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Chris L. Hickey

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THE PHENOMENAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SON-FATHER  
RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCE

CHRIS L. HICKEY, SR.

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Ph.D. in Leadership and Change Program  
of Antioch University  
in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

April, 2013

This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled:

THE PHENOMENAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SON-FATHER  
RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCE

prepared by

Chris L. Hickey, Sr.

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in Leadership and Change.

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Philomena Essed, Ph.D., Chair date

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Michael J. Diamond, Ph.D., Committee Member date

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Toby Miller, Ph.D. External Reader date

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As I was finishing up the final edits of this dissertation, I had time to pause and reflect upon not only this particular learning product, but the entire Ph.D. learning journey, and the many who contributed to my growth and progress along the way. With respect to this study specifically, it is abundantly clear to me that I owe a great deal of gratitude to a number of individuals who have contributed directly to my inspiration, motivation, encouragement, achievement, and accomplishment associated with completing the earning of this degree. While it is my name on the cover of this dissertation, I need to acknowledge the great many folk who have contributed in a myriad of ways.

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felt Laurien's presence and support. While she always showed committed support to my success, she also let me feel it when I needed to refocus. Laurien always provided what I needed, when I needed it, and I am forever grateful. At one point during the program, when I was struggling, she said to me that she was going to see me through this...I was going to make it. I could always feel her commitment. I really must thank you, Laurien, for being what I needed, when I needed it.

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Then, there are my two children: Chris Jr. and Diana. It occurred to me that I have been in some sort of schooling throughout your lives. I know that I have set an example of life-long learning for you. I am so proud of you both, and appreciate you allowing me to experience being a father. I am also very proud of the individuals you have brought



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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of my first teacher, my first friend, and the smartest person I have been blessed to know, Ardelphia Hickey, my mother. You will always be at my side and in my heart.

I love you, Momma.

Your #1 son, Chris.

Save my seat in Heaven, next to you.

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine what the son-father relationship experience feels like (the phenomenology of the son-father relationship), and how the relationship experience affects leadership development, specifically in the son. I chose to reverse the order of the typical reference on this topic (father-son) in order to emphasize the significance of the son (role) being the central character or object of interest, even in instances where the character is a father in addition to being a son. Additionally, it should be noted that all fathers are sons, but not all sons are fathers (biologically, and/or socially, and/or conceptually). My central research question is: How is leadership development influenced by the phenomenological characteristics of the son-father relationship experience? I address this question through a series of interviews with adolescent boys age 17 and men between 18 and 45 years of age. The foundation of my interview protocol is built on a series of theory-based questions (Wengraf, 2001) that are outlined below. Analysis of these interviews is presented along with a comparative review of the scholarly literature on leadership development in adolescents. The primary value of this research is its applicability to youth leadership development programs with respect to the potential to add an emphasis on values and practices that cultivate healthy sustainable relationships that are consistent with responsible and effective parent involvement and planning, family leadership, and community support. While there is considerable consideration being acknowledged to an anecdotal connection between how boys are, or should be, affected by the leadership qualities of their fathers, very little was articulated about how the participants felt their own leadership development was influenced by the relationship experience, particularly juxtaposed to the amount of attention the participants

spent on describing their feelings and emotions about their son-father relationship experience. In this respect, what is particularly noteworthy is the richness of the interviews with respect to the participant's accounts of the phenomenal characteristics of the son-father relationship experience, including how sons articulate their feelings about the relationship, at and over time. This dissertation is accompanied by an Author's Introduction supplemental file [mp4]. The electronic version of this Dissertation is at OhioLink ETD Center, [www.ohiolink.edu/etd](http://www.ohiolink.edu/etd).

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	i
Dedication.....	vi
Abstract.....	vii
Table of Contents.....	ix
List of Tables.....	xii
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
Discovering My Purpose.....	1
Filling in the Gaps.....	3
The State of the Current Research.....	3
Relevant Leadership Literature.....	5
Background.....	8
Male Development and the Role Played by Fathers.....	8
Phenomenology.....	10
The Phenomenal Father.....	12
Overview of the Leadership Connection.....	14
Implicit leadership theories.....	17
The Study.....	19
The Question.....	20
Methodology.....	20
Chapter II: Review of the Literature.....	22
The Father’s Role in Male Development.....	22
Infancy.....	22
Attachment Theory.....	25
School-aged Children.....	26
Adolescence.....	30
Young Adults.....	32
Cultural and Socioeconomic Factors.....	33
Alternative Perspectives.....	41
Leadership Development in Youth.....	42
The Father’s Role in Leadership Development.....	43

Implications.....	44
Fathers and Sons: A Qualitative Review on Feelings.....	45
Chapter III: Methodology .....	49
The Purpose of This Study.....	49
The Interview Protocol. ....	50
The Interviews. ....	52
Interview Questions.....	53
Setting. ....	54
Data Analysis .....	56
Initial Interviews .....	60
Second Wave of Interviews.....	61
Third Wave of Interviews .....	63
My Positioning as Researcher.....	64
Chapter IV: Results.....	66
Introduction.....	66
Research Question .....	66
Results.....	66
Second Wave Interview Results.....	70
Third Wave Interview Results.....	72
Son-father Relationship Experience .....	76
Father Fantasy/Hunger.....	77
Son Fantasy/Hunger.....	83
The Changing Nature of the Son/Father Relationship over Time .....	86
Gender Expectations/Differences .....	92
Generative Nature of Fatherhood.....	96
The Son Assumes Father’s Traits/Qualities/Values .....	99
Feelings/Emotions.....	104
Relationship Reflection/Importance Over Time.....	105
Reflection on Personal Experience/Choices .....	109
Expression of Emotions .....	111
Father Accessibility .....	114

Respect.....	117
Father’s Pride in Adult Son.....	118
Father Qualities.....	119
Leadership.....	120
Self-leadership. ....	120
Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusion .....	126
Interview Findings .....	126
How the Findings Address the Research Question.....	128
What Perceptions of the Son-Father relationship among Adolescent Boys and Men? .....	133
How Do Adolescent Boys and Men Describe Their Feelings and Emotions About Their Own Son-Father Relationship Experiences?.....	135
In What Ways Do Adolescent Boys and Men Describe Leadership Characteristics and Qualities in the Context of Their Own Son-Father Relationship? .....	136
Limitations of the Research .....	138
Future Research Opportunities .....	140
References.....	143
Supplemental Files: DrHickey_Introduction.....	47 sec.

### **List of Tables**

Table 4.1	Frequency of Thematic Occurrences During the Interview.....	67
Table 4.2	Frequency of Thematic Occurrences During the Interview.....	72
Table 4.3	Frequency of Thematic Occurrences During the Interview.....	74
Table 4.4	Interviewee Demographic.....	76
Table 4.5	Tabulation by Wave.....	77
Table 4.6	Tabulation by Wave.....	104
Table 4.7	Tabulation by Wave.....	122



## Chapter I: Introduction

### Discovering My Purpose

In an early reflective essay required by my Ph.D. program I was provided the overwhelming opportunity to account for *who* I am. My initial intent was to provide the reader with a glimpse of some of my thoughts with respect to my personal concept of leadership characteristics and an analysis of how I measure up to these characteristics. Along the way, I found the research process to be a safe platform from which to get a few things off my chest, with the result being that I managed to use some menacing gremlins to construct a me that personified my own unique conceptual characteristics of a leader. Much to my chagrin, the me I discovered warranted much more than a casual preamble to a greater point.

In brief, this essay chronicled events in my life resulting in a disappointing occurrence at the age of 12 years old leading me to come face-to-face with the reality and pain of experiencing the emotional wounds of being a fatherless boy. I wrote:

I was devastated. I could scarcely feel the shame I had through the debilitating pain in my chest. It seemed that everywhere I turned and everywhere I looked, people turned their backs. I was nobody at all. I felt worthless. It didn't take long at all for the tears to move up from deep in my heart, and roll from my eyes, back down to my chest. I began to think that my tear-filled eyes were a blessing, because I could no longer see what was happening around me, as the palms of my hands, covered my face. It appeared that I was not the only one blinded by my tears, because I could feel that none of my friends could see me at all. Why should they? They were with their fathers, and their fathers were with them, just where they belonged. (Hickey, 2004, p. 9)

Dramatics notwithstanding, my eventual point had to do with how I used this experience to propel me into a lifelong commitment to becoming a particular type of father. I further postulated that the fulfillment of this commitment epitomized for me what it meant to be a leader. To this end I wrote,

I decided on that night what a true leader was. I decided on that night that I could not consider myself a leader of anything unless I was first someone that my kids could

depend on and respect. My job was to be their leader first, and everything else would evolve around that. I was angry and determined. (Hickey, 2004, p. 10)

The event recounted above thus laid the foundation for my thinking about leadership, and my own leadership development. Additionally, it was the catalyst for constructing a dissertation research project that examined the implications of the son-father relationship for the development of leadership attributes through a variety of lenses.

The relevance of this snapshot of my life experience to this dissertation is eloquently articulated by Shamir and Eilam (2005) in their description of the significance of life stories to the development of authentic leadership. They illuminate:

Leaders are authentic to the extent that they act and justify their actions on the basis of the meaning system provided by their life-stories. This suggestion implies a shift of focus from the current emphasis on the development of skills and behavioral styles to an emphasis on leaders' self-development, and especially the development of their self-concepts through the construction of life-stories. (p. 396)

Considering the deep and real emotions that seem to be felt by fatherless children, boys in particular, in the societal backdrop of strong heterosexual nuclear family norms, my contention is that the ubiquitous theme in the life-stories of many boys is the phenomenal son-father relationship experience, including all of its dimensional characteristics, such as absent-father, surrogate-father (including women), present-father, fantasy-father, nurturing-father, abusive-father, and so on. Moreover, the unavoidable character, hero, and/or antihero in the life-stories of boys is the father-self, the reflexive evolutionary manifestations of the phenomenal son-father relationship experience, at and over time, synchronically and diachronically (Dainton, 2000). Accordingly, because my own father-self is central to my interest in the son-father relationship, I must be clear about how my own emotions and thoughts influence my research. While my particular interest in this topic exceeds what would be traditionally considered the imaginative inquiry of an academic researcher, it is nonetheless imperative that I approach the topic with

genuine respect and adherence to an appropriate level of distance and rigor. My research must not only be mindful (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998), but also considerate of the reservoir of preceding scholarly literature on the father-son relationships as well as leadership development.

### **Filling in the Gaps**

I base my research on a conceptual framework designed to investigate the reciprocal relationships between: a) the son-father relationship experience; b) leadership development; and c) emotional expression of feelings. Because there are multiple meanings associated with each of these domains of inquiry, I first briefly outline some of the prevailing definitions and perspectives for each of these categories in order to compare, contrast, and specifically identify the focus and viewpoint of my research.

First, I submitted my research premise to a comprehensive conceptual structure, in the form of a set of questions, from which to excavate meaning relevant to the stated domain topics: a) What is a father? b) How do boys develop into men? c) What role do fathers play in the development of boys into men? d) What is leadership? e) How does leadership develop in boys? and, finally, f) What role do fathers play in the development of leadership in boys? For my purpose, I grouped together (a) through (c) in an overview of literature on fatherhood, fathering, and father, specifically related to the father-son relationship experience. Likewise, I grouped together questions (d) through (f) in an overview of leadership literature. The feelings domain, defined in terms of how an experience feels and the meaning made of the feelings, is implied within my interpretation of both the son-father relationship experience and the development of leadership. A brief overview of the literature regarding fatherhood follows below.

**The state of the current research.** Morman and Floyd (2006) eloquently describe the scope of literature covering the role of fathers and fathering. They identify the following

approaches: a) the historical perspective, which details how fathers and fathering have changed over the last few centuries, with consideration of the socio/economic changes in American culture over time; b) the contextual perspective, which examines the role fathers play within and between divergent social, economic, and cultural conditions and circumstances; c) the father involvement perspective, which focuses on understanding the father's role through the observation of accessibility, engagement, and, responsibility; d) the developmental contribution perspective, which includes the father's effort to co-parent with the mother; e) the Good Dad–Bad Dad perspective, which evaluates the quality of the father's involvement with the family; f) the compare and contrast perspective, which critiques the role of the father in contrast to that of the mother; g) the social constructive perspective, which focuses on the multilayered influences of the micro-, meso-, and macro-level activities of social life that contribute to the meaning of fatherhood and fathering; and finally, h) the generative fathering perspective, which emphasizes the role fathers play in the enduring and repetitive cycle of perpetuating the next generation of fathers. Whereas Dermott (2008) eloquently distinguishes the difference between fatherhood, the public meanings associated with being a father, fathering, the actual practices of doing parenting, and the connection between a particular child and a particular man (biological and/or social) (p. 7). Yet what is missing in these extant perspectives of fatherhood and fathering is the affects generated by how a boy's life experiences feel to him, and the meaning made of these feelings, with respect to his perception of a father figure.

The connection between a particular boy and a particular man, for my purpose, is addressed as the multi-dimensional son-father relationship experience. My examination goes beyond the perspectives listed by Morman and Floyd (2006) to include what being a boy feels like, in the context of being a son, with/or without the presence of a father; including various

conceptualizations of what it means to be a son. Thus the heart of my research is constituted by what it feels like, and furthermore, by the meaning that the son makes of these feelings.

Another significant point that must be made with respect to the meaning made of one's feelings is the construction of a meaning-making process or mechanism, mediated by consistencies and/or the repetitiveness of one's experiences and their subsequent feelings relevant to those experiences. For example, if a boy has a particular experience repetitively, over time, that generates a set of consistent associative feelings, not only is it plausible that the boy will begin to make the same or similar meaning of this set of associative feelings, but he will also start to construct a meaning-making mechanism that is activated automatically upon the very notion of the triggering experience reoccurring. Furthermore, this meaning-making mechanism can also be activated by the anticipation of other very different experiences that may resemble the original triggering experience in the most remote way. The accumulation of such meaning-making mechanisms has monumental significance on the development of a child's personality, behavior, and perspective on leadership. Much like Shamir and Eilam (2005) have suggested, a meaning-making system is developed courtesy of one's life stories and experiences. The sequence is: experience – feelings – meaning making – mechanism – personality – behavior – leadership. Following is a very brief overview of the literature on leadership.

**Relevant leadership literature.** Alvesson (1996) posits an appropriate perspective on the definition of leadership. He writes, “a common definition of leadership is not practically possible, would not be helpful if it was, does not hit the target and may also obstruct new ideas and interesting ways of thinking” (p. 458). Notwithstanding this point of view, nonetheless there are a number of perspectives and approaches that articulate various concepts pertaining to what makes a good leader, what a leader does, how leaders behave, the relationship leaders have with

others, how one becomes a leader, what makes a leader effective, and the meaning of leadership. Northouse (2004) outlines 12 descriptive approaches to understanding the multi-dimensional meaning of leadership. What is missing, however, in Northouse's scheme (and those of others), is the relationship between human development and leadership development. There are studies that do address this relationship on a certain level, for example, Sinclair's (2007) examination of the influence of family and early life experiences in general on leadership development.

I posit an evolving conceptual perception of what leadership feels like to a boy, experienced during his overall development. Moreover, as a boy progresses through the various stages of social, psychological, cognitive, sex-role, emotional, behavioral, and moral development, there are associative concepts of how leadership looks, and how it feels. As the boy continues through the stages of school-age, adolescence, and young adulthood, these internalized concepts of leadership resurface, in the form of behaviors, expectations, and acknowledgements contextually appropriate to current perceptions of circumstances and/or conditions. I contend that the triggering factors eliciting the reactivation of these internalized concepts are the emotional feelings associated with the son-father relationship experience (Ayman-Nolly & Ayman, 2005; Burns, 1978; Diamond, 2007; Forste & Jarvis, 2007; Keller, 1999; Kenny, Blascovich, & Shaver, 1994; Lewis, Feiring, & Weinraub, 1981; Offermann, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994).

Closely related to the general concept of *feelings* is how one's emotions interact with experiences and subsequent feelings. In his construction of a working definition of emotion, Frijda (1986) suggests that there are three major classes of phenomena that characterize emotion: "the phenomena of behavior, of physiological response, and of subjective experience" (p. 2). In this dissertation my overwhelming primary interest is in the third major class, subjective

experience, which forms a foundation that grounds our understanding of the first class, behavior, with respect to the various characterizations and behaviors associated with leadership development. My focus here is in what Frijda (1986) considers the phenomena used to characterize emotion, more so than the larger phenomena of emotion itself. With respect to the conceptual difference between phenomenal and subjective experience, Frijda writes,

Subjective experience is another source of the use of emotion words. People use expressions like 'I feel sad' and 'I feel happy.' Presumably, something is special about the experience referred to by these expressions. Two features of the expressions serve to roughly identify the experiences involved...evaluative connotation...[and] subjective reference. (p. 3)

This is remarkably similar to Van Manen's (1990) discussion on phenomenology as a philosophical perspective for researching lived experiences. However, I believe the larger issue is with respect to my primary focus on what boys and men say about experiencing the feelings that are elicited by their son-father relationship experience. Therefore, the larger question is, are there other phenomenal characterizations beyond those associated with emotion theory that are suitable for our analysis of the son-father relationship experience? Clearly the phenomenal son-father relationship experience, characterized by what it feels like, is replete with emotion and is often characterized by such.

In consideration of its multidimensional characteristics at and over time, the son-father relationship experience moves beyond what would be considered just the emotional experiences a father and son share during their lives. Moreover, it includes the accumulated unified collection of emotions, feelings, behaviors, perceptions, and reflections mediated by the elements of meaning making and self-awareness; including what it feels like to have experienced the son-father relationship holistically, in the context of its multidimensional characteristics.

## Background

**Male development and the role played by fathers.** The study of male development, particularly in the context of the father's role, has a long history. Additionally, there is an abundance of research targeting child development that dates back almost to the study of early-20th-century psychology (Bloch, 1991; Charlesworth, 2004; Koops & Zuckerman, 2003; Senn, 1975). Within the domain of child development research the primary focus of attention has traditionally been on the role and influence of the mother, with no particular distinction between the development of girls or boys. However, since the 1960s and on into the present there has been a growing interest in the role of the father in the development of children, from both laymen and academics (Abramovitch, 1997; Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992; Bloom-Feshbach, 1981; Dermott, 2008; Floyd & Morman, 2003; Lamb, 1976, 1981; Lewis, 1997).

Adding clarity to Lamb's (1976) earlier list of three key reasons for the increased research interest in the role and influence of the father in child development: a) the overemphasis (imbalanced) of the mother's role in social development; b) the disintegration of the family structure in contemporary American society; and c) the recognition of the active role children play in eliciting and shaping social interaction, Lamb (1981) later offered three additional reasons for the increased interest: d) the modern father's demand not to be a peripheral figure; e) the tendency to exaggerate the extent of mother-child interaction; and f) the overemphasis on the amount of time a parent spends with a child.

