of the sons were interesting to explore because in most instances this was the first time that many of the participants had the opportunity to reflexively think and have conversations about their own identities and roles within the relationship they have with their fathers.

Most of the time they encountered what men normatively encounter - conversations with their fathers about superficial events in their daily lives, or conversations about their relationships with their fathers with someone else that barely scratch the surface of relational significance – mere relational maintenance. This study gave them the space to talk about themselves and their fathers in a safe and comfortable environment. Within this environment they were able to explore the intricacies of the relationship they have with their fathers and the importance that relationships had, have, whether positive or negative, on who they are and who they will be.

**Sons’ contribution to the scholarly conversation.** Were they a good son to their father? Were they able to have the relationships with their fathers that they hoped that they could have? Did they have influence on their fathers or the relationships as a whole? Within the context of narratives sons were able to explore these questions and make sense
of their experiences in and through the narratives’ that they offered. This is commensurate with Wyatt (2012) discussing the loss of a client’s father and how that reflected upon and influenced the way that he felt about the loss of his own father. Additionally, Adams (2012) speaks very candidly about the relationship he has with his father and the longing to be closer and to more comprehensively understand the relationship they share. Similarly, Patti (2012) explores the loss of his father as well describing the coping that he still encounters after the death of his father and his negotiation and understanding of the relationship as it was and continues to be. Much like the examples of contemporary scholarship above, this study joins and continues the conversation to initiate other conversations which allow men to be open with themselves and talking about their relationship and masculinities.

**Addressing the taboo.** Being able to speak about their experiences is vital for this study and for scholarship pertaining to men and masculinity because it offered an initial breech of often taboo conversations; conversations with, between, and among other men. How often is it that men really talk about their experiences with other men, especially about their fathers, with other men? The answer was simple, almost never. This study allowed for a space for men to begin talking about the importance they hold within father-son relationships. It gave sons the opportunity to receive the recognition of the feelings and emotions that may have been neglected by others. Here the son was able to say, “This is what I did” and “This is why it worked”, or, “This is why it didn’t work”, or “This really pissed me off”, or “This made me run away”, or “This finally made me become closer to my father”.

178
Sons offered perspectives on what they need to do either through proactivity or through addressing interactional neglect that would alter the relationships they held with their fathers. They discussed what they would have done differently within the relationships or what they would have changed if they had the opportunity. Most of the sons responded by stating that they wish their fathers would have been a more significant part of their lives when they were growing up. This was an important part of the sons’ perspective because it was a time in the interviews where they spoke about not having control over what happened in the relationship. That is, as younger children growing up they were not able to take control of the situations they had with their fathers. Instead it was a reactive interaction instead of a proactive reaction. As they matured and developed, they became more or less invested in the relationships because their own actions or inactions mattered more in the relationship they held with their fathers. Not only does this addresses the importance of narrative interaction and meaning making in the context of our participant narratives with regards to sons’ perspectives on father-son relationships, it also illustrates how interactions between father and son over time can change identities, roles and relationship as explicated in symbolic interactionism.

Relational change and maintenance. When offered the opportunity to talk about how they would have changed their own performances within the relationships, in reference to the above paragraph, participants said they would not have been able to change anything in the earlier stages of their lives. However, as they became more independent many of them suggested that they retrospectively, knowing what they know now, would have taken the time to try and understand what their fathers did and why. In
trying to comprehend his actions now in their adult lives they would have been able to address the issues that were present in so much as those interactions would have changed the way that they were today. Again, as in many narratives, there were voices of dissention in which the participants did everything that they could in the context of the relationships to make it amicable. Regardless of what they did and the effort that they put into the relationships, the outcomes of the present relationships ended in either a negative relationship or in complete dissolution.

An interesting contribution to father-son relationships specifically from the perspective of sons emerged when having conversations about their perspectives and their relationships as a whole. For most of the participants, a moment of clarity arrived when retrospectively looking at the relationships they had with their fathers. That is, in terms of understanding their identities, roles, the relationships and the maintenance involved, sons realized that it was not just the roles of fathers to maintain the relationships but as they matured it was their job as well. Especially when negotiating the relationships during later development, the sons talked about how their relationships became more give and take; the relationship evolved into adult relationships with another men. This emerged in narratives explaining events in which sons went to their fathers for advice or “just to talk” about something. In this they recognized that it was imperative for them to make the steps forward as well. In most instances if it was not for the sons moving forward with the relationships, the relationships themselves would not have moved forward.
Outside of both fathers and sons making concerted efforts to move the relationships forward, every participant at some point in their interview spoke about a certain event or time in their relationships with their fathers that altered the way they saw themselves, their fathers, the roles that they occupied and the relationships.

**Turning Point Perspective**

Much like the scholarship on the perceptions and perspectives of sons within a communicative lens, there is very little scholarship that explores the importance of turning points within family communication scholarship. Although some research does exist on turning point perspective (Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Baxter, Braithwaite & Nicholson, 1999; Dun, 2010; Graham, 1997; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007), the current study helps to reiterate the need for further research on the importance of relational turning points. Within the most recent communication scholarship focusing on turning point perspective, Koenig Kellas, Bean, Cunningham, Cheng (2008) suggest in studying post-dissolutional relationship, turning points not only capture a critical event, moment, or incident as Baxter and Bullis (1986) posited but, “They are also symbolic interpretations and evaluations of events that give meaning and definition to a relationship” (p. 28). This study contributes to and corresponds with what Koenig Kellas et al. (2008) suggest and looks to further research exploring the importance of turning points within the context of father-son relationships.

Participants offered narratives that explained pivotal points in their lives and in the relationships with their fathers that went over and above the everyday interactions in helping change the trajectory of their relationships. These turning point moments offered
insight into how their relationship was, is, and how they hoped that it may change in the future. Deaths in the family, graduation days, weddings, accidents, and cancer diagnosis all contributed to participants changing the ways in which they interacted with their fathers. In these very specific instances the men were able to talk about their turning point experiences within participant narratives.