Lamb (1976) offers an extensive volume of information on the father's role in child development that covers a wide range of relevant topics. In his 1976 edition of *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, Lamb eloquently brings to the forefront a cornucopia of issues specifically related to the role fathers play in their child's development. The primary theoretical



perspectives that are addressed throughout the text are psychoanalytical theory, Parsons' socialization theory, and learning theory (Lewis & Weinraub, 1976; Parsons, 1964). In a later edition of his work, Lamb (1981) adds attachment theory to his list of primary theoretical perspectives. These theories establish the foundation for examining the following questions regarding the development of the child: a) What is the nature of father-child interaction? b) What influence does the father-child relationship have on sex-role, moral, and intellectual development; c) Within which theoretical frameworks can explanations be sought? d) What is the effect of growing up without a father? and, e) Is the nature of the father-child relationship culture-specific, or are there similarities from culture to culture, and from species to species?

Bloom-Feshbach (1981) and Dermott (2008) point out how interest in the father's role in the family has also reached the sphere of popular culture. Bloom-Feshbach (1981) reminds us that during the 1980s there were a number of magazine publications and popular books, such as the *New York Times*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and Biller and Meredith's (1974) *Father Power*, that have featured father-related subjects. Additionally, the Academy Award-winning film *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979), "illustrates how single-parent fathers have emerged as a new familiar structure" (Bloom-Feshbach, 1981, p. 71). This theme was repeated in the 2006 box office hit, *The Pursuit of Happyness*. Dermott (2008) also points out the growing presence of "how to" books on topics related to fatherhood (p. 9).

Abramovitch (1997) adds an important dimension to the discussion regarding the increased interest in the father's role, with the significance of father absences (Harper & Fine, 2006). He attributes the renewed interest in the father to an exploration of new masculinity. He also points out that along with the recent interest in fathers and a new masculinity, there has been an emerging interest in writing about the absent father. Herzog (2001) uses the term "father

hunger” to describe the yearning of an abandoned son for a good or good enough father. The good enough father is characterized as one that is “loving and emotionally accessible” (p. 21) in his son’s life. Important elements of this accessibility are reliability and consistency. The father hunger topic inevitably opens up a wide range of research questions related to the father’s role in the development of boys, such as self-identity and sex-role development. It must be noted that throughout much of the overall literature on the father’s role in child development, researchers are diligent in pointing out flaws and inconsistencies in many of the studies done to date. Many have offered possible reasons for and solutions to research design issues, pointing to potential for future research (Biller, 1976; Burns, 1978; Connor & White, 2006; Dermott, 2008; Kotelchuck, 1976; Lamb, 1976, 1981; Lewis, 1997; Machtlinger, 1976; Nash, 1976).

### **Impact of Phenomenology**

Considering the diversity of research approaches available, I have been influenced by phenomenology because it is a structured approach with a particular emphasis on how one articulates their lived experience. Within the context of data analysis, it is my intention to elucidate from my interviews with the participants a deep reflection of not only specific accounts of their son-father relationship, but also a detailed perspective on associated feelings and an understanding of how those feelings may have affected subsequent behavior. Moustakas (1994) describes the orientation of the methodology as one in which

The aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences or structures of the experience. (p. 13)

Phenomenology thus helps to obtain insight into the essence and structure of the son-father relationship experience, and how it may or may not affect behaviors that facilitate leadership development.

Van Manen (1990) offers what most social scientists consider a clear explanation of what is asked of the phenomenological approach to social research. He posits, “Phenomenology asks for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a some-‘thing what it is—and without which it could not be what it is” (p. 10). Nevertheless, the concept of phenomenology has a number of diverse interpretations that require further clarity, or at minimum, sorting out for the purposes of defining how I am utilizing the concept in this research. Since Husserl’s introduction of the concept, the term phenomenology has been thought of as a philosophy, an inquiry paradigm, an interpretive theory, an analytic perspective in social science, and a research methodology (Patton, 2002). Additionally, there have been a number of phenomenological formations, most notably: a) transcendental, with a focus on the essential meanings of individual experiences; b) existential, with a focus on the social construction of group reality; and c) hermeneutic, with a focus on the language and structure of communications. Even with these distinctions, however, there are overlaps of interpretation depending upon the nature of a research inquiry, and/or the intent of the researcher. In as much as there are these multiple interpretive distinctions, the important thing to remember, in general, is their common characteristic, which is primarily a focus on exploring how human beings make sense of their experiences. This focus includes both the antecedent as well as the subsequent relationship these experiences have on one’s consciousness (Patton, 2002).

To clearly outline the approach of this dissertation with respect to phenomenological methodologies, it is first important to understand the difference between two distinct uses of phenomenology in research. On the one hand, research can be conducted with a phenomenological focus; on the other hand, a phenomenological perspective may be used in a study to justify the research methodology. Here, the former describes a study where the intent is

to get at the essence of the experience of some phenomenon. The latter employs a phenomenological perspective to illuminate the importance of using methods that capture the lived experience of a research participant or subject (Patton, 2002). It is important to add that these two concepts are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, it is not unusual for a study to focus on the essence and meaning of a participant's lived experience, without necessarily employing general phenomenological methods as such. This study focuses on the essence of the meaning in the son-father relationship and uses convergent interviewing methods to uncover the feelings and experiences of the participants.

With respect to the son-father relationship, I focus on what the son-father relationship experience feels like, mediated by how a son *feels* experiencing the son-father relationship: This is particularly important in so far as my intent is to identify the meanings made of the son-father relationship experience and its characteristics. The experiential objects of reference I examine are the phenomenal characteristics of the son-father relationship, and the subjective elements therein. This is quite distinguishable from the physical-objective-characteristics of a man, a boy, a baseball game, a conversation, a trip to the zoo, etc. For example, it is not enough to acknowledge that a boy and his father did or did not have a conversation. My focus is on the meaning made of the conversation, *what it was* or *was not* about, phenomenologically (Horgan & Tienson, 2003; Wilson, 2003). Moreover, how does the conversation make the boy feel in the context of its spatio/temporal dimension (Valle & Halling, 1989), both synchronically and diachronically (Dainton, 2000).

### **The Phenomenal Father**

There are a wide range of methodologies and philosophical perspectives that seek to understand the role of the father in the family, and the associated meaning elicited by the father

and others in a boy's social network (Lewis et al., 1981; Lewis & Weinraub, 1976), particularly among the other members of the family. In general, the primary objects of the phenomenal son-father relationship experience are the son and the father. At the same time, however, it is important to acknowledge that many of the characteristics of this experience are significantly influenced by other objects of intentionality, such as the mother, siblings, cultural influences, community, and other relatives, that flow in and out of the lived experiences of the son and his father, both together and independently and over time (Dainton, 2000; Van Manen, 1990).

Diamond (1992) points out that for the father, the process of developing a phenomenal relationship may have already begun before the birth of his son. He suggests that much like the feelings that men experience in their daily lives that arise from coming home from a hard day's labor, complaining of sore muscles after working out or playing a game of basketball with their buddies, or even watching Monday Night Football, a father-to-be searches for variations of these feelings via a physical and bodily expression of their fatherhood. In this way, Diamond asserts, "There is a 'psychobiology' to fatherhood much as there is in motherhood" (p. 41). Therefore, I would add that this phenomenon may plausibly have a carry-over effect upon the dynamics of the son's relationship experience at the very moment of his birth. In this way, the impetus for the phenomenal son-father relationship experience is well established by the time the son is, or is not, introduced, at birth, to his father.

The way the son initially thinks of his father is partly dependent on the way the father is thought of [in the mother's mind as well as in the father's own mind] prior to the child's birth. (Beaton & Doherty, 2007; Habib & Lancaster, 2006). Moving forward, throughout the boy's life, the development of several physical, social, and psychological aspects that shape who he is, both to himself and to others, is directly and indirectly influenced by the dynamic characteristics of

the phenomenal son-father relationship experience from its earliest origins (Forste & Jarvis, 2007). The boy's emotional, cognitive, sex-role, social, and leadership development are all associated with how the boy feels about himself and others, which is at its core significantly affected by the phenomenal son-father relationship experience, beginning with the initial meaning made by the father before and at the time of his son's birth.

Our understanding of the phenomenal father as an object of meaning-making in the son-father relationship thus derives from the son and the father, and their independent accounts of the phenomenal experience. For my purpose, I am limiting my examination to the experience of the son, including, however, the son's perception of the father's experience. The ultimate objective of this dissertation is to explore the relationship between the phenomenal son-father relationship from the viewpoint off the essence of their experience, and the effects of this relationship and experience on the development of leadership, primarily in sons.

**Overview of the leadership connection.** The general corpus of contemporary leadership literature includes a significant number of works that can be considered as complementary perspectives with respect to the issue of father-son relationship experience, and leadership development in both the father and the son. I refer to Diamond's (2007) assertion regarding the reciprocal relationship fathers and sons have in regard to their respective journeys through life. Diamond points out that while an understanding of the influence fathers have on their sons is common among professionals, "less acknowledged is the other half of the equation, the fact that just as profoundly as fathers influence their sons, so do sons influence their fathers" (p. 7). In specific reference to the positive characteristics and benefits of the father-son relationship, Floyd and Morman (2003) suggest that there are, "many benefits it can entail for both fathers and sons" (p. 600). The dynamics of this relationship can be construed as applying to leadership

development in both as well, considering the reciprocal communications between father and sons throughout various interactions during their relationship.

There is a significant richness of leadership literature that resembles and indeed parallels the literature on the father's role in child development. Much of the leadership theory I have reviewed for this dissertation comes from Burns' (1978) *Leadership*. Burns' examination of moral leadership provides a framework for understanding the relationship between the role of fathers in child development and leadership, specifically in his discussion of the "transforming leader" and "moral leadership." Burns clarifies this framework by suggesting a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation resulting from transforming leadership.

This act of transformation converts followers into leaders, and possibly leaders into moral agents. He goes on to explain how transforming leadership results in a relationship of mutual need for the leaders and the led, explaining that "in responding to leaders, followers have adequate knowledge of alternative leaders and programs and the capacity to choose among those alternatives" (Burns, 1978, p. 4). Finally, Burns concludes that this relationship of mutual need requires that leaders take responsibility for their actions and commitments.

Diamond (2007) speaks of a parallel struggle that a middle-aged father experiences as his adolescent or young adult son struggles for independence. The letting go that the father experiences can be synonymous with the father elevating to the position of moral agent, which is a characteristic of transforming leadership. This suggests a transforming relationship of mutual need for both the father and the son, including the son's adequate knowledge of alternative leaders (or mentors), as well as the father's requirement to take responsibility for his actions and commitments. The significance to the son includes his experience witnessing, acknowledging, feeling, and making meaning of his father's changing life, as well as a growing sense of having

more responsibility for himself. Additionally, there is the emerging possibility of, as Diamond (2007) later points out, the father converting to the led and the son transforming into the leader.

Burns (1978) suggests a line of questions related to the relationship between the shaping and sharing of values and the needs of children from a developmental perspective. He then offers the suppositions of a number of child development theorists to explain this relationship. These theorists include Freud, with his theories regarding the superego and the Oedipal conflict, as well as Piaget, Kohlberg, Jung, Huxley, Erikson, and Parsons. It is striking that the leadership references offered by Burns are identical to those most often used to examine and explain the father-son relationship.

In his discussion of the nature of power and leadership in the context of the child's moral development, Burns (1978) cites material taken directly from child development literature. He reminds us of the nature of selective imitation by which children learn by imitating their parents and others based on original and autonomous wants. Moreover, Burns notes how at different stages of development, a sense of reciprocity grows between the child and the parent(s), much like Diamond (2007) asserts.

Burns (1978) goes on to discuss how Kohlberg's stages of development accentuate the sense of reciprocity between children and parents. For example, the most primitive form of reciprocity takes place during the first stage of moral development. This stage is based on power and punishment, which represents the reciprocity of obedience and freedom from punishment. I contend that it is at this stage that the structural development of a child's implicit leadership theories (ILT) begins to form (Keller, 1999; Offermann et al., 1994). At the top of this hierarchy of reciprocity is the stage where the child appeals to an abstract concept of justice that lies beyond the more palpable rules of social order. At this stage the child appeals for what they



perceive to be moral and fair treatment. With respect to the child's developing implicit leadership theories, the appealing act on the part of the child reflects their currently existing perception of leadership in the form of who they appeal to and in their own initiative and confidence in making such an appeal. Additionally, the child is influenced and either motivated or de-motivated by *how* the act of their appeal *feels* (in anticipation and actuality), particularly in terms of expected outcomes, conceivably based on past experiences.

In summary, by referencing child development literature, Burns (1978) points out that the development of intelligence, learning, and reasoning in children, brought about through their constant adaptation to new experiences, play, and exploration, "help[s] move children from the status of passive followers to that of potential leaders" (p. 83).

**Implicit leadership theories.** With respect to the son-father relationship, there is an ongoing, interactive, reciprocal relationship between specific personality traits exhibited in a father's character and behavior, including sensitivity, charisma, etc., and his son's overall concept of leadership, as defined by the son's emerging implicit leadership theories (Bass, 1990). Furthermore, the nature of the son-father relationship experience has an effect on the son's future perception of leadership in others as well as in himself (Bass, 1990). Clearly, the parental personality traits offered in the Keller (1999) study also speak to the quality and meaning made of the son-father relationship experience, which directly affects the cognitive, sex-role, social, and emotional development of the son. The relationship between the personality traits of the father, and the son's developing implicit leadership theories represents a significant factor in the overall reciprocity that exists in the father-son relationship suggested by Diamond (2007) when he states:

As fathers and sons create their special bond, they become a “team of two”...while [men] are helping to guide their sons through [the toddler’s development period] their sons are likely helping these fathers to expand upon their own notions of masculinity. (p. 58)

For example, as the son is influenced by the perceived leadership behaviors of his father, he starts to emulate this behavior, being more like his father. This and other factors such as the reaction of others (the mother, siblings, and others in the child’s social network) have an effect upon and encourage the continuation of such leadership behaviors in both the father and the son. Again, it is important to note that this symbiotic chain of leadership phenomena is not limited to what is considered as the normative, or mainstream, models of paternal influence and leadership modeling. The presence of non-nurturant, abusive, and father-absent characteristics in the son-father relationship dynamic are also subjected to this form of behavioral inheritance. This is also evident in cases in which the son does not emulate the characteristics of his father. For example, there are accounts of young men being so adversely affected by their non-normative experience that they seek out and model other males in their sphere of involvement. Boys find sports coaches, teachers, a friend’s father, etc., to fantasize about and form images of leadership that they attempt to emulate and refer to in their own self-development. Very often, when such positive behavior is perceived to be recognized by others (e.g., family members, teachers, coaches, etc.); the boys are encouraged to seek additional opportunities to demonstrate the rewarded behavior and characteristics.

The modeling effects of such non-normative circumstances can be shown to have direct ties to sons’ leadership behaviors. Forste and Jarvis (2007) found that young men who did not live with their fathers during adolescence were more likely to become a father at an early age, yet they were also more likely to be nonresident fathers. An important component in the line of reasoning behind generative fathering is perception and feelings. It is not just what the son

witnesses in his father's behavior, rather, what is significant is how the behavior is perceived by the son, how it feels, and what inferences as to its meaning are made, again in consideration of the other elements in the son's family and emerging social network (Diamond, 2007; Keller, 1999; Lamb, 2004; Lewis, 1997; Lewis et al., 1981; Lewis & Weinraub, 1976).

There is a vast range of other nuanced situations that run counter to the prevailing normative understandings of fatherhood, including the heterosexual underpinnings that perpetuate the problem of normative fatherhood as the reproduction of unequal gender relations. While this very significant topic is beyond the scope of this research I have remained cognizant of such issues as they pertain to moral basis of child support obligations; gender inequality; homosexual family structures; and gender bias in the legal system, among others, all of which reflect societal expectations of the role of men and fathers to some degree.

### **The Study**

It appears that in every arena of leadership today, from high profile athletics<sup>1</sup> to the White House, an increasing number of individuals in leadership roles acknowledge how the father-son relationship has contributed to their perspective on and approach to leadership. Prominent examples of this can be found in the *U.S. News and World Report* (Walsh, 2007) cover story titled, "Father figures: From Mitt Romney to Barack Obama, how six leading candidates' ideas and ambitions were shaped by their dads." The inside cover reads, "Like Father, Like Candidate. A good way to understand who the presidential candidates are is to look at where they came from. In the cases of the leading candidates from both parties, fathers played unusually important roles in shaping characters" (p. 2). It is my contention that the role fathers play, in this respect, is

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<sup>1</sup> One notable example is Georgetown University's head coach for the men's basketball program, John Thompson III, who follows in his father's footsteps leading the program into national prominence. One of the star performers on the team is Patrick Ewing II. In 1984 Thompson's father, John Thompson II, led the Georgetown team to a national championship. The star player on that team was also named Patrick Ewing, the father of Patrick Ewing II.

not at all unusual. Some researchers suggest a progressive relationship between types of leadership on a continuum (Ritter & Lord, 2007; Sanders III, Hopkins, & Geroy 2003). Other researchers are deliberate in describing different types of leadership on the merits of their one unique characteristics, traits, and contextual effectiveness (Avolio & Bass, 1988, 1995; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Burns, 1978; Conger, 1989; Greenleaf, 1977; Heifetz, 1994; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Lord, De Vader, & Alliger, 1986; Roberts, 1985).

**The question.** My central research question is to determine the specific ways that leadership development is influenced by the phenomenal characteristics of the son-father relationship experience, including how sons articulate their feelings about the relationship in the moment of the experience and over time. A series of sub-themes that also form the foundation of my methodology is built upon the following theory-based questions (Wengraf, 2001):

- a) What are the perceptions of the son-father relationship among adolescent boys and men have?
- b) How do adolescent boys and men describe their feelings and emotions about their own son-father relationship experiences?
- c) In what ways do adolescent boys and men describe leadership characteristics and qualities in the context of their own son-father relationship?

**Methodology.** I looked for a methodology sensitive enough to allow for probing about feelings, while also providing space for participants to search for reflective words and meaning that would provide insight into how they have experienced the son-father relationship. I thus chose to use some principles of grounded theory for findings emerging from the interview data as well as for my data analysis.

The interviews were conducted using the convergent interviewing methodology outlined by Rao and Perry (2007). I found that this interview method provided the most appropriate means for allowing the participants to express their feelings and emotions relevant to the son-father relationship experience and the possible links to leadership development.

The foundation of my interview protocol is built upon the theory-based questions outlined above in Chapter I. Relevant literature and theories on human development, the role played by men in child development, emotions, and leadership development provide the grounding philosophical perspective from which to guide and analyze the interviewing process.

**What follows.** In Chapter II I present a review of literature that primarily focuses on the father's role in male development, from infancy to young adulthood. Consideration is given to cultural and socioeconomic factors as well as alternative perspectives such as nature versus nurture viewpoints that refute the significant influence of parental involvement on the progression and outcome of character development and learning. Additionally, I share literature relevant to leadership development in youth, with particular attention to the father's role and its implications. Chapter III outlines the methodology of this study, and Chapter IV draws from interview materials with the research participants and includes a presentation and analysis of the research results. In Chapter V I share my perspective on these results, relating how the research question is connected to the findings, and noting the limitations of the study and opportunities for future research.

## Chapter II: Review of the Literature

### The Father's Role in Male Development

The primary question addressed in this study involves examining how men and boys articulate their relationship with their father, and how their lived experience affects leadership development. This investigation focuses on the perspective of the first person, about themselves, rather than purely extant notions of leadership development. For example, in the case of boys who grow up in families without a live-in father, they often articulate experiences of feeling like it is their responsibility to be the secondary protector of the family (after their mother), even when they have older sisters. These feelings begin to develop at the time they witness the role of the father in other families; however, they find that they are challenged with constructing the characteristics of protector without a primary example, relying instead on what they think they witness in other families. Often, these men and boys are expressive of how such early experiences affect other relationships in their lives, and how they perceive their role accordingly.

**Infancy.** Although my research focuses on son-father relationships, this approach deviates from mainstream approaches to this topic. My focus is not on the necessity of fatherhood to male development, but rather on the way adults and men experience the phenomenon of “father” in their lives, with a focus on whether or not there has been a physical presence of a father. My study further strays from the general literature in this field focused on the father-son relationship as articulated within nuclear families to consider a range of contemporary family structures and how they respectively affect the experience of the son-father relationship.

As suggested by Lamb (1976) the father-son relationship is evident during the infancy stage of the child's development. While traditionally, particularly beginning in utero, it is the

mother who has been dominantly recognized, primarily because of her biological affixation with the child and primary nurturing role, the social network of the child, including their relationship with the father, begins in the infancy stage of their life. With respect to the child's role in social interaction and networking, Lamb (1976) argues that researchers are demonstrating that infants who at one time were assumed to be passive and receptive partners in social interaction are now viewed as playing a more active role. He nevertheless cautions us not to equate time spent with an infant with the quality of interaction; a point that applies to both parents. He thus concludes that "empirical and theoretical considerations indicate that the amount of time spent together is a poor predictor of the quality of the infant's relationship with either mother or father...the extent of interaction is probably unrelated to its quality" (p. 4).

The quality of the child's relationships is a dominant theme that permeates the literature on the father's role in the child's development (Biller, 1976, 1981; Biller & Kimpton, 1997; Diamond, 2007; Floyd & Morman, 2003; Lamb, 1976, 1981, 1997, 2004; Lewis & Weinraub, 1976; Morman & Floyd, 2006; Newberger, 1999; Poulter, 2004; Roopnarine, 2004). For example, Kotelchuck (1976) asserts that developmental psychologists have virtually ignored the father's influence on the infant's early social development, instead studying fathers only in their absence. Lamb (1976) elaborates on the need to not only examine the mother-child relationship, but also our need to appreciate the complexities of the father-child relationship. Moreover, to better understand the socio-personality development (Parsons, 1964) of the infant's social world we must appreciate its complexity and multi-dimensionality. Biller (1976) suggests a positive relationship between the quality of the infant's relationship with parents, and that of future relationships. For example, he argues, there is a direct correlation between infants who experience greater anxiety on separation from their mothers, and infants who have little contact

with their fathers. Moreover, as Bronte-Tinkew, Carrano, and Guzman (2006) conclude, the father's perception is another significant factor related to the father's role in his child's development. These authors specifically identify: caregiving activities; paternal warmth; nurturing activities; physical care; and cognitively stimulating activities as the most significant domains of father involvement that are associated with the father's perception of what fathering constitutes (Dermott, 2008; Morman & Floyd, 2006).

In consideration of the sex-role development of the infant, the relationship with the father at infancy is significant. Biller (1976) points out a strong positive relationship between the presence of a masculine father, a positive father-son relationship, sex-appropriate behavior (in a society where heterosexuality dominates and where gender equality is formally idealized, but not fully practiced); and popularity with peers. In agreement with Biller, Ilardo (1993) elaborates that such a positive father-son relationship results in the son unselfconsciously thinking of themselves as a male, in the likeness of their father.

Conversely, father absent boys are more likely to be less comfortable affirming their masculinity. Harper and Fine (2006) argue that the well-being of children of nonresidential fathers is likewise negatively affected by their father's distress, parenting behaviors, and inter-parent conflict. Moreover, Machtlinger (1976) points out the element of fantasy father attachments, from his observation of fatherless children, arguing that fatherless children experience the most intense and persistent attachments to fantasy fathers, which they construct out of even the most minimal relationship or contact with any man at all. In a similar vein, Herzog (2001) writes that the:

capacity of a [boy] to make up a father with his mother and their mutual longing for a good-enough man, not only served as a template for a fertile imagination and creative ability in thinking and in work, but also fueled [the boy's] omnipresent father hunger and his derivative interest in men. (p. 81)



Such observations have had profound significance in the literature in terms of broadening our understanding of the dimensional characteristics of surrogate role modeling, which may not always be a positive experience for a boy. They also provide fertile ground for consideration of the associative development of implicit leadership theories commensurate with fantasy, good-enough, and surrogate male relationships. For example, Dermott (2008) suggests a paradox between creation and construction with respect to the differences between the biological father figure and the social or surrogate role model, a point of view that might be extrapolated to examine leadership attributes as related to the son-father relationship.

**Attachment theory.** Attachment theory of infant and child development also provides useful tools with which to analyze the multivariant levels of mutual influence in the progression of the son-father relationship, and the question as to how relationality can affect the emergence of specific leadership qualities or abilities. Berson, Dan, and Yammarino (2006) explore the relationship between attachment theory and the development of one's perception of leadership.

They write:

According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979), people examine the behaviors of significant others with whom they interact by relying on mental models, called internal working models, of relationships. People form these models on the basis of early childhood experiences...we examined whether these attachment models were also related to individuals' perceptions of leaders. (p. 165)

Of course, the child's social network must also be taken into account (Keller, 1999; Lamb, 2004; Lewis, 1997; Lewis et al., 1981; Lewis & Weinraub, 1976). Even during play with a parent (Sluss & Stremmel, 2004), children are indelibly affected by parental interaction. Vygotsky and Cole (1978) coined the concept of a "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) to describe the process of cognitive development associated with an interaction with older peers and/or adults, including parent(s). According to Vygotsky and Cole's theory, knowledge is

constructed first on a social plain (interpsychological) and then internalized or appropriated (James, 1890; Natsoulas, 1998) on an individual level (intrapsychological) (Sluss & Stremmel, 2004). The zone of proximal development not only affects the acquisition of knowledge, but also has a profound effect on the construction of perceptions and values (Michie & Gooty, 2005; Shamir & Eilam, 2005), including those most associated with the development of implicit leadership theories. Clearly this construction of perceptions and values is also mediated by the feelings associated within the structure of the child's zone of proximal development. In this way, while interacting with others the child not only acquires knowledge, but also develops perceptions and values associated with the development of implicit leadership theories, according to associative feelings, and meaning making, within the ZPD structure. The father's effect in the child's ZPD is thus substantial given the father present experience.

**School-aged children.** Theories relevant to the question of early childhood development and its relationship to the emergence of leadership attributes are further elaborated on and applied in studies focused on school-aged children, a critical period when socialization begins to play a role on a new level. Lewis (1997) discusses some of what I consider the more comprehensive perspectives with respect to the father's role in child development at this age from a sociological standpoint. First, it is important to identify, distinguish, and clarify the differences between the psychological and the sociological approach to research on this topic. In doing so Lewis points out the two contradictory themes in fatherhood research of the 1970s, one from a psychological perspective, the other more sociological. He reminds us that while on the one hand research suggests that men have a significant influence on their children's development, on the other hand there exists an alternative theme in the literature that plays down the father's role in influencing their child's development. With respect to this dichotomy, it must

be noted that these statements are intended to address the effect and influence of father involvement, not the accessibility, consistency, and frequency of father involvement.

To add clarity to his point regarding the two perspectives, Lewis writes, “More often than not authors expressed two opinions simultaneously: that fathers provide an essential ingredient to the child’s psychological development, but to understand fathers we need to grasp that other factors are involved” (Lewis, 1997, p. 122). And, it is the examination and analysis of these other sociological factors, both direct factors and indirect factors, which have helped advance the research on the father’s role. This approach moves us away from the simple cause and effect relationship in the parent-child interaction.

Likewise, the father’s role in the socialization of the child is of significant importance to the overall development of the child’s social adaptability and skills. Lewis and Weinraub (1976) cite research that reveals different parental perspectives with regard to the general concerns of the early school age child. In discussing research conducted by Stolz (1966), they suggest that fathers are more likely to be concerned with their children’s education, moral values, personal values (Michie & Gooty, 2005), and physical safety, whereas mothers tend to be more concerned with their children’s emotional adjustment and freedom from anxiety. Moreover, fathers themselves are more likely to say that socialization agents other than the mother, such as schools and the media, are beneficial to the child. Parsons and Bales (1955) attribute such differentiated roles between the mother and the father as *instrumental* versus *expressive*, a distinction that Lewis and Weinraub (1976) elaborated as follows:

Though we believe that separation of these two modes—the expressive and the instrumental—along sex-role lines is unrealistic, there is some evidence to support the fact that, at least within the family, fathers play a more instrumental role, linking the child to the larger society outside the family, and mothers play a more expressive, nurturant role. (p. 169)

Such differentials may also play a very significant role with regard to sex-role adoption, considering the tendency for individuals to associate their perceptions of a child's personality or behavior characteristics with their perception of the parent(s) and his/her sex or gender-role. Often people are heard saying, "He acts just like his father" or, "She is just like her mother" (Cornish, 1999; Williams, 1991). With respect to the father-son relationship in this area, Biller (1981) helps us to understand sex-role development subsets:

Whereas sex role orientation is related to the individuals' views of themselves, sex role adoption pertains to the way in which individuals are perceived by other members in the society...The formation of a masculine sex role adoption, especially in the preschool years, is often related to imitation of the father. A young boy's masculinity is positively related to the degree to which his father is available and behaves in a masculine manner in his interaction with his family. (p. 324)

In terms of paternal influence on the sex-role development of preschoolers, Lewis (1997) reminds us that research that focuses on the effects of fathering styles on children's sex-role development has been underway for decades. Overall, however, the evidence seems clear that the sex-role development of school age boys is strongly influenced by the father's involvement, beginning during infancy and carried through as part of the boy's socialization and adaptation development.

Biller and Kimpton (1997) also recognize the social aspect of the child's cognitive development, noting that cognitive functioning cannot be isolated from other aspects of the child's development such as social and moral growth. With respect to the social aspects of cognitive development, and the father's influence on social and moral growth, the authors address what research reveals regarding father absence. For example, both for boys and girls, father absence (which they defined as two years of separation from father, though not necessarily consecutive) was related to relatively low ability in perceptual (motor and manipulative) spatial tasks. They also noted that the major disadvantage occurring with father absence for children is

lessened paternal attention, including fewer opportunities to model mature decision making and problem solving, a profound effect on a boy's sex-role development, and, by extension given the ties outlined above, the development of implicit leadership theories. They argue that during the elementary school years, daughters are less influenced by father absence than are sons.

Additionally, they point out a positive relationship between a son's occupational mobility during early adulthood and the father's support of physical-athletic development during childhood.

Although these studies undoubtedly illuminate the instrumental role played by the father (Lewis & Weinraub, 1976), it is important to note that they were conducted during an era prior to the 1990s when the hetero nuclear family norm was usually taken to be the norm, suggesting probable bias.

More recently, a range of studies have examined the effects of a combination of father involvement and social environment on the development of school-aged children. An exploratory study of a sub-sample of 1,334 families with children between the ages of 5 and 12 was conducted by McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Ho (2004) with the intent to examine the relationship between school, neighborhood, and family-level resources and children's academic achievement. More specifically, the goal of the study was to identify the role played by father involvement in mediating contextual influences on children's learning. This brings into focus the topic related to the indirect influence the father has on his school-aged son's expanding social network (Diamond, 2007; Keller, 1999; Lamb, 2004; Lewis, 1997; Lewis et al., 1981; Lewis & Weinraub, 1976). Among the findings of this study, the research revealed "a significant relationship between aspects of father involvement in their children's education and student achievement beyond that accounted for by mother involvement" (McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Ho, 2004, p. 201).

Although my research did not particularly engage interviewees who experience living with gay or lesbian parents it is nevertheless noteworthy to mention some recent research relevant to such environments. In research conducted by Patterson (1992), where assessments were conducted for possible differences between gay or lesbian parents, in contrast to heterosexual parents, it was concluded that there was no evidence, given comparable circumstances, of any significant compromise of the development of the children of the former parenting construct. In another study, drawn from parent questionnaires, child interviews, and focus groups to investigate school incidents experienced by children of lesbian and gay parents, Ray and Gregory (2001) found that students between the second and tenth grade expressed feelings of discrimination and frustration by their peers' lack of understanding about their families. Additionally, many of the students interviewed expressed feelings of being unsafe and a lack of confidence in their teacher's abilities to deal with homophobia. Clearly, more research is warranted on subjects related to this and other "non-traditional" family structures and environments.

**Adolescence.** While a case can be made regarding the distinction between early school-age children and adolescents, for the teenager, being a more independently thinking and socialized offspring, research suggests that the effects of father involvement during infancy and the child's school-age development continues to predicate the adolescent child's social development. This is the case for both the father present and father absent adolescent. Additionally, adolescent boys are distinctly influenced by the relationship they have with their fathers, with the quality of the relationship having no less effect on the boy's development than during infancy and the school-age years (Biller, 1976, 1981; Biller & Kimpton, 1997; Diamond,

2007; Katz, 2002; Ogletree, Jones, & Coyl, 2002; Osherson, 1995; Videon, 2005; Williams, 1991).

Diamond (2007) eloquently articulates the plight and complexities of the adolescent boy as follows: “Outrageous, conformist, turbulent, despairing, desperate, crazy, ecstatic—these words only begin to describe the breathtaking roller coaster of the emotionally intense, hormone-fueled teenage years” (p. 110). Diamond goes on to assert a foundation from which the teenage boy starts to deal with his changing mind, body, and emotion. He continues:

Boys are, moreover, faced with three essential tasks: to begin to formulate their own identities while incorporating all the changes they’re undergoing; to separate from their families, particularly from their fathers; and to begin to come to terms with their feelings of loss. (p. 111)

Working from a similar perspective as Diamond, Newberger (1999) points out, “It is important to keep in mind that as their sons are approaching or traversing adolescence, many fathers are experiencing what is called ‘midlife crisis,’ an awareness of their mortality and limitations, a questioning of their life goals” (p. 211). Undoubtedly, the insecure feelings of the father are reflected in how he begins to communicate and relate to the son, adding another layer to what the son has to deal with. However, with respect to a growing sense of independence on the part of adolescent boys, Biller (1976) points out the significance of an already established affectionate father-son relationship during the crucial time where a father begins to set limits on the adolescent son. The nurturant and rewarding father-son relationship at this time is closely associated with the boy’s attachment to his father and masculine development. Conversely, the highly punitive and non-nurturant relationships predisposes sons toward perceiving themselves as thinking and acting vastly different from their fathers while simultaneously showing little fondness for their fathers. In this manner, father absence thus continues to be relevant to the son’s overall development (Abramovitch, 1997; Biller, 1976; Biller & Kimpton, 1997; Bloom-

Feshbach, 1981; Burns, 1978; Diamond, 2007; Herzog, 2001; Lamb, 1976, 1981, 1997; Lewis, 1997; Lewis & Weinraub, 1976; Nash, 1976; Pleck, 2004; Pleck & Pleck, 1997; Roopnarine, 2004).

In their study of affectionate communication in father-son relationships, Floyd and Morman (2003) assert:

From those studies that have addressed men's affection toward adolescent or adult sons, at least three important findings have emerged. The first is that both fathers and sons value the expression of affection in their relationships...A second important finding was that fathers appeared to be more affectionate with their sons today than their own fathers had been to them...A third important finding is that fathers and sons tend to express their affection toward each other more through supportive activities. (p. 600)

Another issue addressed in much of the literature deals with the issue of sex-object preference in adolescent boys. Both Biller (1976) and Pollack (1998) address this issue in the context of the greater society's fears, prejudices, and anxieties toward homosexuality. Recent research findings suggest an evolving, accepting, and understanding of multiple factors associated with the father-son relationships and the homosexuality topic.

In a quantitative study designed to investigate the expression of affection in father-son relationships, Floyd (2001) reports results demonstrating that self-identified homosexual or bisexual men receive less verbal, nonverbal, and supportive affection from their fathers than do self-identified heterosexual men. Of course, it would be a mistake to infer causality from these correlational findings. In fact, it seems likely that many fathers are threatened by their sons' budding homosexuality and therefore withdraw their affectionate expression toward them.

**Young adults.** Further along on the path to adulthood, boys continue to experience changes in how they deal with family relationships, in particular with their fathers. Diamond (2007) proposes:



young men need to begin to create an autonomous life where they can experience themselves as adult men able to function independently, apart from their families. This entails two tasks: finding their place in the world (which includes creating a career direction); and forming intimate, lasting love relationships. Neither is easy. (p. 136)

And, both are affected by the young man's infant, school-age, and adolescent relationship with his father (Herzog, 2001; Ilardo, 1993; Newberger, 1999; Osherson, 1995; Pollack, 1998; Poulter, 2004).

Balcom (1998) eloquently points out a number of adverse effects due to "divorce, death, absences due to employment or military service, addictions, incarceration, and chronic physical or mental illness" (p. 285) that father abandonment has on a son's own attempts at having intimate relationships with his own mate and children. In his discussion of the therapeutic strategies that may assist men in resolving issues of grief and shame, Balcom points out that the abandoned son's feelings are generally typified by emotional reactivity, characterized by the statement, "I'll never be like him!" Likewise, many abandoned sons simply disavow the importance of their fathers. In either case, Balcom (1998) suggests that "Until the son acknowledges his unfulfilled needs and longing for his father, he can remain in turmoil about himself and his intimate relationships" (p. 283).

**Cultural and socioeconomic factors.** Considering the goal of my research is to examine the human nature of feelings, it is important to acknowledge that the onset of many human feelings and particularly the articulation of human feelings are influenced and experienced within the context of cultural and socioeconomic factors. As men and boys develop within the environment of a particular family structure, their developing emotions and feelings are affected by the cultural context and relationships of the family. Given this reality, it is appropriate to acknowledge the possibility of differences in how men and boys may articulate feelings about

what may seem on the surface to be very similar experiences based on varying cultural and/or socioeconomic factors.

In some of the earliest literature on the role of the father in child development there are a number of references with respect to the importance of taking into account cultural considerations and differences. Much of the focus is generally intended to either point out cultural social changes within mainstream Western society, that is, to contrast general differences with respect to family structure and practices, from the standards of Western Protestant norms, or, to use differences found among non-Western traditional practices as examples of “bad fathering” (Pleck & Pleck, 1997).

Whereas the focus of my study with respect to this sociocultural perspective is on culturally-specific practices that characterize the father-child relationship, in particular, the father-son relationship, in order to have an even deeper understanding of various issues related to the cultural influences that impact the father’s role in the development of children within American society, particularly with respect to families that have migrated from other countries (as well as with Native Americans), there are a number of other factors that need to be considered. Among these other factors are: a) the cultural influences of the father’s native country; b) the length of time the family has been in the United States; c) the conditions from which the family came to the United States; d) the socioeconomic status of the father and family in the United States; e) whether the children are born and socialized in the father’s native country, or in the United States itself; f) the father’s general expectations of U.S. society’s advantages and disadvantages; and, finally, g) the level of formal education for both the father and the mother (Leeder, 2004; Myers-Walls, Myers-Bowman, & Posada, 2006; Ricketts, 2007; Roopnarine & Gielen, 2005; Silverstein & Auerbach, 2005). These are just a few of the essential

considerations that need to be factored into our understanding and analysis of the various family patterns found in more recent U.S. households. Indeed, since 1990 there have been a number of articles written that seem to view cultural differences within American society with much more legitimacy (Biller & Kimpton, 1997; Connor & White, 2006; Lamb, 1997, 2004; Lewis, 1997; Pleck, 2004; Pleck & Pleck, 1997; Roopnarine, 2004).