In these narratives they were able to make sense of the importance of the turning point events. Why did this matter so much? What were the implications to that moment in time to them, to their fathers? What changed their perspectives? What changed in the perspectives of their fathers? Often these were monumental events that also acknowledged a move forward on the way to their fathers seeing them more as men. It was the realization of fathers and the sons’ morality and the liminal space that life offers. Within these realizations participants, and from their perspectives, their fathers, acknowledged that they only had one father and one son within the context of their life experiences. This allowed them to set aside the traditional, normative ideologies of masculinity within the context of father-son relationships to address the emotional, physical and relational needs that exist between fathers and sons.

Negative trajectories. On the other end of the spectrum, turning points also offered some participants similar clarity in the completing a dissolution of the relationships with their fathers. In these instances it was the turning point events that offered the participants the ability to say goodbye to the relationships they with their fathers. Specifically it was another arrest, or a relapse into drugs, or even one more attempt to gain financial stability (i.e., borrowing money from the son). In all of these
instances the sons took those points, stated as turning points by the sons, within the relationships as a means to discontinue the relationships.

**Positive trajectories.** Turning points were also utilized to move forward from negative relationships with fathers. Unlike the examples that were given above, these events signified moving forward from dissolution or physical, emotional distances. Multiple participants offered narratives in which they vividly retold stories regarding the first time their fathers hugged them, the first time they saw their fathers cry, or the first time they were able to tell their fathers that they loved them - or more importantly to them, the first time in their adult lives that they recall hearing their fathers say I love you to them. It seemed that once the physical and emotional distances had been breached the first time the relationships were able to remain on that trajectory utilizing that one turning point event as not only a catalyst for change but as a “new normal” or a new foundation from which the relationships could then exist.

**Multiple turning points.** It is important to note that participants in this study often reiterated multiple turning points within the relationships with their fathers. As stated above, when sons reached a certain developmental stage, or a point of maturation in their lives, fathers often felt it was a good time to change the trajectory of the relationships they held with their sons. With most participants, as illustrated in contemporary scholarship (Carter, 2006; Chemers, Hu & Garcia, 2001; Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007), going away to college and creating a physical distance between them and their sons was a significant turning point with the emotional and
relational closeness that occurred between the two men. It was the physical distance and not being face to face that allowed for the emotional distance to grow closer.

What makes this particularly salient within the context of father-son relationship is that, again, this is a relationship between two men. Because of this and the inclusion of the traditional ideologies of masculinity, father-son relationships are often doomed to be one way for the entirety of the relationships. Stemming from the idea that it is not masculine to talk about masculinity (Chesebro & Fuse, 2001), it can also be argued that it is not masculine to talk about the relationship you hold with your father. Because of these taboos and relational hurdles men, unless taking the initiative themselves or being forced to do so from an outside individual, often need something to happen, a turning point event, to cause them to reconsider the current trajectory of the relationship.

Addressing RQ2 from the perspectives of fathers, sons and turning points, this study offers significant contributions and implication to current communication and masculinity studies scholarship from a symbolic interactionism and narrative theory frameworks. The following section explores the contributions of this study with regards to specific contexts emerging from RQ3.

**Implications for Father-son Relationships Similarities/Differences**

The following themes not only emerged as the most prevalent situated within the interviews but also demonstrated the most imperative similarities and differences between fathers and sons and thus offered the best contributions to scholarship. In addressing RQ3 which asked what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding father-son contextual differences/similarities offer insight into both the performance and
perception of masculinity and father-son relationships, resulted in four main themes: (1) history/family; (2) romantic/interpersonal relationships; (3) culture; and (4) sex and gender.

Within the current study sons were able to address issues of identities, roles and their relationships in terms of the specific contexts that were imperative to their relationships. The similarities in father-son relationships offered a common ground from which they both could stand when nothing else in the relationship could be collectively agreed upon. On the other hand, differences in the basic ideological beliefs of some categorical areas resulted in separation or further separation between fathers and sons.

Below, the specific contexts that emerged from this study are addressed in greater detail by situating each within contemporary scholarship.

History/Family Theme

The majority of the themes surrounding historical and family contexts within the current study incorporated similarities between fathers and the sons. Within these contexts the majority of the narratives situated the family or history as the most salient portion of the participants’ narratives. As alluded to above, sons’ narratives concentrated on the fathers’ historical narratives. That is, they concentrated on the influence of the fathers’ background on the relationships. Most often the sons would relay narratives that would combine both the historical and family significance of events that occurred in the fathers’ lives that had significant implications on the identities and roles of both fathers and sons.
Family history and/or history in regards to family still remain prevalent areas of scholarship as noted at length in the literature review. Adding to the research addressed above, recent scholarship surrounding family stories focuses on story fragmentation as a means to establish a cohesive story or to construct individual and collective narratives of family histories that reestablish foundational understandings of family (Dick McGeough, 2012). Additionally, everyday family interactions involving shared family narratives offer family members an interactional, conversational reminder of the importance of family identity (Beiti, 2010). Beiti (2010) suggests that in telling individual and collective family stories often incorporating family memories and histories the individual, in this case sons, can extend their identity comprehension by integrating themselves into the family on multiple levels: “I as an individual and autonomous self, I as being a member of a culture and larger community and I as member of a specific interacting epistemic community which may confer my immediate collective identity” (p. 520). These areas of research, including the current study, offer insight into the construction and negotiation of identity, roles, and relationships specifically within the context of family.

Specifically in the current study participants utilized the conversation space to tell stories about the importance that tying their own identities and performances to their families holds. Here it was of great importance for them to represent their families in how they were perceived by those both inside and outside of their families. Narratives collected integrated stories about fathers overcoming great obstacles to continue to provide for the family, or even overcoming obstacles to make it to America. In telling these stories to their sons and living lives that were constant reminders of where they
came from, the sons also took on the familial responsibility to continue these narratives acknowledging the foundational stories and work ethic of their family. In essence, everything they did and, in the context of the interview, everything they talked about always came back to accomplishing these goals from historical and family contexts.

**Narratives of independence and escape.** In addressing the differences that emerged within this context participants felt the need to acknowledge their historical and family narratives as narratives of escape. In complete contrast to doing everything with their history and family in mind, they instead wanted to create their own narratives independent of their historical and family narratives. The context remained at the forefront of their identities and performances and as a reminder that they did not want to revert back to the ways of their family. Here, stories of abuse, neglect, and abandonment culminated in negative family/historical contexts that guided participant narratives and in fact their lives.