Roopnarine (2004) sets the stage for reexamining how we evaluate father involvement from a multicultural perspective in his examination of father involvement in African American and African Caribbean fathers. Pointing out the doubtfulness of any singular characteristic being able to capture the ethos of both the African American and African Caribbean fathers' level of investment in the welfare of their families, Roopnarine suggests considerable variability in the family structure and context within which these men become fathers and develop a relationship with their children.

In their discussion on generative fathering, Allen and Connor (1997) offer:

*How African American men view their family experiences, what they are able or willing to do as family members, and even when they decide to do it are often directly affected by ethnicity. (p. 53)*

With respect to research methodology they point out two very distinctive conceptual errors to be avoided with respect to understanding the impact of ethnicity (Mirande, 1991). The errors they warn against are: ignoring the potential effects of ethnicity—thereby assuming that all fathers are alike and, conversely, assuming that ethnicity has the same effect on all members of a given ethnic group. Avoidance of such errors contributes to a higher level of research that is relevant and consistent with respect to representing the cross-section of family structures and functions in American culture. A number of other recent studies adhere to this approach to evaluating the father's role in the development of children in terms of accounting for cultural

differences in their analysis of the father-son relationship (Cabrera & Coll, 2004; Chow, 2007; Connor & White, 2006; Dumka, 2007; Shwalb, Nakawaza, Yamamoto, & Hyun, 2004). With respect to this approach, Connor and White (2006) discuss in some detail their perception that African American men are often shortchanged in most research on their involvement with their children. They write:

[A] more complete analysis of Black men will likely demonstrate that some of the men who were not involved with their children were not “deadbeat” per se, but were men bearing both psychological and physical scars—scars derived from daily interactions in an oppressive environment. The ugly remnants of these scars were passed on to their offsprings in terms of an emotional [and physical] distance between fathers and children. (p. 15)

Nonetheless, in my opinion, the children of non-involved and/or absent fathers suffer in the meantime. Children do not understand the historical antecedents and influences of their father’s condition. By the time the children are able to genuinely comprehend some of the historical and cultural factors that may contribute to the father’s parental neglect, the damage is done, in spite of later attempts to educate or enlighten the child on the historical and cultural factors. Connor and White (2006) went on to suggest that the true love and caring involvement of black men in the lives of their children is actually ignored by those outside of the African American community, or unduly measured against traditional concepts of father involvement, rendering their involvement inadequate and often non-existent. Dermott (2008) adds, “In focusing on the different kinds of fathering involvement, it has been argued that a more expansive definition is required as restricting men’s involvement with children to direct care is too narrow” (p. 23). Forste and Jarvis (2007) reveal that although research indicates that “black children are less likely to live with two biological parents than non-blacks” (p. 100), their fathers are more likely to remain in contact with them as compared to white nonresidential fathers.

Studies such as that of Forste and Jarvis (2007) bring to light the importance of not falling into the trap of overly focusing on the deadbeat dad. It is my contention that the nurturant and involved fathers of most cultures and ethnicities are not ignored or perceived as lesser. The father's effective influence is evident through their children, as suggested by the term "generative fathering" (Connor & White, 2006). Whereas indeed there is a lot of attention focused on the deadbeat dad in the literature, these authors and others are generally suggesting that there is not enough written on the "good" black father. I would argue, however, that one can find traces of "the good black father" in the scholarly literature on good fathering in general, although such studies regrettably do not explore important cultural considerations specific to African American fathers. Unfortunately, among those studies that do address African American fathers in terms of their cultural distinctions, it is all too often the case that this is within the greater general literature as examples of the "bad" father. Such essentializing categorizations are of little use, and in fact can be said to be harmful. I contend rather that there is no "good" black fathering, or "good" white fathering. Likewise, there is no "bad" black fathering—just good fathering and the absence of good fathering, and the literature is pretty clear in identifying the characteristics of both. Whereas certainly there are within this viewpoint of "good fathering and the absence of good fathering" cultural variations, it is important to avoid negative ethnic stereotypes typified by the language "bad fathering." Yet given the propensity to make cultural identifications along such categories as "good" and "bad" fathers, greater care should be taken to approach them equitably.

Similar to the Conner and White (2006) perspective, with respect to African American father involvement research, Cabrera and Coll (2004) discuss this issue as it relates to Latino father involvement. Referring to research conducted in the early 1990s, the authors point out that

there has been a growing recognition of the inherent problem of judging the parent-child relationship of Latino families against the standards of Euro-American models of family structure and function. Resulting from this growing awareness is a new view of Latino fathers and families. Replacing the extant perception of Latino fathers as machista-authoritarian, harsh, and overly disciplinarian, is a recognition of Latino men being more flexible, adaptable, and caring. They also point out that one of the barriers that Latino men must overcome is the negative stereotypes that surround them, as a residual of earlier research distortions of their true involvement with their family and children. Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2006) point out the problem of many immigrant fathers, experiencing a shift in family roles when arriving in this country, adding to other stressors such as: underemployment; unemployment; language barriers; shifts in identity roles; and barriers to services and information.

Overall, it is my belief that too often, research endeavors that seek to explain social/economic/cultural factors that affect father involvement direct attention away from what we know about the effects of a nurturant, caring, and actively involved father on the development of their children. If the focus were specifically on the development of the children, how would social/economic/cultural differences, with respect to father involvement, have any different effect on the social, psychological, and cognitive development of the children, in American culture? Surely, the social/economic/cultural segmentations in American society have an effect on family time and financial resources. Families with more lucrative financial access are better able to take advantage of other contributing resources that affect their child's social, emotional, and cognitive development (for example, better schools and social settings). Conversely, families with less financial resources are correspondently at a disadvantage, with respect to their access to contributing resources. In a discussion regarding the homogeneous

sample of 25 fathers in her study on “how men conceptualized their role as ‘worker’ and ‘father’ and the extent to which reality matched the theory” Dermott (2008) divulges,

The assumption here was not that creative parenting practices are limited to a particular family form but, because the push of economic necessity is often the reason that is given for adopting ‘traditional’ gendered forms of parenting, higher incomes levels might afford more possibilities. (pp. 3, 4)

Moreover, in their study on the effects of a father’s perception of his involvement, Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2006) resolve that the perception of fathering is in fact affected by income, race/ethnicity, age, education level, and marital status. Yet with respect to a father’s quality involvement and the effect it has on a child’s social, emotional, and cognitive development, research supports the fact that under any social/economic/cultural circumstance, children are positively influenced by fathers who are present, nurturant, supportive, engaged, and active with their children, particularly their sons (Cabrera & Coll, 2004; Chow, 2007; Connor & White, 2006; Forste & Jarvis, 2007; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004; Roopnarine, 2004).. Studies reveal that when fathers are not involved in a supportive and nurturing way in their children’s lives, regardless of the social/economic/cultural differences found in American society, their children suffer (Cabrera and Coll, 2004; Chow, 2007; Connor & White, 2006; Forste & Jarvis, 2007; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004; Roopnarine, 2004). Even with the growing trend of leadership programs for college youth, there is research that suggests a significant link between the perceived circumstances at home and with parent(s), and the student’s attitude and academic performance. For instance, Barling, Dupre, and Hepburn (1998) conducted a study of 134 college students and their parent(s) to evaluate the effect of parents’ job insecurities on their children’s attitudes and beliefs toward work. The authors cited other research that found that even at the young age of third and fourth graders, children are very observant of their parent’s reactions and emotions relevant to work. By this time in their lives, the children know where

their parent(s) work, what they do, and perceive what their parent(s)' job satisfaction is (Abramovitch & Johnson, 1992; Kelloway & Watts, 1994; Piotrkowski & Stark, 1987). Consistent with the findings of other research (Kelloway, Barling, & Agar, 1996; Steele & Barling, 1996), they found that, particularly when students identified more strongly with their fathers, there was profound evidence suggesting conditions that moderate the relationship between perceptions of parents' job security and the students' work beliefs.

In a parallel study, Barling and Mendelson (1999) examined how students' academic performance in college was affected by perceptions of their parents' job insecurity. Likewise, the findings of this study supported the notion that students are adversely affected by perceptions of parents' job insecurities, mediated by beliefs in an unjust world and negative moods. In both of these studies (Barling et al., 1998; Barling & Mendelson, 1999) there are clear associations established between the child's external experiences and the effects mediated in the meaning making (Kegan, 1982) of these experiences. What is not clear is the structure of the meaning making itself, and the role parents play in constructing such a structure.

In summary, while the interview questioning and analysis may be considered culturally neutral, there are a number of cultural and socioeconomic factors that are naturally embedded in the feelings and articulation of those feelings of the interview participants. For example, we examined a number of factors identified as present in family structures in which the United States is not the native country of the paternal family. We pointed out errors to avoid with respect to considering cultural and ethnic family differences. Additionally, we delved into the range of socioeconomic situations present among the respondents when analyzing the interview data. Collectively, consideration of this range of factors is critical to the identification of variations in data interpretation. The important thing for me is to be particularly attentive to how



the participants express their feelings—feelings that I believe can be construed in this context as culturally and socioeconomically neutral.

**Alternative perspectives.** Notwithstanding the overwhelming empirical research supporting the conclusions regarding the significant influence and role played by fathers on the psychological, sociological, cognitive, sex-role, and leadership development of their children, there are some who refute such notions on various levels. Rowe (1990) emphatically asserts the position that after 100 years of behavioral genetic research, there is little factual support for the “common sense” proposition that child-rearing styles and family environment are formative of personality traits. He posits:

Nonintellectual traits seem to be determined instead by genetic influences and by relatively specific environmental influences, most of which are not particularly tied to the family or parental treatment. Intellectual traits show modest family environmental influence, but that influence may diminish in importance after childhood. (p. 606)

With similar tone, Herrnstein and Murray (1994) and Pinker (2002) question various issues related to the nature vs. nurture influence on children, particularly with respect to intelligence and cognitive development, referring to genetic influences as being the primary determinate of personality and cognitive characteristics in children. It is their position that parental involvement has minimal influence on personal and cognitive development. These positions run somewhat contrary to the prevailing literature tying parental influence of the father, as well as the mother, to the development of their children on a number of levels, including their personality and cognitive development. Surely, there are genetic influences involved; however, there is significant evidence supporting the influence of the child’s social network, particularly the direct and indirect influence of the child’s immediate family.

It is important to note that several studies in the past 10-15 years have re-addressed the nature versus nurture debate. Recent studies have argued for the existence of a more integrative process in cognitive and emotional development. According to Tucker-Drob (2011),

Recent research in behavioral genetics has found evidence for a Gene  $\times$  Environment interaction on cognitive ability: Individual differences in cognitive ability among children raised in socioeconomically advantaged homes are primarily due to genes, whereas environmental factors are more influential for children from disadvantaged homes. (p. 125)

In another study, Tucker-Drob and Harden (2012) share, “Parenting is traditionally conceptualized as an exogenous environment that affects child development. However, children can also influence the quality of parenting that they receive” (p. 252). They add that

Genetic and environmental factors differentially contributed to these effects. Parenting influenced subsequent cognitive development through a family-level environmental pathway, whereas children’s cognitive ability influenced subsequent parenting through a genetic pathway. These results [of their research] suggest that genetic influences on cognitive development occur through a transactional process, in which genetic predispositions lead children to evoke cognitively stimulating experiences from their environments. (p. 254)

This line of research thus presents evidence for the need to consider new perspectives on the nature versus nature debate that depart from the traditional dichotomous understanding human development.

**Leadership development in youth.** In his broad range discussion on human development and leadership, Gardner (1995) outlines a meticulously articulated perspective regarding the process of leadership development. According to Gardner, leadership is a process that occurs within the minds of individuals who live in a culture. He points out the significance of the capacity to create, understand, and evaluate the stories that mediate the process of leadership development in the minds of individuals. This point is a strong feature in the work of Shamir and Eilam (2005), who are emphatic in their argument that authentic leadership

development is directly influenced by storytelling, for both the leaders and followers, on an aesthetic as well as practical level. They elaborate extensively on the research implications of storytelling and authentic leadership development, including the cross-cultural generalizability of this concept.

In as much as leadership development in boys is directly influenced by what they experience, and the meaning made of the son-father relationship experience, a comprehensive overview of the leading theories and perspectives on various topics related to leadership styles and practices provides an excellent segue into a more focused attention and review of leadership literature specific to leadership development in youth. With respect to the phenomenal son-father relationship experience, it is actually the emotionally activated meaning of the father-self that accentuates authentic leadership development (Michie & Gooty, 2005). The students in the Steen, Kachorek, and Peterson (2002) study are essentially divulging a collected set of implicit leadership theories, developed during the early stages of life and experience (Ayman-Nolly & Ayman, 2005) related to one's meaning of self.

**The father's role in leadership development.** In this section I extend the review of leadership literature to include research specifically relevant to the father's role in leadership development, beyond my introduction of the topic in Chapter I, and more targeted than my review in the section above. The work of Burns (1978) is the perfect place to start, particularly his discussion of the psychological matrix and the social sources of leadership. Burns (1978) points out that the father's role in developing self-esteem in his son, and the reciprocal interaction and effect of the son-father relationship experience, contributes ultimately to how self-esteem is reflected in the boy's leadership development (p. 98). Here, Burns strongly implies

a process, beginning with the boy's sex-role development, that has an effect on his self-esteem, which in turn functions as the basis of leadership development.

An exploratory study conducted by Bronfenbrenner (1961) reported a significant relationship between parental and adolescent behavior, along sex roles, and the child's responsibility and leadership as rated by high school teachers. He also reported that leadership is more likely in families where fathers are more highly educated, and in which both parents are less rejecting, punitive, and less overprotective (Zacharatos, Barling, & Kelloway, 2000). It is important to keep in mind, however, that because the Bronfenbrenner study dates back to the early 1960s and given the many changes in gender roles since that era, including the (greater, but hardly widespread) acceptance of homosexuality, much of the thinking in this study could be considered as outdated.

**Implications.** Certainly, there are a number of implications deriving from this very brief summary of the literature regarding male development and the role played by fathers. I am immensely interested in one in particular, which pertains to looking at the subject from a different analytical lens. Of the literature I have reviewed, a significant number of the authors have suggested essential flaws in the research design and/or data gathering. Many speak of limited access to the father's account of the relationship with their children, resulting in research findings being primarily based on the account of the mother of the children and the children themselves. With respect to personality research conducted with an overemphasis on empirical methodologies, Shontz (1965) offers, "personality research inherently requires solutions to methodological problems that are in some ways unique" (p. viii). Furthermore, he adds "Theoretical problems are often ill-suited to empirical methods, and meaningful questions are often attached in scientifically meaningless ways" (p. 3).

In my view, research that is able to access data from all parties would assist in the reliability and validity of research findings, including the depth and breadth of understanding derived. Additionally, I believe that many of the interpretations derived from these studies require reevaluation in the postmodern context. Thus, for example, Biller's (1976) research findings regarding homosexuality as being primarily influenced by a negative father-son relationship is clearly outdated and thus requires revisions in line with more recent research findings (Gottlieb, 2003; Patterson, 2004; Snow, 2004). For example, Dermott (2008) asserts, "Increasing acknowledgement of gay fatherhood...is important because it not only presents an additional challenge to the actuality of having two biological parents as carers, but it does so publicly" (p. 14).

### **Fathers and Sons: A Qualitative Review on Feelings**

Balcom's (1998) descriptive applied research article on the absent father's effect on abandoned sons serves to illuminate and establish a grounded foundation from which to stage further discussion. After a brief discussion of the social context of father abandonment, as mentioned above, Balcom highlights the adverse effects abandonment can have on the son's intimate relationships. Krampe and Newton (2006) suggest the importance of the father's experience as a son, as such reflections and memories are invariably influential in their relationship with their spouse and children. Balcom continues on to discuss therapeutic strategies that may assist men in resolving issues of grief and shame. My primary interests in this article, as it relates to feelings, center on issues of self-esteem, emotion, communication, perception, and self-consciousness. Furthermore, Balcom's acknowledgment of the role unacknowledged feelings can play in a son's emotional development is of significant relevance to the concept of feelings utilized in my study.

In a very brief but succinctly relevant autobiographic case study on father-son mutual respect, Campbell (2005) discusses some of the dynamics of the relationship in the self-perceptual context of success. During a camping and hiking trip, “deep in the forests of the Pacific Northwest” under the tutelage of his twenty-five-year-old son, Campbell found himself pondering on various notions of mutual respect between fathers and sons. He writes, “A son who in his own mind never matches his father’s performance is vulnerable to a life that feels incomplete, unfulfilled, and unsatisfying, no matter how much he, the son, objectively accomplishes” (p. 24). In this article the author brings to the conversation the element of value (Michie & Gooty, 2005; Shamir & Eilam, 2005), asserting that the perception of success in the son’s mind is dependent upon his perception of what the father values. “If the father values only money, the son’s only avenue to success is to make more of it than did the father” (p. 24). He adds that if this is not accomplished, the son, “is doomed to a perpetual feeling of personal insufficiency” (p. 24). While this is obviously a sweeping generalization, the implications, particularly in light of the study on abandoned sons, can be profound.

Floyd and Morman (2003) remind us that, “Far fewer studies have addressed men’s affection with adolescent sons” (p. 600). Wyatt (2005) adds to our understanding about the loss of a father in his autoethnographic case study chronicling his reflections on his relationship with his father both during his father’s life and after his death. He began documenting his thoughts almost a year after his father’s death. His opening words are:

It is on days like today, in summer, that I remember him most: tanning himself in the harsh sun or swimming in the sea, so far out that I could glimpse him only between the waves; or as now, when the evening draws in, holding his whisky-half scotch, half water. The nectar of the gods, as he would say. (p. 724)

Reflexivity, perception, memory, affection, and resolution are all embedded in the words of the author, as he opens the reflective door to his feelings, both past and present. In the final

words of this writing the author shares, “My teenage son is in the room above me—I can hear his tapping at the computer keyboard and the beat of his music—and my twelve-year-old daughter sings as she skips up the stairs and slams her door” (Wyatt, 2005, p. 725). With his initial words, the author invites the reader into the reflective visualization of a time filled with fondness and appreciation of his father’s protective presence and shared humor. With his final words, the author “fast-forwards” the reader into the reality of his current protective post as a father (Diamond, 2007), who in turn reflects the present, bound in an inevitable surrender to the future. With these words the author closes the loop, acknowledging that the feelings associated with his relationship with his father not only affect the past and present, but the future as well. The next six pages of his story are more narrative memories accounting for the author’s relationship with his father. Finally, the author again puts it all in perspective in terms of the lasting phenomenon of life; past, present, and future. He closes:

The story is finished, compressed into a few pages. I have worried over it, dreamed it, loved and hated it, and feel sad that it is done. The writing of it meant living it again. I imagine that there will come a time when I shall want to stop writing about my father, and I sense that I may be nearing that point, but for now, I am reluctant; because to stop narrating stories is to cease being alive and I don’t want him, or me, to die yet. In an hour or so the house will begin to awaken. The drone of a heavy metal soundtrack will filter through the ceiling; there will be footsteps on the stairs, followed by requests for money, friends, transport, or time. I cannot wait. (Wyatt, 2005, pp. 731-732)

This story also helps to illuminate the power of narrative, in addition to other data gathering techniques, in a comprehensive analysis of a phenomenon, particularly one that is both nebulous and material.

I have chosen to quote Wyatt’s work so extensively in order to illustrate the goals I hope to achieve in my own phenomenological research design with respect to unveiling the depth of feelings sons’ express and/or exemplify about their relationships with their father, both in the past and in the present. This literature review contributed to the development of my research

design as it enabled me to focus in on my own specific theoretical perspective on what is actually occurring in the son-father relationship experiences I encountered during the interview process. The range of literature summarized was intended to give the reader a sense of the level of social, cultural, and psychological factors that come into play in this complex yet essential relationship. As outlined in Chapter I, for the purposes of this study I will approach my topic from phenomenological perspective in order to explore how sons recount how their relationship with their father felt/feels, and how these *feelings* shape their relationship with others, including their own children. Additionally, I then consider the relationship between these feelings and the construction of implicit leadership theories, the antecedent of leadership development.



## **Chapter III: Methodology**

### **The Exploratory Nature of This Study**

Because the questions of how the son-father relationship experience feels like have scarcely been addressed before in the current literature on the subject of father-son relationships, I searched for a methodology that would allow for ample space to explore my research question without imposing too many restrictions on the research process. I thus sought a means to probe the subject without being hindered by rigid research instruments, and to develop insight accumulatively. I looked for a methodology sensitive enough to allow for collecting in-depth information about feelings, while providing space for participants to search for reflective words and meaning. I ultimately determined to utilize, for the purposes of this study, principles of grounded theory for findings emerging from the data, extension of judgment, and interpretation in light of theoretical implications.

### **The Convergent Interviewing Method**

Rao and Perry (2003) describe and justify the convergent interviewing method in their research “as a useful inductive, qualitative method to investigate under-researched areas” (p. 236). They elaborate by proposing,

Convergent interviewing is an in-depth interview technique with a structured data analysis process—a technique used to collect, analyze and interpret qualitative information about a person’s knowledge, opinions, experiences, attitudes and beliefs through using a number of interviews which converge on important issues. (p. 237)

As it is described here, this interviewing technique appropriately aligns with the objective of understanding the experiences, feelings, meaning making, attitudes, and behaviors related to the son-father relationship. The authors explain,

Essentially, convergent interviewing is a series of in-depth interviews with experts [sons] that allow the researcher to refine the questions after each interview, to converge on the issues in a topic area [such as father-absence, sex-role development, or father-son

affection]...The flexibility of convergent interviewing arises out of this continuous refinement of content and process (Rao & Perry, 2003, p. 237)

**The interview protocol.** The foundation of my interview protocol is built upon the theory-based questions (Wengraf, 2001) described earlier, and supported by relevant literature and theories on human development, the role played by men in child development, emotions, and leadership development, which provide the grounding philosophical perspective from which to guide and analyze the interviewing process.

**Sample size and method.** My approach with each interviewee was to allow enough space, flexibility, and personal reflection for the emergence of content that was not only rich, with respect to its meaning to the participant, but relevant to the research questions. One of the goals was for each participant's account of the son-father relationship experience be purely perspective, considering that the scope of the son-father relationship experience in this study is defined as characteristically multi-dimensional; meaning it covers all constructs of the experience including absent-father, surrogate-father (including women), present-father, fantasy-father, nurturing-father, abusive-father, etc.. The selection of each set of participants reflected this goal of multi-dimensional perspectives and richness.

The selection of the interviewees came from a purposeful sample of high school and college (including community college) students, and young fathers from various family structures. I interviewed individuals who represented a cross-section of leadership qualities. My search resulted in my interview of 14 boys and men between 18 and 45 years of age. I had a relative cross section of interviewees in terms of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic background. The final number of interviewees was largely dependent upon when there seemed to be a

saturation and agreement of emergent themes.<sup>2</sup> As suggested, some of the interviewees were chosen based on demonstrable qualities of leadership involvement (i.e., member of the school student council or athletic team). Others were chosen based on less obvious leadership qualities as articulated through their level of household responsibility; for example, the eldest sibling in a single mother household is often required to take care of younger siblings or manage the household while the mother is at work. I also interviewed a mixture of interviewees with respect to their perceived relationship with a father figure in their lives (i.e., fatherless, involved fathers, surrogate fathers, and male mentors). The 14 interviews were conducted in three waves.

After each wave of interviews, I shared the results of the data analysis of the interviews. As previously mentioned, each of the interviews conducted for this study was analyzed using a modified grounded theory methodology, explained further below. My initial set of interviewees consisted of 5 individuals (4 adults and 1 teen). As desired, they represented a cross-section demographically in terms of being financially and ethnically diverse.

Before selecting participants for my second wave of interviews I conducted my analysis of the initial interviews. This provided me with the basis for evaluating not only the need for additional interviews, but a grounded approach for targeting specific topics to explore more deeply. My analysis of the first wave of interviews resulted in a second wave of interviews that consisted of 5 more participants (3 adults and 2 teens). In this wave, along with financial, social, and ethnic diversity, consideration was given to the generative family history, alternative family structure, and masculinity issues. After the thematic analysis and tabulation and categorization of the second wave of interviews, I began preparation of a final wave of participants to interview, which consisted of 4 more participants. Two of these participants were from the second wave,

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, saturation is intended to denote the fact that as the interview process continued, I began to record responses that were the same or similar from several respondents, which I construe as validating the consistency and relevance of the findings in these areas.

and initially declined and cited the need to think more about their participation (2 adults and 2 teens).

To identify potential interviewees, I approached churches, schools, community organizations and sports clubs for volunteers who expressed an interest and willingness to be interviewed and reflect upon their phenomenal son-father relationship experience. The goal of the interviews is to explore the various feelings and emotions that are expressed when the interviewees reflect upon various relationship experiences involving the phenomenal son-father relationship, and how these feelings and emotions seemingly affect their perception of their own leadership qualities. In consideration of the multi-dimensional characteristics of the son-father relationship experience, the interviewees do not have to have lived with their own fathers growing up. The initial interview with each participant was not longer than two hours. Some interviewees were asked for a second interview for elaboration and/or clarification on a particular theme. Second interviews were limited to no more than one hour per interview. The number of subsequent interviews conducted depended largely on the level of agreement with respect to convergent themes.

**The interviews.** I conducted all interviews. The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and were transcribed by a professional transcription service. I made personal contact with all interviewees to pre-arrange the interview place, time, and setting. Each interviewee was informed of the time limits of the interview and was asked about their concerns. I made every effort to establish a rapport of support and trust with each interviewee, with a brief explanation of the purpose of the research. All interviewees were informed of the confidentiality of the interviews and were asked for permission to record the interviews. Each was also be given an informed consent as well as an Institutional Review Board (IRB) form to read and sign.

**Interview questions.** I started each of the initial interviews with the following introductory statement:

The purpose of this interview is to explore your feelings and ideas related to the father-son relationship, based primarily on your experiences as a son (and now father) and afterthoughts related to who you are today.

Following this introductory statement and my address of any questions the interviewee may have at this point, I segmented open-ended questions based on the general topics of relationship, feelings, and leadership. Example interview questions on the topic of relationship, particularly with respect to perspective, behavior, personality, identity, and conflict resolution, include:

1. How would you describe the son-father relationship?
2. Describe how the son-father relationship differs from any other relationship?
3. Describe a disappointing experience you have had related to the son-father relationship.
4. What might your father's life have been like if you were not his son?
5. How would you define the purpose of the son-father relationship?
6. What is a father's responsibility in the son-father relationship? The son's responsibility?

Sample interview questions on the topic of feelings, particularly with respect to affection, awareness, reflection, and emotion, include:

1. Describe the attention you received from your father.
2. Explain how you felt when you first noticed your father's attention.
3. Describe how the son-father relationship feels.
4. Describe the attention you gave to your father during your life.
5. How would you describe your father's affection toward you? Your affection toward your father?

6. What might your life have been like if you were not your father's son?
7. Explain how you feel your father would describe his affection toward you. How would your father describe your affection toward him?
8. In what ways are you like your father?
9. Describe what it feels like to be your father's son.

Finally, sample interview questions on the topic of leadership focused on style, behavior, perception, and type, among other themes, include:

1. How would you describe a leader? Who is an example? Why?
2. With respect to leadership characteristics, how would you describe your father? How do you feel your father would describe himself?
3. With respect to leadership qualities, how do you feel your father would describe you? How would you describe you?
4. Describe an example of your father's leadership. Of your leadership.
5. Describe how you feel others view your leadership style.

**Setting.** The interviews were conducted in a myriad of different settings and circumstances, all dependent on the comfort of the individual participant. For instance, my interview with Timothy, the adult “street hustler,” was conducted at a gasoline filling station, sitting on the curb where he hangs out during the day, soliciting money from patrons. Chris was interviewed in the office of his school counselor, who helped arrange our meeting. The more “professional” interviewees, such as Mike, Chuck, and Alvero, were interviewed in their office settings.

**Ethics.** Particular attention was given throughout the research process to upholding the highest level of ethical responsibility. Much of the consideration of ethics was outlined in my

Antioch University approved Institutional Review Board (IRB) application. All the interviews were conducted within the approved time frame specified in the IRB approval. Some of the ethical issues addressed and conformed to are as follows:

- All interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. All transcriptions will be shared with the interviewees.
- Each of the interview participants were provided with the following declaration:  
“There is very little risk to you for participating in this study. The recorded interviews may uncover some experiences that are emotionally uncomfortable. I will be very careful with respect to your feelings during our conversation. I will also make available a referral list of therapist that can offer services, if you or your parent(s) and/or guardian(s) feel it is necessary. I will stop the conversation at anytime at your request. Participation in this study will be very beneficial in helping the researcher understand how the relationship between father figures and young men can actually lead to leadership development. This information could be used to help families, particularly fathers, understand how to be a positive influence for their children. There is no financial gain involved for me or any others involved in reviewing the results of this research.”  
  
“The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only I, the researcher, will have access to the records. I will be the only person who will have access to the recorded interviews.”
- An informed consent form was completed and emailed to each participant.

**Data analysis.** I employed a variant of grounded theory methodology for data analysis.

In their discussion of the analytical tools used for grounded theory Strauss and Corbin (1998)

summarize the following list, which identifies the purpose of these tools:

to steer a researcher's thinking away from the confines of both the technical literature and personal experience; b) to avoid standard ways of thinking about phenomena; c) to stimulate the inductive process; d) to focus on what is in the data, and do not take anything for granted; e) to allow for clarification or debunking of assumptions made by those being studied; f) to listen to what people are saying and doing; g) to avoid rushing past "diamonds in the rough" when examining data; h) to force the asking of questions and the giving of provisional answers; i) to allow fruitful labeling of concepts, although provisionally; and, j) to discover properties and dimensions of categories. (p. 89)

In the opening chapter of *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*, Charmaz (2006) provides a useful definition for how to use grounded theory guidelines:

Like any container into which different content can be poured, researchers can use basic grounded theory guidelines such as coding, memo-writing, and sampling for theory development, and comparative methods are, in many ways, neutral. Grounded theory guidelines describe the steps of the research process and provide a path through it. Researchers can adopt and adapt them to conduct diverse studies. (p. 9)

Charmaz goes on to write, "Grounded theory methods can complement other approaches to qualitative data analysis, rather than stand in opposition to them" (p. 9). For my dissertation studies, I am interested in understanding the flexibilities of constructivist grounded theory and its applicability for illuminating the phenomenology of lived experiences, with particular attention to meaning making. Additionally, employing grounded theory in this manner appropriately complements the convergent interviewing methodology.

While I find Charmaz's (2006) section on axial coding somewhat complicated, where she offers a number of fractured comparisons between her approach and the approach outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), she makes a very clear statement about the basic idea from the outset.



With reference to Creswell (1998) she writes, “axial coding follows the development of a major category, although it may be in an early stage of development. The purposes of axial coding are to sort, synthesize, and organize large amounts of data and reassemble them in new ways after open coding” (p. 60). Additionally, under the general section of coding she illuminates an enlightening account for reducing problems in coding with a discussion on “wrestling with preconceptions” (p. 67). Charmaz warns against common sense theorizing. “Preconceptions that emanate from such standpoints as class, race, gender, age, embodiment, and historical era may permeate an analysis without the researcher’s awareness....Every researcher holds preconceptions that [have an] influence” (p. 67). I find this point particularly significant considering the reality that generally all research starts with a researcher’s hunch; a hunch that is in all practicality embedded to some degree within the researcher’s preconceptions about a phenomenon of interest to them. As I ponder my own dissertation ideas I am aware of the need to monitor my less than obvious preconceptions.

Continuing her self-described “journey” through the process of grounded theory research, Charmaz (2006) offers an equally useful chapter on memo-writing, which she defines as “the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” (p. 72), and then subsequently theoretical sampling, saturation, sorting, reconstructing theory in grounded theory studies, writing the draft, and reflecting on the research process.

The audio recording of each interview was submitted to an independent transcriber who returned a completed transcript of the interview. I then read through each transcription while listening to the audio to confirm the accuracy of the transcription. I then listened to the audio recordings a second time, making notes on the transcription based on notes taken during the initial interview of such things as facial expressions, body language, hand gestures, and overall

non-verbal communication that transpired during the interview. At this point, I started the two phases of grounded theory coding, the “initial phase” including relevant “in vivo coding,” and the “focus phase” described by Charmaz (2006). She explains:

During initial coding we study fragments of data—words, lines, segments, and incidents—closely for their analytic import. From time-to-time, we may adopt our participants’ telling terms as in vivo codes. While engaging in focused coding, we select what seems to be the most useful initial codes and test them against extensive data. Throughout the process, we compare data with data and then data with code. (p. 42)

With respect to this analytical approach, I began dissecting the data as a “process of discovering what the data are about” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). Although the foundation of my interview protocol is built upon a set of pre-determined theory-based questions that establish the general analytic categories: a) father/son relationship; b) feelings/emotions; and, c) leadership, the detailed analysis of the initial interview data, and subsequent coding, is derived from the specific text and nature of each interview, which can be seen as a slight departure from grounded theory in the sense that I developed my questions on the foundation of this theoretical lens. Nevertheless, the line-by-line initial coding approach was for the coding to be provisional, and “remain open to other analytic possibilities” (p. 48). Specific meaning of the participant’s views and actions were excavated by using in vivo coding in line with Charmaz’s (2006) view that “in vivo codes serve as symbolic markers of participants’ speech and meaning” (p. 55). Each of the participants was very passionate about their experiences, lending in vivo coding specifically appropriate for much of the data analysis.

After my initial coding of the first wave interviews, I hosted two four-hour focus group sessions with five members of APADS (Association of Pan African Doctoral Scholars) to review, discuss, and make recommendations about the interviews and my initial coding. One additional three-hour focus group session was held after the second wave of interviews and focus

coding. APADS is a support group in Los Angeles that fosters and provides mentoring support for Pan African students and scholars. The five-member discussion group was composed of two doctoral degree mentors and three doctoral students. In the first four-hour session we focused our discussion on the text of the interviews. The purpose of this session was to gain a collective sense of what the data suggested with respect to the general analytic categories mentioned above. During the second four-hour session, held a week after the first focus group session, I shared my adjusted line-by-line initial coding with the group for their review, analysis, and input. This exercise was very instrumental in helping me to maintain a broad perspective on the data and coding. Moreover, it ensured that the initial codes remained grounded in the data. The coding of the initial interviews and consequent identification of a number of striking themes laid the foundation for a greater level of focus in my subsequent coding and an opportunity for analysis that was tested against not only the initial interviews, but all subsequent interviews.

As described by Charmaz (2006), “Focus coding means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sort through large amounts of data” (p. 57). This process required me to go back and forth over my data and the initial coding over and over, to allow myself greater depth and understanding of the intra-relationship between the data and the initial coding of the data, while also taking into account feedback from the two focus group sessions. Moreover, “Focus coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely” (p. 57). The initial coding and focus group sessions thus helped to reveal what additional data would be required from my second and third wave of interviews. I was also very cognizant of much of the focus coding revealing more than one, and sometimes as much as three, different but related thematic strands. For example, in several instances a thread of conversation with a participant was associated with “father

fantasy/hunger” and “expressions of emotions,” or, “son assumes father’s traits/qualities/values” and “father accessibility.”

**Initial interviews.** The initial interviews consisted of five participants who represented a cross-section of diverse demographic characteristics in accordance with the approached outlined above. These initial interviews were coded and analyzed for emerging themes. The initial interview samples were used to assist in determining the direction of future interviews and the consideration of the saturation of themes. Conceptually, these initial interviews provided the grounding for both the demographic and thematic constructs for future interviews. The demographic profiles considered for the initial participants were based on age, pre-adolescent family structure, adolescent family structure, current family structure, current socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and apparent leadership qualities. The specific profiles of these initial participants are as follows:

- 1.) adult upper-income African American without child; single; heterosexual; grew up (first born) with father/mother in a middle-income home. [Lawrence]
- 2.) adult upper-income white with children; married; two-income; heterosexual; grew up with father/mother in a working class home. [Mike]
- 3.) teenage underserved Latino; oldest child at home; part-time stepfather; no relationship with biological father. [Chris]
- 4.) adult, upper-income African American without child; two-income gay (living with partner); grew up with father/mother in an upper-income home. [Chuck]
- 5.) adult, underserved (street hustler) African American without child; physically challenged; from age 3- 8 lived in foster care; never knew his father; mother died at the age of 3; from age 8 lived with aunt’s family. [Timothy]

Resulting from the analysis of the interviews was a varied assortment of themes relevant to much of the literature discussed in Chapter II. The interviews were read and analyzed line-by-line for specific thematic content and coded accordingly. The aggregate collection of themes were then tabulated and labeled according to the categories of this study: a) father/son relationship; b) feelings; and, c) leadership. Drawing from the first wave findings, and following the format of theoretical sampling, I selected a second batch.