**Romantic/Interpersonal Theme**

Interestingly, as the majority of sons’ historical and family thematic contexts were similar to their fathers, the outstanding romantic and interpersonal contexts were in contrast to their fathers. Similar to participant narratives of independence and escape, within this contextual framework, participants had drastic ideological differences in the way they held their relationships, especially relationships they help with partners. As a major point of contention, fathers’ understanding of relationships from different generational gender role perspectives caused conflict in the relationships they had with their sons. Misogynistic tendencies emerged in how their fathers saw the women in their
lives. To some fathers women were subservient and held very specific places in the
family, in the home, and in relationships. Because of these perspectives the sons wanted
to change the way that they were with their significant others. Again, we see that the
pattern of the father had direct influence and guided the relational patterns of the son.

The important contributing factors here are exhibited in the sons’ proactive work
to incorporate a more equitable if not equal relationship with the women in their lives.
Participants created entire narratives and changed macro-performances in order to create
new narratives within their own relationships. That is, as a result of everyday interactions
with their fathers they stepped away from the way their fathers were in relationships and
created their own patterns of relational interaction. In instances where sons and fathers
were operating from similar frameworks in regards to romantic and interpersonal
contexts, narratives were created in which the primary focus was on how they placed
their romantic and interpersonal relationships as primarily important to the narratives in
their lives. Here, the saliency of both symbolic interactionism and narrative
conceptualizations is established in and through participants’ ability to talk about their
experiences with regards to interpersonal/romantic contexts and to alter or reify the
relationships they have through everyday interactions.

Situating contemporary scholarship. Trying to connect father patterns of
romantic and interpersonal relationships with current scholarship becomes an issue when
incorporating the demographic within the current study and incorporating why changes in
romantic and interpersonal relationships occur from the perspective of the son. That is,
isues arise when trying to explicate how and why participants decided to change the
ways in which they negotiate the relationships that they have with significant others and within other significant relationships. Although research does exist that illustrates what changes in romantic relationships from adolescence to adult in terms of sexual experiences and relationship negotiation (Giordano, Manning, Longmore, & Flanigan, 2012), the research fails to describe why those patterns of sex and relationships change as they do. The current study explores why these changes occur and why it is vital to participant identities and the roles they assume in their current relationships.

Offering further insight into family patterns of romantic relationships Hiefetz, Connolly, Pepler and Craig (2010) found that early adolescence romantic relationships were influenced by whether or not participants came from families that were intact or from divorced families. Here research demonstrated that adolescents from divorced families begin dating earlier and were more susceptible when it came to romantic pressures (Hiefetz, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2010, p. 374). Furthermore, Hiefetz et al. (2010) also found and emphasized that family processes, patterns and parental roles hold great importance in how adolescents progress in their romantic relationships. These findings are important to understanding of romantic and interpersonal patterns established not only in adolescence but into and throughout adult children’s lives. Imperative to the current study and comprehending the negotiation of romantic and interpersonal relational patterns, participants’ narratives acknowledged their own relationships as placed explicitly against or in alignment with their fathers’ patterns of relationships through explicit father-son interactions, an extension of family processes and paternal roles as they aged and matured.
Cultural Theme

The cultural theme within this study came in different forms within the parameters of the participants’ narratives. This context did not exclusively concentrate on culture in terms of race and ethnicity. Instead, participants being highly educated emphasized differences in what fathers and sons felt were strong work ethics. The differences were a result of white and blue collar cultural contexts.

Blue collar versus white collar culture. Within the current study sons who were working on their degrees were often seen as less masculine because of the work that they did versus the work that their fathers did. Here there is an interesting difference is what is considered work. Fathers, in the context from which they were situated, held specific ideological and pragmatic beliefs about what was considered manly work. Long hours, working with your hands, seeing an accomplishable goal, all contributed to the idea that work had been accomplished. Conversely, the sons’ work in academics did not seem to be as important or to carry as much weight as the work that had been accomplished by the father.

Scholarship has addressed differences in blue and white cultures and recreational activity (Mäkinen, Kestilä, Borodulin, Martelin, Rahkonen, Leino-Arjas, & Prättälä, 2010); however, this does not address differences of individuals within the same family. Additionally, Lucas (2011) addresses blue collar families and the use of direct and indirect communication surrounding social mobility but does not specifically address the implications of interactions and behaviors of fathers on how and why sons attend to the similarities and differences concerning culture within those relationships. The current
study offers a new perspective of work as culture and the corresponding ideological frameworks incorporated within the concepts of masculinity.

**Ethnicity and race as culture.** Current scholarship focusing on cultural contexts within family relationships often concentrates on the acculturation of children from foreign countries and their ability to conform to the cultural constructs, attitudes, beliefs, languages, behaviors and performances of their peer groups over a period of time (Birman, & Poff, 2011; Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, 2008). Furthermore when addressing cultural differences within family systems research often gravitates towards the cultural differences between the generations within the family, between individuals within the relationship, and between individualistic and collective societies with regards to family; all of which adhere to the racial and ethnic conceptualization of culture (Marshall, 2008; Moriiizumi; 2011; Özdikmenli-Demir & Sayıl, 2009).

Although these studies represent imperative contemporary family and personal relationship scholarship and briefly address the propensity for family members to maintain their racial, ethnic and cultural foundations, they do not address the importance of individual accounts of why fathers-son interactions are so vital to continued family cultural assimilation. Additionally, culture in the manner that is conceptualized in the studies above lacks the expansive ideology of culture as demonstrated in and through participant narratives.

**Sex and Gender Theme**

Sex and gender remain very salient areas of research with regards to individual identity construction, negotiation, and reification. This was evident in participant
narratives surrounding father-son relationships and masculinity. Particularly salient within sex and gender contexts were the sexual orientations and gender performances of the participants.

**Addressing similarities.** Beginning with the similarities, it was imperative for the participants to acknowledge that their fathers put a great deal of emphasis on the way in which their sons performed as men. As an integral contribution of this study sons clearly established that fathers had an idealistic version of the son they wanted their sons to fulfill. As reiterated throughout this study, idealistic notions of father, son, masculinity, are in fact idealistic fictions and are unobtainable regardless of effort put forth to achieve that ideal. Yet, these ideals still exist.