**Second wave of interviews.** The second wave of interviews consisted of five more participants, representing a cross-section of diverse demographic characteristics that were in accordance with the approach outlined above, with significant consideration of new demographic and thematic saturation objectives constructed subsequent to the thematic analysis, tabulations, and categorization of the initial five interviews. Additional consideration was given to the generative family history, alternative family structure, and masculinity issues in the selection of interview participants. The realization of the intended profile depended on my ability to find willing participants. The specific profiles of this wave of participants are as follows:

- 1.) Adult middle-income Latino with child; married; heterosexual; grew up (second child, first boy) with father/mother in a middle-income home; father grew up without his father; knows very little about his father's relationship with the grandfather [Alvero]
- 2.) Teenage middle-income white without children; single; gay; grew up and still lives with a traditional middle-income family; father grew up in a traditional middle-to-upper income family, with positive relationship with his own father (the grandfather of the participant). [David]

- 3.) Teenage lower-middle-income African American who lives with a single father and younger sister; mother deceased seven years ago; prior to mother's death, traditional family structure; father grew up most of his early life without any contact with his father; father met his father as a late teenager, but never established a relationship. Father was the oldest of three siblings. [Daryl]
- 4.) Adult low-income Latino with three children (two are boys, including the oldest); day laborer; spouse does domestic work; slight physical challenge, but able to manage almost normally; grew up in Latin America with poor father/mother. [Edward]
- 5.) Adult low-income African American with infant female child; child being taken care of by the maternal grandmother; the biological mother is incarcerated (should be released in less than two years); participant spends considerable time with daughter; has a very supportive extended family assisting; participant grew up in a single mother home with no contact with his own father at all; he is the second child, only male. [Andrew]

Potential interview participants were simply asked questions about these issues in consideration of proceeding to be interviewed. Because I was so particular about the criteria for this sample of participants it was considerably challenging to assemble this mix of interviewees. This group was initially much more reluctant than the initial five participants. After the interviews I asked the participants about their initial reluctance, and the primary reason given was attributed to the vetting questions I had asked them. For my initial set of interviews there were very little vetting questions from me, and the participants were very accepting and partially excited about participating in research that allowed them to talk about their ideas related to the role of men and son-father relationship experiences. Yet among this second wave of participants,

while their initial reactions were as cooperative as the initial five participants, the vetting process sometimes tempered the enthusiasm of some.

To get to this group of five second wave participants I went through a process of approaching 18 individuals. From among the 18 individuals I approached and engaged in a dialogue about the research, 6 were not interested at all. Of the remaining 12 potential participants, 4 were lost for various reasons, particularly because I eliminated them through the vetting questions. Of the remaining 8 potential participants, who I felt met all the criteria I had established, 3 eliminated themselves, primarily stating that they were a little uncomfortable with the questions being asked during the vetting. This is in contrast to only having one individual decline, expressing disinterest, for my initial five interviews, where there was essentially no vetting process.

As in the initial interviews, the text was read and analyzed line-by-line for specific thematic content and coded accordingly. The coding of each of these interviews, as described above, was focused, allowing me again to use the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through the data. The aggregate collection of themes was then tabulated and labeled according to the categories of this study: a) father/son relationship; b) feelings; and, c) leadership.

**Third wave of interviews.** The third and final wave of interviews consisted of 4 additional participants, totaling a final number of 19 interviews. The objectives for the selection of these participants followed the criteria outlined throughout this chapter. Two of the potential participants from the second wave who had initially declined agreed to be interviewed, citing the need to think more about their participation. Two additional participants made up the final count. The specific profiles of this wave of participants are as follows:

- 1.) Teenage low-income white without child; single; heterosexual; lives with single mother; spends much of his time on the street; no relationship with his father; not a very close family; second child, with an older sister, who also spends much of her time on the street. [Gregory]
- 2.) Adult low-income white with children who he does not live with and rarely sees; gay; grew up in what he calls a very dysfunctional family setting; very little relationship with his father, who he described as abusive; describes mother as having been an alcoholic; expressed that his father had a very volatile relationship with his mother; one of the participants that declined to be interviewed during the second wave. [Paul]
- 3.) Teenage middle-income Asian who lives in a traditional two-parent, two-income household; describes relationship with father as very good; states father's relationship with his father is very good. Middle child of three; siblings are girls. [Eric]
- 4.) Adult upper-income Asian with single child, a boy; married; single income; grew up in a traditional two-family household; one of the participants that declined to be interviewed during the second wave. [Danny]

This wave of interviews represented the final generation of thematic diversity and saturation. After the four interviews conducted during this wave I was particularly convinced that the construction of diverse themes was completely satisfied. The conversations with this group of participants were not generating any additional perspectives than those that had been significantly and sufficiently covered.

**My positioning as researcher.** Through this entire research endeavor I found myself face-to-face with my own reflection of what the son-father experience felt like to me. Very often the accounts shared by the interviewees either reflected what I fantasized about as a child and an



adult, or the pain I experienced growing up with the reality of feeling that something was missing in my life, particularly with respect to being fatherless. The interview experience for me was a strengthening process in that I learned to balance objectivity with an ability to have my participants know that I was more than just listening to their words to complete my dissertation.

Very often the participants spent time with me far beyond the official interview time and space, discussing various son-father relationship experiences, both painful and enjoyable. Even during the interview, the exchanges were much more conversational than just questions and answers. In this way, my experience seems much broader and rewarding than I expected. The strengthening I experienced with this process is professional as well as personal. Additionally, I felt a sort of spiritual bridge between the “professional” me and the “personal” me that was also strengthened. Since this research experience I have learned to accept and embrace this spiritual merging of myself, which has produced benefits in all aspects of my life: with family, at work, with friends, and during casual occasions, among other areas.

The experience of sharing in these very sensitive accounts of others, along with my analysis, and further study, has taught me to live in the moment. Reflection is still very important to me; however, I have learned to reflect from the present, and not so much from the past. I have learned how one can reflect on the pain of the past, without reliving it, and reacting to it in the present. I feel that I have also learned to listen, as a researcher, in that same spirit. I have gained the skills necessary to allow another to share their experiences without feeling sorry for their past—rather giving them the feeling that we are sharing from the present.

## Chapter IV: Results

### Introduction

**Research question.** The results of this qualitative research are derived from a series of interviews conducted by me with men who are fathers as well as young men in their role as sons. The central research question is: In what ways is leadership development influenced by the phenomenal characteristics of the son-father relationship experience, including how sons articulate their feelings about the relationship, at and over time?

**Results.** The results of the thematic analysis, and the most frequent tabulation and categorizations are as follows. (see Table 4.1):

Table 4.1  
*Frequency of Thematic Occurrences during the Interview.*

Categories	Themes	Lawrence	Mike	Chris	Chuck	Timothy	Totals
Son/Father relationship	Father fantasy/hunger	6	3	45	2	30	86
Son/Father relationship	Changing nature of son/father relationship over time.	23	19	3	12	1	58
Feelings	Reflection on personal experience/choices	5	3	12	10	23	53
Feelings	Relationship reflection/importance over time	5	9	3	23	3	43
Son/Father relationship	Gender expectations/differences	7	7	1	22	0	37
Feelings	Expression of emotions	3	12	0	15	0	30
Son/Father relationship	Son assumes father's traits/qualities/values.	11	10	1	4	3	29
Son/Father relationship	Father's role as a role model.	7	6	7	3	4	27
Son/Father relationship	Communication.	12	8	3	3	0	26
Feelings	Fatherlessness.	0	0	11	1	12	24
Son/Father relationship	Masculinity.	9	3	3	6	2	23
Feelings	Father's pride in adult son.	6	8	2	5	1	22
Son/Father relationship	Father's role to direct.	2	5	2	5	6	20
Son/Father relationship	Generative nature of fatherhood.	13	2	0	1	4	20
Son/Father relationship	Son fantasy/hunger.	8	2	2	7	1	20
Son/Father relationship	Significance of family income.	2	4	3	6	4	19
Feelings	Father qualities.	7	2	5	4	0	18
Leadership	Self-leadership.	6	0	2	0	10	18
Son/Father relationship	Son/father relationship as important	4	5	5	2	0	16
Son/Father relationship	Father's role as leader.	6	2	2	5	1	16
Feelings	Father accessibility.	7	2	3	4	0	16
Feelings	Father/son relationship as a bond.	10	1	1	0	4	16
Feelings	Son/father shared interests.	3	6	5	1	1	16
Feelings	Respect.	3	4	0	9	0	16

With respect to my objective of maintaining a diverse cross section of interview participants, based on these thematic results, my next step was to target individuals accordingly:

- 1.) adult middle-income Latino with child
- 2.) adult middle-income Latino w/out child
- 3.) adult underserved Latino with child
- 4.) adult upper-income Asian with child
- 5.) teenage middle-income Asian with father
- 6.) adult African American with child
- 7.) teenage middle-income African American with father
- 8.) adult underserved white with child
- 9.) teenage middle-income white
- 10.) teenage underserved white

My feeling was that this sample would insure not only a reliable representation of the general targeted population but would also provide for the possibility of additional relevant themes as well as a validation of the themes currently under analysis. While the demographic profiles and thematic discovery/saturation objectives are of course not mutually exclusive, I got a sense, based on the demographic mix juxtaposed to the emergent themes of my initial five interviews, that the discovery and saturation of the most relevant themes for my research was more likely to emerge with some additionally relevant demographic characteristics. On the basis of the first waves of interviews with Lawrence, Mike, Chris, Chuck, and Timothy the additional demographic criteria I considered pertinent for future interviews were:

- 1.) Generative family history (particularly the accessibility/relationship of the interviewee's grandfather to his father). I found it particularly interesting to see how

Lawrence's expressed relationship experience was similar in some respects to the father fantasies of Chris and Timothy. Noteworthy here is that while Lawrence, Mike, and Chuck all grew up with their fathers in the home, unlike Mike and Chuck (both of whom had fathers who were much less attentive and nurturing than Lawrence's father), Lawrence grew up with a father who himself was fatherless. This led me to think about the possibility of Lawrence's father applying his own father fantasies to his approach to being a father. Some literature suggests that differences of this nature are often attributed to differences in the financial resources of the father; however, in this instance that doesn't really seem to be the case in that there is no real discernible indication that family income is a factor. I suspect that an even more significant factor (a term I think I may have coined) is, "son fantasy." I suggest that son fantasies are derivatives of father fantasies, or an extension of the notion, "I will not be like my dad," to include "my son will not be like me," which may even extend to "my family will not be like my family." I suggest the possibility that these sorts of derivative fantasies may serve to inform and influence a man's approach to being a father. Dependent upon the "real/practicing" application of these fantasies, the results could simulate how Lawrence reports his father/son relationship experience. Of course, I understand the danger of making too broad of a generalization, however, I am keeping in mind the difference between the fantasies "I will not be like my dad" and "I will be like my dad," which, of course, may have different effects on a man's approach to being a father. Therefore, somewhere in the mix of my next interviews, regardless of the demographic mix mentioned above, I would seek to find:

- a. more participants who have lived with "fatherless" fathers in the home.

- b. Additionally, it would be a gold mine to be able to interview both the father and the son with this type of scenario.
- 2.) Alternative family structure/gender issues. A father who is raising a son as a single parent. Or, a son who was, or, is being raised by a single father.
- 3.) Masculinity issues. One or two more gay men or boys; or, men or boys who have lived in a home with a gay man or boy.
- 4.) Masculinity issues. A boy who is either physically challenged himself, or whose father has a physical challenge.

**Second wave interview results.** The results of the thematic analysis, and the most frequent tabulation and categorizations are as follows (see Table 4.2):

Table 4.2  
*Frequency of Thematic Occurrences during the Interview.*

Categories	Themes	Alvero	David	Daryl	Edward	Andrew	Totals
Son/father relationship	Son fantasy/hunger.	10	0	22	10	31	73
Son/father relationship	Changing nature of father/son relationship over time.	21	10	14	14	2	61
Feelings	Relationship reflection/importance over time.	9	19	12	6	12	58
Feelings	Reflection on personal experience/choices.	6	7	12	8	21	54
Son/father relationship	Father's role as provider.	1	3	14	21	13	52
Feelings	Father accessibility	9	12	21	0	13	55
Son/father relationship	Communication.	2	21	12	9	3	47
Son/father relationship	Generative nature of fatherhood.	4	12	16	9	2	43
Son/father relationship	Father fantasy/hunger.	1	0	3	15	24	43
Son/father relationship	Gender expectations/differences.	2	9	5	7	12	35
Son/father relationship	Son's role to seek knowledge from father.	2	3	12	14	0	31
Feelings	Expression of emotions.	3	4	3	8	11	29
Leadership	Self-leadership.	2	13	6	7	0	28
Son/father relationship	Masculinity.	0	9	11	8	0	28
Son/father relationship	Father's role as a role model.	7	3	21	7	9	47
Son/father relationship	Son assumes father's traits/qualities/values.	5	0	5	4	12	26
Feelings	Respect.	6	9	4	6	0	25
Leadership	Effective leadership	3	4	6	5	3	21
Leadership	Leader's role to direct.	0	9	4	6	2	21
Son/father relationship	Father involvement/attention to education.	3	1	12	4	1	21
Son/father relationship	Father's role as leader.	5	4	8	0	1	18
Feelings	Father fulfillment of promises.	6	2	4	2	2	16
Feelings	Father qualities.	2	4	1	6	3	16
Feelings	Father's pride in adult son.	9	2	2	2	1	16

Resulting from the analysis of the second wave of interviews was an expanded assortment of themes relevant to much of the literature discussed in Chapter II. After the thematic analysis, tabulations, and categorization of the second wave of interviews, I began preparation for a identifying and interviewing a final wave of participants. Again, the primary consideration for selecting the next wave of interviews was the original objective of maintaining a diverse cross section of interview participants, as well as the generative family history, alternative family structure, and issues of masculinity, with respect to the mix of ten interviews already conducted, analyzed, tabulated, and categorized. The remaining demographic mix to be favored was:

- 1.) Adult middle-income Latino without child
- 2.) Adult upper-income Asian with child
- 3.) Teenage middle-income Asian with father
- 4.) Adult underserved white with child
- 5.) Teenage underserved white

**Third wave interview results.** As was the case with the previous waves of interviews, the results of the thematic analysis and the most frequent tabulation and categorizations are presented as follows (see Table 4.3):



Table 4.3  
*Frequency of Thematic Occurrences during the Interview*

Categories	Themes	Gregory	Paul	Eric	Danny	Totals
Son/father relationship	Father fantasy/hunger.	31	24	4	2	61
Son/father relationship	Changing nature of father/son relationship over time.	4	31	3	5	43
Feeling	Relationship reflection/importance over time.	13	27	1	0	41
Son/father relationship	Gender expectations/differences.	15	12	2	1	30
Feelings	Reflection on personal experiences/choices.	6	4	3	17	30
Feelings	Father's pride in adult son.	7	6	0	16	29
Feelings	Expression of emotions.	12	14	1	2	29
Son/father relationship	Son assumes father's traits/qualities/values.	6	5	5	12	28
Leadership	Expectation in leaders.	8	4	1	14	27
Son/father relationship	Son fantasy/hunger.	13	12	0	2	27
Son/father relationship	Generative nature of fatherhood.	11	12	0	3	26
Feelings	Son/father detachment/disinterest.	3	11	6	4	24
Feelings	Fatherlessness.	14	9	0	1	24
Feelings	Son/father relationship as natural.	12	7	1	3	23
Leadership	Self-leadership.	9	5	4	5	23
Feelings	Father qualities.	8	4	5	6	23
Son/father relationship	Significance of family income.	8	8	4	12	32
Feelings	Son/father relationship as a bond.	21	6	0	3	30
Feelings	Son/father shared interests.	17	8	2	3	30
Feelings	Respect.	6	12	5	6	29
Son/father relationship	Father's role as mentor.	9	7	6	5	27
Son/father relationship	Father's role as leader.	5	8	4	9	26
Son/father relationship	Son/father relationship as important.	3	13	0	5	21
Son/father relationship	Son's role to seek knowledge from father.	2	5	4	9	20

Of particular note with this wave of participants was the demographic composition, in contrast to the first two waves. This wave seemed particularly diverse from the prior two in that this was the only wave with Asians included, along with the fact that there were more whites included in this wave than the others. This was a purposefully constructed approach designed to satisfy the ethnic diversity objectives of the research. Additionally, I paid close attention to satisfying the other criteria that rounded out my sampling objectives (i.e., selecting white participants who given their circumstances would have been considered socially disadvantaged had they been Hispanic or black. In the end, I was surprised to find that despite the attempts for diversity, based on ethnicity and family structure, the themes derived from the analysis of the interviews showed no significant difference from those that I had already uncovered in the initial two rounds of interviews. A complete summary of the 14 interviewees, including their demographic characteristics, follows (see Table 4.4):

Table 4.4  
*Interviewee Demographics*

Name	Wave	Son/father relationship	Father's S/F relationship	Sexual Orientation	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Children?	Childhood family structure	Income status	Other
Lawrence	1	Adult with father	No father	Heterosexual	African American	Single	None	Traditional	Middle Income	
Mike	1	Adult with father	With Father	Heterosexual	White	Married	2 girls	Traditional	Middle Income	
Chris	1	Youth w/o father	No father	Heterosexual	Latino	Living with Parent	None	On and off step father	Low Income	
Chuck	1	Adult with father (deceased)	With father	Homosexual	African American	Married	None	Traditional	Middle Income	Married to another male.
Timothy	1	Adult w/o father	No father	Heterosexual	African American	Single	None	Foster child for most of life	No Income	Physical challenges/streetperson.
Alvero	2	Adult with father.	With father	Heterosexual	Latino	Married	1 boy	Traditional	Middle Income	
David	2	Youth with father	With father	Homosexual	White	Living with Parent	None	Traditional	Middle Income	
Daryl	2	Youth with father	No father	Heterosexual	African American	Living with Parent	None	Lives with father and sister	Low Middle Income	Mother deceased 7 years ago.
Edward	2	Adult with father	With father	Heterosexual	Latino	Married	2 boys – 1 girl	Traditional	Lower Income	Grew up poor. Physical challenges.
Andrew	2	Adult w/o father	No father	Heterosexual	African American	Single	1 girl	Single Father	Lower Income	Child being raised by maternal grandmother.
Gregory	3	Youth w/o father	No father	Heterosexual	White	Single	None	Single Family	Lower Income	Street person
Paul	3	Adult with father	With father – not good.	Homosexual	White	Single	1 girl – 1 boy	Rarely sees children	Lower Income	Dysfunctional family history.
Eric	3	Youth with father	With father	Heterosexual	Asian	Living with Parent	None	Traditional	Middle Income	
Danny	3	Adult with father	With father	Heterosexual	Asian	Married	1 boy	Traditional	Upper Income	

A comprehensive analysis of the interview data revealed very interesting yet almost predictable implications with respect to: a) the perception and articulation of the son-father relationship that adolescent boys and men have; b) how adolescent boys and men describe their feelings and emotions about their own son-father relationship experience, and son-father relationship experiences in general; and c) how adolescent boys and men describe leadership characteristics and qualities in the context of their own son-father relationship experience, and son-father relationships in general. Below, I present the findings of the participant interviews based on the thematic analysis.

**Son-father relationship experience.** From the aggregate analysis of the 14 interviews conducted, the overwhelming categorical topic articulated by all the demographic groups involves the son-father relationship experience, was prominent in the interview structure. The most prevalent themes associated with the son-father relationship category are: a) father fantasy/hunger; b) the changing nature of the son-father relationship over time; c) son fantasy/hunger; d) gender expectation/differences; e) the generative nature of fatherhood; and, f) the son assuming the father's traits/qualities/values.

The following table provides the thematic tabulations for all interviews indicating the frequency of statements made by the participants relevant to the son-father relationship experience category (see Table 4.5):

Table 4.5  
*Tabulation by Wave*

Theme	Tabulation by wave			Total	% of Category
	1	2	3		
Father fantasy/hunger	86	43	61	190	16%
The changing nature of the son-father ship over time	58	61	43	162	14%
Son fantasy/hunger	20	73	27	120	10%
Gender expectation/differences	37	35	30	102	9%
The generative nature of fatherhood	20	43	26	89	7%
The son assumes the father's alities/values	29	26	28	83	7%
Total other themes					37%

Each of these themes indicated in the above table are illustrated by the following summary representation of my interviews with those participants that most saliently articulated both the relevant themes as well as the son/father relationship category. I not only address how they talked about their feelings and emotions, but also describe how emotions played out in the interview setting.