Furthermore, similarity did not mean that they performed exactly like their fathers but instead emphasized that sons had the same beliefs in addressing issues of sex and gender which may or may not have included performative characteristics. In almost all participant narratives sons found it necessary to approach sex and gender by reiterating stories of how their fathers had hoped that they would be regardless of how they actually were (e.g., hoping their son embodied more masculine characteristics than he actually does).

**Addressing differences.** The differences established within the ideological beliefs offered a great divide between what could be accepted by fathers and what could not. Here, the differences in how gender was performed initiated distance between fathers and sons. Specifically with the narratives of the two openly gay participants, this became an issue that went to the core of their identities. Including their coming out stories as
turning points in the relationship that they had with their fathers, the manner in which
their fathers negotiated their sexual orientation moved them further away from their sons.

Recognition that the sons were in one instance their sons without issue to the very
next second when something drastically different had been placed upon the relationship,
it was clear from these examples that the sexual orientation, again a large portion of the
identity of the participants, drew considerable change to the relationships itself.
Furthermore, the participants also explored in their narratives that sexual orientations and
gender performances of sons greatly influenced the identity of fathers. Stated very simply
and as an important contribution to this study - sons’ sexual orientations and gender
performances reflected directly on the performances and identities of fathers. Regardless
of the sexual orientation of the son or how they embodied their gender, sons meta-
perceptions, what they thought their fathers thought of them, directly influenced how they
performed their identities in the context of that relationship.

Stereotypical assertions. Another aspect of the sex and gender focused on the
utilizing sex and gender stereotypes (e.g., being girly, acting feminine, not taking part in
sports, being/acting gay) to assert the fathers perspective of sex and gender ideology and
performance. One participant’s narrative mirrored many others when he told the story of
his father accusing him of being gay because he was not interested in playing or watching
sports. In this instance the father was not only exerting his misogynist masculine
ideologies towards his son but at the same time letting the son understand what
perspective the father was coming from and what performance was not acceptable from
the perspective of his father. It was in instances like these that pushed sons away from
their fathers and further separated them from having an amicable relationship. In most instances the sons were steadfast in their ideological beliefs when it came to sex and gender. In their efforts to remain true to themselves they tried to force their fathers to become more comfortable with alternative performances of sex and gender often to no avail.

As illustrated from the section above history/family, romantic/interpersonal relationships, culture, and sex/gender as guiding themes have great influence on participants’ identities, roles and performances within the context of father-son relationships. As performance remained integral to this study and to participants identities, the next section addressing RQ4 focuses specifically on the performance of participant narratives and the contributions this study makes to communication scholarships understanding of performance from ideological, methodological and theoretical perspectives.

**Research Question Four Explanation: Implication to Dialogic/Performative Narrative Analysis**

Performance, dialogue and nonverbal communication being valuable parts to all interactions embodies everything that we do. Whether conscious or subconscious, the performances that we embody communicate our identity within our interactions. The intricacies that emerge from our performances are often overlooked in the midst of communicative interactions. However, within the interviews and with the aid of the performative coding, individual participant performances often became the center piece
of participant narratives. Here, it was the performances of the participants that helped to emphasize and annunciate the narratives told.

Addressing dialogue and performance, RQ4 asked what themes stemming from sons’ dialogue and performances within the context of interviews offer insight into their narratives surrounding father-son relationships and masculinity. Dialogue and performance enveloped a large portion of how the interview process evolved. Within the context of the interviews I was able to negotiate what questions to ask and how to ask them by reading the participants and their willingness to “go a step further” with their stories and narratives. Here, Riessman’s (2008) ideologies underlying dialogic/performative narrative analysis adds elements of how and why participant narratives were told, not just what was told. Additionally, placing myself as a man, and a son within the context of the interviews, as Riessman would argue, also added depth when addressing RQ4. Furthermore, Focusing on this portion of analysis briefly in the context adds insight to participants’ performances and perceptions of masculinity, an integral area of concentration within the current study.

**Dialogue and Performance**

**Entering the conversation.** To begin, contemporary methodological scholarship surrounding qualitative research with regards to the performance of masculinity offers great insight into the current study. Specifically addressing the presence of male researchers versus female researchers Sallee and Harris (2011) explore the implications of gendered topics within research suggesting that men interact differently with male researchers than with female researchers especially when the conversation involves
performance of gender and sex. Emphasizing male interview interactions Sallee and Harris (2011) state:

Discussing gender issues with men is fraught with additional complications, as men are typically socialized to avoid discussions about gender and masculinities that extend beyond heterosexual sex, toughness, and other topics that are socially constructed as masculine. (p. 411)

The current study reinforces this perspective within its orientation surrounding performances and perceptions of masculinity.

Furthermore, Sallee and Harris (2011) explore the notions of gender performances within the interactions of interview. However, performance as demonstrated within the context of the current study becomes vital to the interview process when the exploration switched from a larger understanding of masculine performances to embodied performances as additions to participant narratives. This is imperative because it helps to explicate the importance of maintaining normative masculine performances between men both in everyday interactions and within interview experiences. It is also important because it emphasizes the important contribution of this study to move scholarship forward surrounding the understanding of performative masculinities.

**Participant performance.** When participants were in the interview the way they were performing, the manner in which they sat, their posture, what they did with their hands, what they were looking at, how long they stared, if they were fidgeting with their hands or their rings or their hair, if their legs and/or arms were crossed all added to their overarching narratives. All of these performative cues or characteristics helped determine the way participants felt within the context on the interviews. *Felt* here describes
participants’ demeanor, conscious or subconscious, within the interviews. Performances were as varied and unique as the participants themselves.

Age, relationship and performance. Interestingly, difference in age and the relationship with me as the primary researcher had a great deal of influence on how the participant oriented their posture at the beginning of the interview. Sallee and Harris (2011) address the presence of superordinate/subordinate positionalities and performances with regards to both the maturity level of participants and their performances within interviews of researchers who were older and more educated. The current study adds a performative element to that research.