### **Father Fantasy/Hunger**

The two participants that this theme seemed to resonate with most frequently in their conversation were Chris and Gregory; both of whom are youths who have not had their father in their day-to-day lives. Throughout much of their conversation there were very clear indications that they were considerably influenced and affected by self-constructed fantasies about their lives being considerably different if they had experienced their father in their day-to-day life.

Machtlinger (1976) points out the prominence of an element of fantasy father attachments based on his observation of fatherless children, arguing that fatherless children experience the most intense and persistent attachments to fantasy fathers, which they construct out of even the most minimal relationship or contact with any man at all. "I'm telling you man." Gregory stated, "When I was a kid I thought about it. I'm not going to lie. When I was with my friends. I mean, at school and stuff, I wanted a father like them. I would have so much fun...and things. I

wouldn't be out here. I would dream about it." Chris shared very similar sentiments about his fantasies. "Dreaming about having a real father is trippy. I don't have to be asleep to think about it...I still think about it, you know, when things ain't right...I know a real father would make sure I don't go through some of the things my stepdad send me through...He could do better, but a real dad would make it really different." Both of them used the phrases: "I wish," "I dream about," and, "If only I had" throughout their interviews. Much of their fantasies had a time-continuum characteristic. The predominant idea is that if things had been different back then, things would be different now. Rarely was the father fantasy/hunger situated in the present, even with those who are still youths. The prevailing fantasy/hunger statements invariably consisted of, "If I had had my father," rather than "If I had my father." However, accounts of their thinking seemed to be predominantly in the present. Rarely was there an account of how they thought about things in the past. The father fantasy/hunger accounts of the participants in this research were about *how* the participants currently feel their lives *would have* evolved differently if they had experienced having a father in their past. The construction of what would have been constitutes the father fantasy element. The reflective emotion associated with the fantasy constitutes the father hunger element. Herzog (2001) suggests that this accounts for the need for fatherless boys to seek and fantasize about a "good enough man" in their lives (p. 81).

One interesting aside to the father fantasy/hunger theme that I noticed among those I interviewed that did grow up with their fathers in their day-to-day lives was that they did not particularly articulate having and benefiting from the same values and characteristics in their own son-father relationship experience, as the values and characteristics fantasized by those who did not have fathers in their lives. For instance, while the much popularized father fantasy; prescribing the "idea" father as the primary and essential model of "manhood" was prevalent

among the fatherless, among those who did have fathers in their day-to-day lives, modeling manhood seemed a mere byproduct of the father being male, nothing that particularly stands out or is special.

Gregory, probably the most emotional of all the interview participants, stated, “One of the things that really hurts me the most, and I had thought about it a lot in my life...like when I was in school...elementary school, and ever since. I know my life would be different. A father makes sure his kids...all of his kids have the things they need to grow up good. My mother...well, she try, but she don’t know how to be a man. I just know it would be better.” Much of Gregory’s conversation was heavily reflective. Rarely did he look at me, however, it didn’t at all seem like it was from embarrassment or from being shy. His eyes seemed to stare into the past, reflecting not only on very descriptive accounts of his childhood, but recollecting his past emotions associated with specific experiences. His recollection of emotions was rare among most of the father fantasy/hunger accounts. Gregory reflects, “One time a friend of my mom...her boyfriend then, try to act like he is going to be my dad. Fake.” He says with a smile and a smirk as if I should know what he means; of which I did. “He takes me to a ball game. I was about ten years old. I should have said I didn’t want to go with him. He always want to make me cry. All the time he is trying to get with some other women he started talking with at the game. He didn’t care about me or my mom. My own father...they don’t do that.” Typical of Gregory, he was unapologetic about his tears. It was almost as if he felt entitled. “He left her too.” A steady uninterrupted stream of tears authenticates the pain Gregory had gotten used to experiencing throughout much of his youth. Later in the conversation Gregory said, “It’s not right for a father not to help his son grow up to be like him.” Thus, the fantasy extended, to

making the unknown father into someone he was not, evidenced by Gregory's statement, "to be like him."

Chris was also an open participant. I felt that he was troubled and hungered for consistent male attention. The teacher at his school that arranged for this interview, and who also demonstrated great care and interest in Chris, was a woman. One of the remarkable things about Chris was that he seemed to be aware of his shortcomings as well as his father fantasy/hunger. "I know I could do better...most of the time...and I know I have to not wish I had a father all of the time before I do the best I can to be a man...I can't depend on any father to make me a man...I jus' don't know how to be a man yet...That is why I need a father...I guess I fantasize too much." I was moved by his expression of knowing about his own sense of power and self-determination. "When I don't fantasize, I know I have power and can do anything I put my mind to do...I can do what anybody else can do that do have a father...I have to not think so much that I need a father...I guess I just wish I had one...I don't know why." His higher-order thinking seemed to resonate throughout the interview. For instance, not only was he a deep thinker about his experiences, he was also articulately aware of his own thinking. Chris' fantasies included how his father might currently react to his life turning out to be "something." He states, "and when I become something he'll come back and tell me something like 'I just wanted to see if you could make it on your own' or maybe that's what I think it is." Clearly, Chris' fantasies are evident to himself.

In addition to the accounts of father fantasy/hunger dominated by Gregory and Chris, were those of Timothy and Andrew, who are both adult men who, like Gregory and Chris, grew up without there being a physical father in their life. Moreover, they expressed a deepening sense of father fantasy/hunger, not dissimilar to Gregory and Chris, with respect to the primary



characteristics of father fantasy/hunger; “if I had my father then, things would be better now.” This included, of course, the characteristics of the “idea” father. Timothy, a young man who had neither his biological mother nor father in his life, seemed to be influenced by the notion of a special bond between a father and son, with the typical fantasy characteristics of the “idea” father. He states, “So, you know having a father in your life is a good thing. You know it is a special bond.” He pauses to gather his thoughts as he did throughout the interview; carefully selecting his words, and sometimes speaking first under his breath as if he is rehearsing how to say his next sentence. He continues, “It’s nothing like father and son, you know.” Reminiscent of Gregory’s reflective stare, Timothy shifts his gaze. He then utters, “Nothing else can really get between that, once you have your father in your life. It’s like your best my, you know, your right hand man.”

While the father fantasy/hunger characteristics of Timothy and Andrew’s conversation were very similar to Gregory and Chris, there was much less visible real-time emotion displayed; however, both Timothy and Andrew were very expressive of the emotions they experienced as children. Timothy, who has spent most of his youth as a “neglected foster child” spends much of his adult life as a street pan-handler. A non-apologetic drug user with a physical disability that affects his mobility, Timothy maintains a very stoic personality. During the interview, however, he was considerably generous with sharing his childhood emotions with regard to his father fantasy/hunger. He shares, “I describe [the purpose of the father-son relationship] as a wonderful feeling. You know, to have both parents, especially to have a man figure in your life, you know, cause he helps you, you know, be a man.” Projecting how things could be different he adds, “You know, as you get older, you can be just like your father.” He then fantasizes the “idea” father, “Do the things he do.”

Andrew specifically articulated his reflections on childhood emotions associated with growing up without his father in his life. He shares, “Sometimes, when my mother was not at home, I would be in my room just crying. I could not let my mom see me crying for no reason.” Another variation of the father fantasy/hunger was consistently articulated by Andrew with the discussion of his uncle. Moreover, Andrew’s fantasy is actually embodied in a real person; specifically his perception of the “idea” qualities and affect of a real person he actually knows. Andrew explains, “We would be over my cousins’ house and my uncle would be so nice and making them feel good. I would have fun, but it really hurt sometimes because I realized that after I get home, that is not my reality.” He fantasizes, “They seem to have everything they need. Now they have been to college and doing good. I thought they would do good, cause as kids they did good.” Rationalizing, he adds, “My uncle was a good man and taught my cousin how to be a man and not get in trouble like I did.” He then summarizes his childhood feelings, “I still don’t think my mother knows how much I cried when she was not around. I just didn’t understand why...how could I not have a father. My older sister at least knew her father. I didn’t. It really hurt.”

Despite Andrew’s clear and descriptive account of his childhood emotions, he seemed much less emotional about growing up without his father now. He did, however, express some similar father fantasy/hunger type characteristics as Timothy, Chris, and Gregory. He generalizes, “Lots of boys would do much better in their lives if their fathers taught them how to be men. Boys need a role model to follow, and it needs to be their own father. Another man cannot motivate you to be like they are. A boy wants to be like his father...taking care of the family, raising the kids, working hard, you know, that kind of stuff.” Notwithstanding his admiration and fantasies toward his uncle, similar to others, the foundation of Andrew’s fantasy

is grounded in the hunger of having his own biological father. He continues, “A boy needs his father and his mother, learning how to have a loving family.” He fantasizes, “My cousins have a loving family because of my uncle.”

### **Son Fantasy/Hunger**

The second most prevalent theme to emerge associated with the son-father relationship experience topic was a variation on the father fantasy/hunger theme, which is characterized as the son fantasy/hunger. This theme emerged through my conversations with the participants who experienced growing up with fathers, who themselves shared stories with their sons about not having fathers themselves. The general nature of this theme suggests that men who have experienced fatherlessness in their own lives, who in turn become fathers who are in the day-to-day lives of their children, tend to tell stories to their children not about their father fantasy/hunger, but more so on their desires not to have their own children, particularly sons, experience fatherlessness. As a derivative of the father fantasy/hunger syndrome, the son fantasy/hunger syndrome extends the father fantasy notion, “I will not be like my dad” to include “my son will not be like me,” which may even extend to “my family will not be like my family.” While the father fantasy/hunger is characterized by the notions, “if I had had my father,” the son fantasy/hunger is characterized by the notions, “my son will have his father.” The primary characteristic of the son fantasy/hunger is the seemingly vicarious fruition of the father fantasy through the deliberate attention to the son/father relationship experience of the father’s son.

My interview with Lawrence particularly illuminated the son fantasy/hunger theme. Unlike the other adults I interviewed who grew up with their fathers in their day-to-day lives, Lawrence grew up with a father who himself was fatherless. Much of Lawrence’s conversation seemed to be influenced by his knowledge about his father’s experiences being fatherless.

Krampe and Newton (2006) suggest the importance of the father's experience as a son, as such reflections and memories are invariably influential in their relationship with their spouse and children. In contrast to the other participants who grew up with their fathers, Lawrence experienced a deliberate attempt on his father's part to be involved in Lawrence's life, to be aware of his emotional life, to be nurturing, involved in his educational experience, and to be dedicated to making sure Lawrence and his sister felt the love their father had for them, almost on a daily basis. Lamb (1976) suggests that researchers be cautious about equating time spent between father and son with the quality of their interaction. My conversation with Lawrence clearly illustrates Lamb's perspective, as he showed consistent fondness for talking about his father and their mutually enjoyable relationship, beginning from infancy. Lamb makes it a point that the trajectory of the son-father relationship experience begins at infancy. It seemed clear that Lawrence's father was committed to fulfilling the "idea" father "fantasy" role as the father. Additionally, Lawrence's father was very open with his children with respect to being deliberate in regard to ensuring that their lives would be different from his; their lives would be "as a child's life should be," therefore "affecting how their lives would turn out." This was profoundly indicative of the hunger part of the father fantasy/hunger equation. This is the notion that suggests, "my life would have evolved differently if."

Additionally, my interview with Lawrence was very appreciative. I was very impressed with his understanding of the significance of this research and his contribution. He was very comfortable with leading the conversation and introducing various ideas. Lawrence opens with, "I only have one perspective on the subject, and that's the relationship with my father... it's been, a very, very, umm close relationship, from as far back as I can remember, my father was always around; he was always, umm, supportive." His words seemed genuine and warm. I

witnessed the pride and confidence in his voice and his face. He spoke about how his father was always involved in every activity he engaged in, and expressed pride and value with his father's involvement in his life. He talked about his father being involved in his school activities such as always knowing what he was studying, and helping him to appreciate school rather than it being unpleasant. Reminiscing about a school field trip to an amusement park, Lawrence accounts, "he would go on all the rides like, you know like he was one of the kids and even interact sometimes with some of the kids." Speaking about the consistency of his father's involvement, he adds, "even as I got older, umm, in high school, umm, my dad would, you know, sometimes, it seemed like he was better friends with some of my friends [chuckle] than I was." I could genuinely sense his fondness for these recollections. Finally, Lawrence was very clear about his father's desire to be the type of father he is. When asked what his father's life may have been like if he was not his son, Lawrence replied, "That's hard to say. I think it would be easier to answer if he didn't have a son. I think he would feel like he was lacking something. At an early age, you know, his goal was to be a father...to have a son."

Profoundly frequent indications of the son fantasy/hunger theme also emerged from the interviews with Timothy and Andrew, both adults who grew up fatherless. While Lawrence's illustration of this theme focused on the son fantasy/hunger of this father, as told to him, Timothy and Andrew articulated this theme on themselves, fantasizing that their son would not grow up like them, as they would be the father they did not have. While Lawrence's life experience as a son was the manifestation of his father's son fantasy/hunger, Timothy and Andrew fantasized about their children's (future and present) experiences of life as a son much like Lawrence's life experience. Timothy and Andrew expressed how they would be very deliberate in the raising of their children. While Timothy is not yet a father, Andrew is very involved and attentive to his

infant daughter. He receives an abundance of support from his extended family, as his daughter's mother is currently incarcerated. Andrew declares, "I will not let anything separate me from my children...I don't care what problems we have...I want to have a son...his life will be good...I will make sure." Timothy says, "I believe I would be a great father to a boy. I can show him how to be a man...I know how it feel to not be shown how to be a man...I know you have to spend time...I know you have to do everything you can to make him loved...I hurt, but I know when I get a son it will be better...Sometimes I think that's what I need to be better...I want a son to help me be a good father and a good man." Here, Timothy adds a variation to the son fantasy/hunger theme by equating the quality of manhood with being a "good" father. He adds, "My father is not a man...he would not let his son...." Tears finished his sentence.

### **The Changing Nature of the Son/Father Relationship Over Time**

There were seven adult men who grew up with their fathers in their lives for whom this theme seemed to resonate with most frequently. The accounts of Mike, Lawrence, and Chuck typify the general characteristics of the son/father relationship theme. Primarily, this theme reflects an articulation of the sense that the son-father relationship is characterized by identifying its changing nature, and the significance of the changes. For example, one participant, Mike stated, "While I always felt pretty close to my father, it is funny how our relationship seemed to evolve as I was growing up. And, especially now since I am now a father. I notice how he admires me and the man I have become with my children. But, at the same time, I feel this need to help him as he grows older. I am becoming the man of the family, and I think that has made us a little closer." How the passing of time facilitates and sustains changes in the relationship is another significant factor. Mike adds, "My dad has gotten old, and I know this. He needs me, and I can tell that he knows that. This is sort of new—it wasn't like this just a few years ago, but I can

see it now, as does he. It's all unspoken, but I think, he thinks he has done a good job with me. In general, this theme is articulated with stories and statements that suggest that sons particularly recognize and appreciate how their father's life and direct influence on their son's activities evolves as the son matures. Over time, the son starts to take control of his own life, have his own opinion, and formulate his own values that are influenced by their father's earlier influence. Additionally, the father starts to feel less of a need to have direct influence on his son, and, eventually, over time, start to be influenced by his son with particular appreciation for how the son has developed into the father's idea of what constitutes being a man.

My interview with Mike particularly illuminated the characteristics of the changing relationship theme. Of all my interview participants, Mike's childhood experience most represents the typical mainstream concept of the normative family structure in dominant ideology: working class, stay at home mother, and father as the financial provider. At the time of the interview, Mike described his current family as being almost a mirror image of the family he had as a child. He states, "I have turned into my father. Both me and my father are proud of that." He explains, "I think the son-father relationship is uh...a mentoring process... it requires modeling on the fathers part; um, correction sometimes called discipline."

Mike grounds his entire conversation with the concept that it is the father's role to mentor, guide, and provide for the family. To Mike, the influence of the father is consistent and therefore seamless. Of the father's influence Mike explains, "I would say as the son you're probably not as aware of it. You're not analyzing it. I think in a good relationship a father is someone that you respect, someone that you might fear, you know, demands respect." However, Mike points out that as an adolescent who was starting to develop his own teenage interests, there did develop a change in the relationship with his father. As a working man, his father spent

little time with him on things like sports. Consequently, other men (church pastors, Boy Scout leaders, etc.) fulfilled the mentoring role during his time away from home. Nevertheless, Mike still respected the general concept that it was his father's influence that was most important with respect to learning how to be a man—a provider for his family. He states, "I think the purpose [of his father's influence] is preparation for life. Um...to be a father yourself someday, to be a...do whatever you're going to do in life; be a husband; be an employee." He summarizes, "I think to help develop the son; to use life circumstances to um...make object lessons."

He includes that it is the son's role to learn from the father the values and practices required to replicate the process with his own family. Through the course of time, the father should recognize in the son evidence of the inherited values and practices of the father. Eventually, the son and the father become partners in the development of the extended family, until the father begins to depend on the son for guidance, financial advice, and support. Mike reflects on his current relationship with his aging father. "It's difficult with the distance, so it's a good relationship...It's not strained in any way... you know I call, we talk, but again it seems superficial." Mike really starts to put a lot of thought into his reflections. His voice changes, from a very articulate business like formality, to a more serene contemplative self-talk. He reflects, "We talk about work, or I mean he's been retired for a while so it would be my work but what's going on around the house with my grandparents...But I would say it's a good relationship. It's not deep." After I turned the recorder off and thanked Mike for agreeing to be interviewed, I did not get up from the chair; nor did Mike. I could tell by the change in his voice and demeanor there was more. At this time Mike started to talk about how he had never taken the time to think about the lack of an emotional relationship with his father, throughout his life. He confessed that their relationship was always very semi-formal—teacher/learner. He then said to



me that he was confident that this interview had done more for him than it did for me, and that he really appreciated having the opportunity to actually think about and talk about his father in this way.

Adding to the illumination of this theme, Lawrence contributes, “when you’re a child, your parents and the adults around you all seem like superheroes, but there does come a point when you realize that they’re people, like regular people too, ahh, with regular issues...as a child they shield you from as best they can, as you grow older you do realize they need your support too.” Clearly, Lawrence has thought about the changing nature of the son-father relationship experience; however, it appears this is not an idea he received from his father, which is not particularly surprising, considering Lawrence’s father did not have a father himself. Lawrence adds, that the shifting relationship is something “they don’t even expect. Growing up [they may] expect [support] from [their] peers...but [they] probably didn’t expect it from the children that [they] raised.” Speaking in reference to his own leadership with respect to being prepared, Lawrence adds, “I think it is a responsibility that has to be realized, even for a young man.”