Additionally, within the current study younger participants and younger previous acquaintances of mine positioned themselves in a more submissive posture—sitting closed off, arms crossed, and legs most often together. These participants didn’t look me in the eye for extended periods of time. When we would talk they would be more fidgety. Furthermore, when offering their stories they seemed nervous about their answers, wondering if what they were saying was “correct”. In these interactions it was clear that performative superordinate and submissive positionalities existed. That is, the dominant and submissive characteristics of masculinity between men were enacted during the conversations that I had with these particular participants.

Younger men who I did not know but only knew me from the information that I sent out before the study took place had similar body position. Again, the ideology behind hegemonic masculinity/masculinities in which there is a dominant presence (e.g., an older white male) and a submissive (e.g., younger white male) within every interaction
existed within the space of the interviews. Within these interactions not only were participants aware of their positionality but I was also aware that what I said, how I said it, and my own performance was imperative to creating a comfortable and nurturing space for our conversations.

As I interviewed older participants, most over the age of 21, they began to occupy the space a little differently. Here, as opposed to younger participants, they demonstrated that they were more comfortable with themselves. These participants came into the room with a hand shake, taking a seat in the chair, legs spread, shoulders back, looking me in the eyes when they were talking to me. This performance was even more open and relaxed with participants who knew me better; legs spread wide, or crossed comfortably, relaxed speech, calm demeanor. They spoke to me as if they knew me, were comfortable with me, and more importantly, were comfortable with themselves. The performative hegemony, although still existent within the space, was less of an issue for those participants who were closer or older than me in age, those who had similar education levels, had more life experiences, or felt more confident in who they were. Again, the current study contributes another interesting perspective to contemporary scholarship and envelopes important ideologies behind participant performances.

**Performative theme: Embodied performance.** One of the most intriguing elements and an integral contributions to the dialogic and performative characteristics of this study was that no matter how old or how young the participants, no matter if they were educated or less educated, if they were gay, straight, married, knew me prior to the interviews, or had met me for the first time; within the context of the interviews when
questions came to them that made them think about something that was a little more serious, perhaps a little more emotional, or scary, or vulnerable, no matter who they were in that space their performances changed.

To explain further, within the interviews I hoped to and think that I established a comfortable space in which the participants could be comfortable enough to let their guard down and be able to be vulnerable. Within these vulnerable spaces I was able to ask questions that got to deeper issues regarding the relationships they had with their fathers, their masculinities and themselves. In these more vulnerable times in the interviews, when these questions were posed, there was an initial pause in the conversation. After the initial pause, in the majority of the interviews, the participants would sit up in their chairs. If they were sitting with broad shoulders, the shoulders would come together most often with the hands clasped together. If their legs were spread or if they were crossed, participants legs came together and the feet were placed on the floor slightly apart. Sometimes, they would lean forward. All of these posture and position changes, including discontinued eye contact that led to an outward gaze, carried with them a performative closing off, a performance of introspective thinking and lack of bodily self-awareness.

As participants began to speak and to dwell into stories surrounding more vulnerable topics their postures remained closed, their gaze remained out of the window or away from me. In the instances that they were telling these particular stories, I would argue, that they had forgotten that they were in the room with another man. They were able to dismiss the spatial performative hegemony. They were no longer in the physical
space of the interview; instead, they were consumed and in their own stories, their own thoughts.

Allowing time and space for the participants to work through and make sense of those stories demonstrated the full process of performance within the interviews, the process of symbolic interactionism, and the process of narrative interaction. Their narratives became embodied. Not that they were not through the entirety of the interview, but here participants were less cognizant of the embodiment, the performance within that space. Thus, beginning from the above descriptions of their bodies moving from open to closed positions and then returning to their initial body position without acknowledging the change during our conversation offered evidence of the significance of performance within this study. In essence, their bodies became an integral aspect of their narratives and highlighted portions of their narratives performatively that words alone could not.

As illustrated in this section dialogue and performance have a significant place throughout the entirety of the current study. More specifically, overarching ideologies of performance as well as specific participant performances within the context of interviews offered new insight into how performance can be conceptualized within qualitative and communication research.

Now that the areas of significance have been addressed with regards to theoretical assumptions, and all research questions, the limitations and areas of future research will be addressed.
Limitations

When considering the limitations of this study it is important to first note that the generalizability of the study and its application to larger populations is limited by the relatively small sample size. While participants in this study cannot claim to know and to represent all men, the experiences of these men offer insight to a range of possibilities that may occur in other men’s experiences of the perceptions and performances of masculinity within the context of their own father-son relationships. Additionally, beyond the small sample size the participants in this study were fairly homogenous. Moving this research forward, future iterations of this research will include not only a larger sample size but will hope to include a more racial, ethnic, varying educationally, sexually oriented, and socio-economically diverse sample of men.

Suggestions of Future Research

Diverse/Specific Demographics

Addressing two of the limitations of the study, one area of future research will look to recruit more specific demographics. As context was such a large element within this study, focusing on one particular, local demographic (e.g., gay men, Americans of Mexican descent) will give greater insight into the experiences of father-son relationships and masculinity from their perspective. In accomplishing this, the research will offer a deeper and closer look at these specific demographics and can focus on issues that may occur within those specific demographics.
**Father-son Dyads**

Because this research project explored the meaning making of narratives within interactions between the researcher and the participant, examining the interactions, conversations and narratives of father-son dyads while addressing identities, roles, relationships and masculinity would be a great step forward in this research pipeline. Not only would this add to the current understandings established by this study but it would offer further insight into father-son relationships and the performative nature of the interview process itself.

As it was addressed above, the performance of the participants in this study allowed for the researcher to witness the change in how the participants spoke and acted within the context of the interview when speaking about the relationships they had with their fathers. To add individual father interviews to this data set and to see how an older demographic negotiates the same questions would be an intriguing insight. Not only that but then allowing men to have a conversation about their relationships in the context of interviews would add more depth and understanding to the existing results as well as deepen the understanding of performative hegemony within the context of the dyadic interviews.

**Turning Points**

A significant aspect of this study concentrated on stories and narratives of participants in regards to pivotal turning points within the relationships they had and have within their father-son relationships. Future research would focus specifically on these turning points. As participants seemed to resonate with the questions that concentrated on
the turning points and spent a significant time exploring them, researching this further would add a tremendous amount of information to scholarship surrounding father-son relationships and masculinity.

**Dialogic/Performative Narrative Analysis**

As this study began to scratch the surface of dialogic/performative narrative analysis within its implications to \textit{RQ4}, future research should focus more specifically on father-son relationships and masculinity from a dialogic/performative narrative perspective. In this, future research can concentrate on how and why individual and small group narratives are told as well as exploring the telling of narratives. This would increase the knowledge of individual experiences of father-son relationships and the performances and perceptions of masculinity therein.

**Conclusion**

Fathers impact our lives in many dynamic ways throughout our lives. Whether that father is the most amazing person in the world, is a horrible individual, is biological, non-biological, or has moved on from this world, the influence of fathers on individuals, and particularly sons, is undeniable in scope and importance. The current study qualitatively explored father-son relationships and the performances and perceptions of masculinity within that relationship from the perspective of sons. Through the utilization of symbolic interactionism and narrative as theoretical and conceptual frameworks participant narratives were collected as a means to make sense of participants’ experiences and interactions with their fathers throughout their lives. Through a multi-phase analysis utilizing Riessman’s (2008) thematic narrative analysis as an ideological
basis and with newly created coding, RQ1, which asked what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the performance and perceptions of masculinity within their father-son relationships, yielded the following three themes: (1) traditional masculinity; (2) responsibility; and (3) non-traditional masculinity. From RQ2, which asked what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding the construction of sons’ identities, roles and relationships within father-son relationships, the following three themes emerged: (1) perceptions of father(ing); (2) sons’ perceptions of self; and (3) turning point perspective. RQ3, which asked what themes underlie sons’ narratives surrounding father-son contextual differences/similarities offer insight into both the performance and perception of masculinity and father-son relationships, resulted in four main themes: (1) history/family; (2) romantic/interpersonal relationships; (3) culture; and (4) sex and gender. Lastly, RQ4, which asked what themes stemming from sons’ dialogue and performances within the context of interviews offer insight into their narratives surrounding father-son relationships and masculinity, offered insight into specific dialogic and performative instances within participant responses. From these results this study added insight and understanding conceptually, ideologically, theoretically, and methodologically into the areas of family communication and masculinity studies.

As this study incorporates aspects of father-son relationships and masculinity it offers both family communication and masculinity studies an intriguing perspective on father-son relationships, fathering, the perspective of sons, identity, roles, and masculinity. The intersectionality of this study in regards to those areas of research in addition to operating from a strictly qualitative approach to these areas of scholarships
gives a fresh perspective on the contemporary issues surrounding father-son relationships, the contemporary culture of fatherhood, and masculinity studies.

The perspective of sons in both family communication and masculinity studies regarding father-son relationships and masculinity is scarce. Thus, given the opportunity to add to both family communication and masculinity studies scholarship the current study begins to fill the gap in knowledge that exists. The perspective of sons particularly from this age range offers a different perspective than has been addressed before. Here, sons are placed in the position of optimal importance and are given the opportunity to address topics of importance from a communication and masculinity studies perspective. Additionally, when offered the opportunity to address father-son relationships from the perspective of the son, as in the edition of *Qualitative Inquiry* mentioned above, the articles did not address masculinity as a central focal point. This study did just that.

By looking at father-son relationships and masculinity from the perspective of sons, men both young and old can gain insight into where their relationships have been, are, and possibly will be. With so much concentration on the perspectives of fathers individuals receive information that may not address the issues they are having from their own perspective, the perspective of sons. Exploring the narratives of these participants, the negotiation of individual interactions, identities, roles and relationships can be help individuals further understand their own relationships. Ideally, this study would give sons the opportunity to see, much like all other relationships, that communication must exist between both fathers and sons; that sons have just as much responsibility to their fathers to work towards positive relationships.
In addition to focusing on the perspectives of sons, this study also has implications and applications to father-son relationships. First and foremost I believe this study offers further evidence to the credibility and need for further qualitative examinations of father-son relationships and masculinity. As stated above, this study gave men the space to talk about issues, concerns, opinions, and to even ask questions of themselves and me in an area that is not often talked about between men. Creating the space to allow men to talk about their relationships and their feelings about their relationships and masculinity was, as some participants stated, therapeutic.

Researching and learning about sons’ perspectives and the perceptions of the relationships they have with their fathers may open doors to conversation that may not happen otherwise. Giving men the tools to communicate with their fathers about their relationships, their feelings, or anything for that matter will increase the potential for advancing amicable, nurturing and open relationships between fathers and sons. That is, this study may be the beginning of an area of communication scholarship that can arm men with the tools to have better relationships with their fathers, and in the future, their own sons.

As evidence to the pragmatic influence of this study, by talking through many of the issues and concerns participants had, they were able to acknowledge that issues did exist and were able to at least begin to make sense out of the relationships they have with their fathers. By taking part in the study and having conversations regarding their father-son relationships and masculinity, participants were even encouraged to have conversations with their fathers that they would not have had. These communicative baby
steps demonstrated that this study had a positive effect on the participants, and their relationships and through further communication scholarship other men and other father-son relationships can benefit as well.

Lastly, by displaying that there are no uniform relationships that exist between fathers and sons and illustrating that there is, in fact, no idealistic “normal”, men will be more at ease with acknowledging the challenges within their own relationships. Similarly, as stated above, although there remains a theoretical or ideological traditional masculinity, it is imperative to reiterate to men that masculinity is just as individualistic as the individuals who perform their own masculinity within the contexts of their relationships and within the spaces they hold.

Essentially this study was accomplished to give men the space to talk about their relationships and masculinities as a way to inform them through interactions and narratives of who they are within their relationship with their fathers; to aid in their understanding of who they and their fathers were and are. In completing this study my hope is that it will open up further conversational space to talk about these often taboo subjects and ultimately improve how we think and talk about as well as perform within our own masculinities and relationships.
References


209


http://www.jstor.org/stable/3207893


Deese, M. (2010). “Do you know why I am the way I am”: A study of masculinity in war films. *UW-L Journal of Undergraduate research XIII.*

http://www.uwlax.edu/urc/JURonline/PDF/2010/deese.CST.pdf


http://0proquest.umi.com.bianca.penlib.du.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=5305365SrchMde=1&sid=1&Fmt=6&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VNamePQD&TS=190453299&clientId=48347


225


227


229


231


ATTENTION UNDERGRADUATE, GRADUATE STUDENTS, STAFF AND INSTRUCTORS

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN:

Father-son Communication and Masculinity Study

There is currently limited data accounting for the personal narratives concerning everyday communication, father-son relationships and masculinity. As a participant in this study you would be asked to discuss your past and current communication in regards to experiences involving your father/son, that relationship and masculinity.

You will be compensated $50 - $100 upon completion of the study!!!

As an individual, your participation will involve one session of approximately 1 - 1.5 hours. As a father-son pair, your collective participation may take 3 - 5 hours.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:
Daniel S. Strasser
Email: daniel.strasser@du.edu

This study was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on October 11, 2011.
APPENDIX B
Qualification Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. Because this study requires discussing information about the relationship with your father, I would first like you to consider a few points of possible contention to ensure that your participatory experience is positive. The purpose of this research study is to discuss the communication that has occurred or occurs within the relationship that you have with your father in regards to masculinity. As part of the interview process you will be asked to discuss your role and identity with the relationship and how your masculinity and the masculinity of your father impacts your own. Participation is completely voluntary. As such you have the power to stop the interview at anytime or refuse to answer any question without any type of social penalty.

1. Do you feel comfortable discussing your relationships and your masculinity?

Additionally, in order to pay full attention to, you, the participant, I will rely on audio-recording of the interviews. Once the interview process has been accomplished, your name and identifying information will in no way be connected to your interview transcripts. Access to the audio file will be reserved solely for, me, the researcher.

2. Are you willing to be audio recorded?

Again, thank you for taking your valuable time to be a part to this research process. If you have any further questions or comments feel free to contact me anytime at daniel.strasser@du.edu.
APPENDIX C  
Father/son Relationships and Masculinity: Project Information Sheet

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. The purpose of this research study is to discuss the communication surrounding the relationship that you have with your father and the impact of masculinity on your identity and role within that relationship. As part of the interview process you will be asked to discuss your relationship in addition to discussing how your relationship is impacted by you and your father’s masculinity. Participation is completely voluntary. In this regard, you have the power to stop the interview at anytime or refuse to answer any question without any type of social penalty.

In order to gain insight into the intricacies surrounding father-son relationships and masculinity, this study proposes two research objectives: (1) To explore how sons engage in narratives and dialogue surrounding the relationships that you have with your father and the impact of masculinity on your identity and role within that relationship; and (2) to explore the dynamic communicative phenomena that occurs in and through everyday interactions and discourses embedded in father-son relationships and masculinity.

If at any time during the study you do not wish to continue or experience anxiety or negative emotions due to the sensitive nature of the discussion please alert the investigator to pause or cease the interview. If you feel you need further assistance please refer to the following local resources:
University of Denver Health and Counseling Center:

Phone Number: 303.871.2205

http://www.du.edu/duhealth/counseling/emergency-services.html

University of Denver Emergency Counseling Service:

Phone Number: 303.871.3000 (ask to speak to counselor on call)
APPENDIX D
Consent Form: Father-son Relationships and Masculinity

You are invited to participate in a study that will investigate communication and masculinity within the context of father-son relationships. The study is conducted by Daniel S. Strasser, a doctoral student within the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Denver. Results from this study will be utilized to better understand the implications of everyday communication and masculinity on the identities, roles and relationships of fathers and sons. Daniel can be reached at daniel.strasser@du.edu, 513.382.1340. This project is supervised by Dr. Elizabeth A. Suter, Department of Human Communication Studies, University of Denver, 200 E. Asbury Lane, Denver, CO 80208.

Participation in this study should take approximately 60-90 minutes of your time as an individual. For the time spent within the study process you will be compensated with a one-time award of a $50 American Express gift card as an individual participant. The incentives will be distributed upon completion of the research study.

Participation will involve responding to several open-ended questions about the relationships that you have with your father and masculinity. In addition to the interview, you will be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire at the beginning of the interview process. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. Although the information you discuss may contain sensitive material, the risks associated with this project are relatively minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. I respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal
from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

All identifying responses and personal data will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will have access to your personal data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, I am required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

The investigator in this study is a PhD student and a graduate teaching instructor. Thus, if you are a student, it is possible that you may be in contact with the investigator outside of the interview process. These interactions could potentially be in a course taught or to be taught by the investigator during your time at the University of Denver. If this occurs, all information shared during the interview process will be held in strict confidentiality by the investigator.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.
You may keep these pages for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.
Consent Form:

Performed and Perceived Masculinity in Father-son Relationships from the Perspective of Sons: A Thematic Narrative Analysis

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study and have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature _____________________ Date _________________

___ I agree to be audio-taped.

___ I do not agree to be audio-taped.

Signature _____________________ Date _________________

___________ I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address:
APPENDIX E
Demographic Questionnaire

Instructions: This questionnaire contains demographic information regarding you and your family. Please answer each of the questions by either filling in the blank or checking the appropriate responses.

1. Name: ___________________________________________________

2. Age: ___________

3. Relationship Status:
   - Single__________  Married__________
   - Partnered__________  Divorced__________
   - Widowed__________  Separated__________
   - Never Married____

4. Employment status/Are you currently:
   - Employed for wages____
   - Self-employed____
   - Out of work for more than 1 year_________________________
   - Out of work for less than 1 year_________________________
   - A homemaker________
   - A student___________
   - Retired____________
   - Unable to work______
   - What is your occupation: _______________________________
5. Race/Ethnicity (please check the one that best describes you):

- African American
- Hispanic/Latino
- Asian Pacific American
- American Indian
- Caucasian
- Other

6. What is your annual income?

- $0 - $25,000
- $25,000 - $50,000
- $50,000 - $75,000
- $75,000 - $100,000
- $100,000 - $125,000
- $125,000 - $150,000
- $150,000 - $175,000
- $175,000 - $200,000
- $200,000 (+)

7. What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?

- Some High School
- Some College
- High School Graduate
- College Graduate
- Technical Training
- Graduate Degree

8. What is the highest level of education that your father achieved?

- Some high school
- Some college
- High school graduate
- College graduate
- Technical training
- Graduate degree

9. What is the nature of the relationship to your father?

- Biological son
- Adopted son
- Step-son
- Other (Please indicate)
10. If applicable, what is the nature of the relationship to your son?

   Biological son _____  Adopted son _____
   Step-son _______  Other _______ (Please indicate)

11. How many sons/male siblings are in your family? ______________

12. How many total siblings do you have? _________________________

13. In what order are you in regards to your siblings?

   Only child_______  Oldest_____________
   Youngest________  Middle child________

   Other___________

14. Please list the age of your siblings and circle the type of relationship:

   Age _______ Biological / Stepsibling / Adopted Sibling / Male / Female
   Age _______ Biological / Stepsibling / Adopted Sibling / Male / Female
   Age _______ Biological / Stepsibling / Adopted Sibling / Male / Female
   Age _______ Biological / Stepsibling / Adopted Sibling / Male / Female
   Age _______ Biological / Stepsibling / Adopted Sibling / Male / Female
   Age _______ Biological / Stepsibling / Adopted Sibling / Male / Female
   Age _______ Biological / Stepsibling / Adopted Sibling / Male / Female
   Age _______ Biological / Stepsibling / Adopted Sibling / Male / Female
APPENDIX F
Interview Protocol

The following questions will be utilized within the interview process for the proposed study. Although these questions will guide the interviews the questions will not be limited within the context of the interview.

Interview Questions for the Son:

Opening Questions:

1. Could you tell me a little bit about how you were raised?

2. Could you tell me about how your father was with you growing up?

Main Interview Questions:

1. Could you tell me a story that best describes how your father was in interactions with you growing up?

2. Could you tell a story that best describes how your father is within interactions with you now?

3. How do you think the interactions that you have had and have with your father affect that person that you are today?

4. Could you describe your father for me?

5. If your father could describe you what would that description sound like?

6. Do you consider yourself a masculine man? Why or why not?

7. Can you describe to me where your masculinity comes from?

8. Can you tell a story that best describes the relationship that you have with your father?
9. How has the relationship that you have with you father now changed over the years?

10. Do you think the masculinity that you identify has an impact on your father’s identity? Why or why not?

11. Can you tell me story that exemplifies how similar/different you and your father are? Do you think these similarities/differences affect your relationship?

12. If your father could describe you what do you think that description would sound like?

13. Could you describe for me how you think you are as a son?

Closing Questions:

1. Is there anything you would like to add that we have not covered in the interview thus far?

2. What advice would you give fathers/sons when negotiating their relationships with their father/sons?
**Appendix G**  
**Tables of Coding Schemes**

Table 1  
*Coding Labels, Representations and Explanations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Labels</th>
<th>Alphabetic Representations</th>
<th>Explanations of Narrative Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dialogic Codes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal Inflection</td>
<td>(VI)</td>
<td>An emphatic peak or lowering in vocalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimic</td>
<td>(MI)</td>
<td>Taking on the vocal characteristics of another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pause</td>
<td>(P)</td>
<td>A lapse or meaningful break in conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic Pause</td>
<td>(DP)</td>
<td>A longer lapse or meaningful break in conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurried Speech</td>
<td>(HS)</td>
<td>Purposefully speaking quickly and intentionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Dialect</td>
<td>(LD)</td>
<td>Intentional change in language to emphasize region</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Coding Labels, Representations and Explanations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Labels</th>
<th>Alphabetic Representations</th>
<th>Explanations of Narrative Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performative Codes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaze</td>
<td>(G)</td>
<td>Conscious or subconscious contemplative aversion of eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand Gestures</td>
<td>(HG)</td>
<td>Specific, coordinated movements of the hands and arms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posture</td>
<td>(POS)</td>
<td>Specific, coordinated position of the body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uneasy Gestures</td>
<td>(UG)</td>
<td>Acts of uncomfortability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyper-masculine</td>
<td>(HM)</td>
<td>Overt, intentional or unintentional masculine acts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed Body Position</td>
<td>(CBP)</td>
<td>Embodying, occupying a smaller space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Body Position</td>
<td>(OBP)</td>
<td>Embodying, occupying a larger space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

Coding Labels, Representations and Explanations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Labels</th>
<th>Alphabetic Representations</th>
<th>Explanations of Narrative Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contextual/Thematic Codes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>(I)</td>
<td>Reference to relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantic</td>
<td>(RO)</td>
<td>Reference to romantic relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father-son Relationship</td>
<td>(FS)</td>
<td>Reference to a father-son relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Relationship</td>
<td>(FAM)</td>
<td>Reference to family relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>(F)</td>
<td>Reference to a friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediated</td>
<td>(ME)</td>
<td>Reference to mediated contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological</td>
<td>(T)</td>
<td>Reference to technology use and/or issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethic</td>
<td>(E)</td>
<td>Reference to ethics or ethical issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>(C)</td>
<td>Reference to culture or cultural issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>(RA)</td>
<td>Reference to race or racial issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>(RE)</td>
<td>Reference to religion, religiosity and/or religious issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>(H)</td>
<td>Reference to history and/or historical periods of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex and Gender</td>
<td>(SG)</td>
<td>Reference to gender and/or sexual issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

_Coding Labels, Representations and Explanations_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Labels</th>
<th>Alphabetic Representations</th>
<th>Explanations of Narrative Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity Codes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinism/Patriarch</td>
<td>(MP)</td>
<td>Reference to macro-level cultural masculinity constructs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>Reference to micro-level cultural masculinity constructs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Masculinities</td>
<td>(MM)</td>
<td>Reference to specific contextual masculinities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hegemonic Masculinity</td>
<td>(HM)</td>
<td>Reference to superordinate and subordinate masculinity constructs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhood Acts</td>
<td>(MA)</td>
<td>Reference to individual physical acts of masculinity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>