Very similar to Mike and Lawrence, Chuck described his growing up family as the quintessential standard with respect to the perceived notions of tradition. Yet unlike Mike, his family was an upper-middle-class African American family; his father a physician, his mother a stay-at-home provider of nurture and balance. Chuck describes his youthful relationship with his father as very sterile with very little personality. It was Chuck’s charge to follow in his father’s footsteps in terms of values, scholarly achievement, career, and family structure. During the interview, Chuck initially articulated his thinking with precise deliberation, stating “The father-son relationship is critical for shaping who the boy will become...It’s an important thing that

shapes it... the father in the father-son relationship, in addition to being the first place for positive guidance...I think the boy also looks at the father as the first place for discipline.”

With respect to the changing nature for the son-father relationship over time, Chuck’s account is profound. While he appeared to be following the prescribed script inherited from his father’s guidance, Chuck revealed to his father during his college years that he was gay. Chuck contemplates, “The complication of me being gay was a negative to him, so who know, [his life] may have been happier...Which is not to say that he didn’t like having me as a son, cause he did, but there were complications, in that regard.” At this point I began to feel Chuck drifting away from his initial deliberate responses. I started to see the drifting gaze of reflection. He continues, “He wasn’t unhappy...I’m just saying if I had turned out to be a different person, and be married and have grand kids, you know, he would have liked that.” In what appeared to be an attempt at regaining control of his emotions, Chuck explains, “And, that was the first time in my life where I really came to grips with the fact that there could be moments where I can have an irreconcilable point of view with my dad.” I noticed the back and forth shifting choice of words used by Chuck as the battle for emotional control swayed. Describing a direct confrontation with his dad, Chuck begins to let his emotions take over; the tears start to appear. He reflects on his father’s words to him and some friends, “He says to us, ‘You know, I think what you all are doing is disgusting.’ And, he looks at me and says, ‘you are the ring leader, and it’s disgusting,’ then he leaves the room.”

Finally, Chuck advances his reflection to the period just prior to his father passing away. He reminisces, “When my dad came down with prostate cancer I move back home...it was the same time my mother had breast cancer.... It’s kind of funny. I was back home cooking for them and doing all this kind of stuff for a few months. It was a strange period, leading up to his death.”

I could feel the tension starting to build. With each sentence there was a cracking in his voice. A quantitative study conducted by Floyd (2001) reported results that demonstrated that self-identified homosexual men receive less verbal, nonverbal, and supportive affection from their fathers than do self-identified heterosexual men. Clearly, this supports the difference between Chuck's relationship with his father, and that of Lawrence and Mike. Nevertheless, during the final days of Chuck's dad's life there was a bright moment. Chuck, sharing a slight smile, utters, "There was actually some honesty there. There were various points in time when I would be like sitting in his hospital room, and whatever, and he would say, 'why is it that we never really got along.' And, there was a little bit of sharing going on."

Then, I could visualize the lights dimming in unison with the sound of Chuck's voice. "There wasn't really a reconciliation...that's a little strong, that implies that we had a big falling out, which we never did. But, we never became buddies... I think I felt, that he was going to die. And, that I'm going to be sad when he dies. That he is really a wonderful person. And, he and I were just not connected... And it was not about being gay, it was before that...The real me was not present in his life."

At this point I attempted to give Chuck space to gather his thoughts. I felt his embarrassment for beginning to cry. I asked him if he wanted to change the subject, and he replied, "No, it's not this...there are some other things going on in my life right now that I am dealing with." I allowed him the space to let it out, and I could feel his appreciation of my being non-judgmental and giving him time to regain his usual self-control and deliberate demeanor.

Another characteristic of this theme is pointed out by men who grow up without their fathers. Their expression of this theme involves their fantasies of a life that would have evolved differently, over time, given a relationship with their father as a child. The emphasis here is that

time spent with their father as children would have resulted in a better current life. This was previously pointed out in our summary of the interviews with Andrew, Timothy, and Chris, as Andrew pointed out, “Lots of boys would do much better in their lives if their fathers taught them how to be men. Boys need a role model to follow.”

### **Gender Expectations/Differences**

Gender expectations and differences were almost equally spread across each of the demographic groups. The most frequent responses identified under this theme were from adults who grew up with their fathers and youth who grew up without their fathers. These two groups were followed closely by adults who grew up without their fathers, then youth who grew up with their fathers. The most dominant illustrations of this theme were articulated in conversations about: a) fathers who are very specific and made clear to their son their perspectives on masculinity, primarily as demonstrated by themselves; and, b) youth who express the father fantasy of being taught “how to be a man” by having a relationship with their father. The first of these types of conversations, the importance of masculinity, were expressed profoundly by Mike, Chuck, Edward, and Danny. The second of these types of conversations, “how to be a man” fantasies, were articulated by Chris and Gregory.

Mike seemed very fond of reflecting on conversations he had with his father and brother during their frequent camping outings. He shares, “One thing that stays with me is how my brother and I really liked going on trips with our father...he really loved showing us things he was taught...he would say, ‘every man needs to know these things...this is what makes you a man...your boy will want to learn how to be a man.’” Mike was very emphatic about this role of men, and he seemed very clear his perspective was one that was obtained from his father, and shared by his brother. “Even today, my brother and I have a clear understanding of what it means

to be a man....there are some things that women are better at...I don't mean that they are less than, or they can't do certain jobs...I don't think I am, well you know...I just know that some things only a man should do...that his son will need him to show him.”

Chuck, despite the difficulties he had with his father upon the discovery of his sexual preference as an adult, also spoke fondly of his father's role as a man. “One of the things that I have to admit is the example my father set as a man. He was a very positive example that men work very hard to accomplish good things. I watched my father...he was very smart, and he always talked about doing whatever it takes to take care of his family.” Chuck goes on to explain, “I know I have some of these thoughts about what a man is supposed to be, and supposed to do. A man takes on the tough challenges...this continues to help me today.” He continues, “Like everyone else, I have the same challenges at work and at home. I have learned from my father, how to be a man and do what is necessary to take care of my family.”

Edward, who has two sons himself, reflects on what he does with his two sons to impress upon them his concepts of what it means to be a man. He declares, “it is up to me to show my sons how to be a man. I take my boy, my sons with me...show them how to work like a man...my father, he work his whole life for very little...but he was always a man...I work like that...my sons see me work hard every day...I tell them that is what a man does...take care of his family...his kids...his wife...be a man, always.” I found myself very moved with my conversation with Edward. I was extremely enamored with his resilience and outlook on his life. Edward was a day laborer who went out each day not knowing exactly what income he would make. He shared with me that sometimes he would get a job doing construction work; however, between such blessings, he would have to pray for work on a day-to-day basis. Additionally, Edward had a physical challenge that affected his walking. I could hardly sense that any of this

had any effect on his resolve to take care of his family. Moreover, he was committed to sharing with his sons his work ethics. He admonished me, “You show your son how to do what you do...this make him a man...you a man, and I like that...you smart and a man.” He adds clarity, “a man shows his son how to do what he do...that is a man.”

Danny articulated very similar sentiments on this theme as Gregory yet there are vast differences between their current economic backgrounds as well as their economic conditions growing up. Danny was raised in a moderately upper income family. His current financial status is also upper income. He describes his childhood family as being a very traditional Asian family with traditional Asian values. I asked Danny to elaborate on the nature of “traditional” Asian values. He replies, “My father has very traditional family values...he believes that the leader of the family is the father. The father maintains and makes sure everyone in the family follows the rules he establishes for the family. The boys in the family learn from the father how to be a man that will someday control his own family. The women in the family are charged with maintaining a comfortable home for the men in the family.” I followed up this answer with the question, “So, what is a man?” Danny replied, “A man is the head of the family...he makes the rules. He is responsible for insuring the family has all that it needs to fulfill the values that have passed down from generation-to-generation. A man insures that his family is aware of history and traditions of the family...he passes this on to his son who is responsible for passing the traditions on to his family, and particularly his sons.” To Danny there is a very close and reciprocal relationship between cultural tradition and manhood. He explains, “In our tradition, a man is primarily responsible for seeing that our cultural and family values are carried through to the following generation...this is the role of every man, to see that his family knows where they have come from.”

The second form of conversations regarding this theme involved participants who articulated fantasies about being taught “how to be a man” by fantasy fathers. For this particular theme, gender expectations and differences, there were striking similarities between the conversations with those who had fathers and those who fantasized fathers; in contrast to the conversations articulated in the father fantasy/hunger theme discussed earlier, where the nurturing fantasies articulated by the “fatherless” were not generally similar to the realities articulated by those who grew up with their fathers.

Both Chris and Gregory had issues related to men, other than their biological father, in their lives. Chris had an on-and-off stepfather who sometimes attempted to have a relationship with Chris. Gregory had a lot of resentment and disdain for a man who was his mother’s “boyfriend.” In both cases, these adolescents articulated the desire to be taught “how to be a man” in contrast to the relationship they had with the actual men in their lives.

“It takes a man to show you how to be a man,” Chris declares. My stepfather, he try to be a man, I guess...but he can’t show me how to be a man...A father has to show you.” Chris seemed particularly biased about the biology of fatherhood. He continuously made reference to the concept of a boy being influenced by “his own” father. He shares, “I always think about how good it is to be...if I could be with my real father.” Throughout our conversation Chris would recount activities and interactions with his stepfather and then generally juxtapose the experience with how it would have been better with his own father. “My mother tell my stepfather to come to the school to see me...talk with my teacher...or see me in what I do...he don’t really care...I can see it in his eyes...He don’t look at me...Your real father would not be that way, cause you are his son...that’s what a father does...not a stepfather...I don’t think.” He was particularly articulate about the masculinity issues and values that “a boy learns from his father.” Similar to

the accounts given by most of the participants, Chris defined masculinity as being a father; a good father defined by their relationship with their children, particularly their sons. “A boy learns from his father how to take care of things at home...how to handle problems without getting mad, and stuff...a boy learns how to work hard, provide for his kids, and the mother...this is what a father is supposed to do...that is a man...to me.”

Gregory framed most of his conversation in anger and disappointment, including his discussion of masculinity and gender expectations. He states, “My mother didn’t know what the hell she was doing...how could she? She is supposed to be loving; making the kids feel good about themselves. She don’t know how to be a man.” He seems to almost go into a rage. “Her stupid boyfriends ain’t never men either...how am I supposed to be a man...my dad ain’t here.” Tears, almost constant. “I need my dad to show me how...I shouldn’t have to be here...with these fools...they don’t have dads...not good ones...we just...” He can’t finish the sentence. The pain Gregory embodied was profoundly evident. He seemed to want me to feel what he feels daily. Gregory owns his pain and seems to feel entitled. He grieves, “it wasn’t right man...you know what I mean...shit...there was no man to show me how to be a man...I ain’t a man.”

### **Generative Nature of Fatherhood**

This theme involves the concept that naturally, the practice of fatherhood is generally passed down to each proceeding generation in a given family. This includes the full continuum of fatherhood, including father absence and father abuse. Moreover, the general tendency is that young men generally perpetuate the family structural conditions they have experienced as a youth: If they grew up without their father in their life, fathers are more likely to be absent in their children’s lives (Lamb, 2004). However, for the purposes of this research, the analysis of this theme includes the articulation of an extended alternative conceptualization of the generative



nature of fatherhood. In this analysis I am including the articulation of issues where participants discuss fathers who specifically intend to create a family structure that is different than their own childhood experience. This is, of course, similar in practice to the son fantasy/hunger theme. In contrast to the son fantasy/hunger theme, this variation of the generative nature of fatherhood theme focuses more specifically on the male youth perception and the reproduction of culture and male responsibility as a byproduct of fatherhood. The traditional version of this theme was overwhelmingly articulated by the youth who grew up with their father in their lives, particularly Eric, and adults who grew up with their fathers, Lawrence and Danny. The variation of this theme was particularly articulated by the youths Daryl and Gregory.

Eric, much like Danny from the discussion on the previous theme, seemed to be particularly influenced by his perception of an Asian cultural and family tradition. He says, "My father has spent a considerable amount of time making sure my sister and I are aware of our cultural traditions and expectations. Just like his father, he demonstrates for me the role of a father in the family. I am learning how to be a father, just as his father taught him how to be a father." I asked, "Describe how he demonstrates being a father." Eric shares, "Well it is more than just a demonstration. He does that day-do-day. We talk about it. When he does something that I should learn from, he points it out. 'It is this sort of thing that a father is expected to do for the family' he would teach. So, it's much more than just doing, a father's role is to teach." Eric is very sharing, and I found that just by sitting and allowing him space, with not so many questions, he would generally explain his thinking without my probing. He adds, "It is actually pretty simple. You learn how to be a father from your father, who learned from his father. In a lot of families, fathers may even do the same work as their father, and so forth."

Lawrence equated being a man with being a father. Additionally, he was very aware of his father's self-critique of himself, based on not having a father in his life. He talks extensively about how his father shares his childhood experiences, and how he constructed his own fatherly values from a life experience of not having a father. He shares, "It almost seemed that my father wears his childhood experience like a badge of honor. He would share with anyone who would listen. My father genuinely feels that he constructed his own values about what a father should be like, but evaluating how he felt about every experience he had, and how I would be different if he had a father. He doesn't talk about the pain he had, he talks about the values he obtained and his commitment to be different. Lawrence attributes his own perception of self-value on the basis of the type of father he would be. He goes on to express a desire to be like his father in some ways. "I admire my father very much. It was a struggle for him, but he made it. For him, being a father is kind of like passing a torch...these are qualities that his son will acquire later in life...when he becomes a father." "Eventually," Lawrence declares, "you kind of think of it in terms of the son being groomed to take the place of the father, for the next generation."

In contrast to the conversation that focused on how fathers passed along to their sons their concepts of the generative nature of fatherhood, Daryl and Gregory provide insight on the perspective of a youth, and their thinking about their role in the generative nature of fatherhood. I said to Daryl, "You have mentioned a few times that your dad has frequent conversations with you and your sister, particularly you, about how he felt growing up without a father." He replied, "Yes. He talks about that a lot. My dad thinks a lot about what he feels he missed not having his dad, and it seems he wants to make up for it. He says he had to make up what he thought a man is supposed to do. He tells me that it is his job to set an example of being a good father. No matter what I did, when he fusses at me about it, he always says that I have to remember these

things to pass along to my children. Sometimes that is more important to him than me doing the right thing.” I replied, “So, how do you feel about that Daryl?” “I get it. It’s not so much that I have to pass my thoughts on to my children, but, I have to make sure I pass my father’s thoughts down to my children. I know that means a lot to him. He had to make up his thoughts, and he want to make sure it does not stop with me. He always say, ‘when you get kids, you make sure you teach them these things. Nobody told me, but, I’m telling you.’ That means a lot to him.”

Gregory, who did not have a father to pass along the concept of the generative nature of fatherhood, nevertheless presented strong images of the concept in much of his conversation. For example, he stated, “I know that my children are going to be just like me, so have to get myself straight. I ain’t shit cause I didn’t have anyone to teach me how to be a man, but I’m learning from the street. I know what to say to my children...that’s what I’m here to do. I’m supposed to teach my son how to be a good father. He will tell his son, ‘my dad taught me this, and taught me that.” Gregory paused and took two deep breaths. He stared into open space for what seemed like eternity. I finally interrupted, “You want to stop?” He looked back at me. “No” he demanded as he looked into my eyes. I could feel that he felt my pain, listening to him. He verified, “You know what I mean...I can tell.” I would not let myself look away. He continued, “I supposed to show my son how much I love him, so that he know how to teach his son how to love his children...I know people don’t think so, but I ain’t always gonna be out here.” More deep breaths. This time I did not interrupt his moment of fantasy and resolve.

### **The Son Assumes Father’s Traits/Qualities/Values**

The final theme most often articulated under the son-father relationship experience domain involved the son assuming the traits, qualities, and values of their father. As a sort of byproduct of the generative nature of fatherhood, the participants who contributed the most on

topics that exemplify this theme were dominated by adult men who grew up with their fathers, with one exception. In the most explicit examples, however, the four individuals (Mike, Danny, Lawrence, and Andrew) who contributed almost equally to this theme were split in terms of whether their fathers had fathers. Both Mike and Danny grew up with fathers who themselves grew up with their fathers, suggesting the presence of the generative nature of fatherhood possibly contributing to their assuming the traits/qualities/values of not only their own fathers, but very possibly the traits/qualities/values of their grandfathers. This connection was made very explicitly by Danny and Eric in our conversation relevant to Asian culture and tradition with respect to the expectations of a man; however, in my conversations with Mike, he made no such suggestion. Contrastingly, both Lawrence (who grew up with his father) and Andrew (who himself did not grow up with his father) had fathers who did not have their fathers in their lives. Notwithstanding this difference, they all particularly shared experiences related to the discovery of being like their own father.

Along with Mike's reflection on his feelings about the changing nature of his relationship with his father over time, he also found humor in how much he felt he was, as he stated, "becoming my father." He shared, "Sometimes it is almost scary to me...and I don't have a son...but, I often find myself acting, talking, thinking, and reacting just as I recall my father doing. Most of it, I guess, is good, but not all of it." He reflects on his relationship with others he encounters. "Not just at home with my daughters, but with everyone, I have my father in me. Even with my mother...it's like sometimes when I talk with her, I am repeating things I have heard or felt from my father when I was a child...Even in my interaction with people at work." I asked Mike, "How does that make you feel?" He replied, "I'm not really sure. You want to feel like you are your own self, but it's there; I have to accept it." He pauses to chuckle. "Overall, it's

good...I'm proud of my father, and proud to be his son. He did a good job with me...I feel." I then asked, "What do you imagine you would be like without him in your life?" He chuckled, "Hmm, I shudder at the thought. Me—not having a father? I guess I never actually thought about the number of many men who did grow up without their fathers. It wasn't like that where I grew up. Hmm...I don't know...I feel sorry for them...How do they know who they are? How do they know what to do in difficult situations? How do they know how to raise family? Wow, Chris...this is really deep. It makes me think about the advantages I had by having a father...much of which I may have taken for granted."

Danny not only embraced the notion of being the embodiment of his father's traits/qualities/values, but almost seemed to wear it as a badge of honor, and a symbol of his masculinity. Much of this was discussed in the context of gender expectations and differences. With respect to sharing his father's traits/qualities/values, Danny considered this an expectation, based on broader cultural norms and expectations. "My father has very traditional family values...he believes that the leader of the family is the father... The boys in the family learn from the father how to be a man...A man insures that his family is aware of history and traditions of the family...he passes this on to his son who is responsible for passing the traditions on to his family, and particularly his sons." While Danny does not explicitly refer to a grandfather, with respect to the generative nature of fatherhood, it seems implied. Nevertheless, he is very explicit about the cultural expectation that a man's traits/qualities/values are passed down from one generation to the other.

Lawrence, who like Mike and Danny grew up with his father in his life, was not exposed to a grandfather; who was not in his father's life, in contrast to the experience of Mike and Danny. We have discussed this influence on Lawrence in the context of the son/father fantasy.

Nevertheless, his reflections on acquiring the traits/qualities/values of his father were extremely similar to Mike's. "Oh, I see it consistently" he shares with a smile. "I can't get away from it if I tried." He continues, "Not only do I see it, but I am being told all the time; from my mom, my sister, aunts and uncles, everyone...I know it, and the truth is, it's OK with me. He ain't bad to be like...My dad is very earthy, in that he didn't at all have it like me...But, there is that part of him that I have managed to pick up, and it is that part that people seem to pick up on, and I sort of appreciate...I didn't have to struggle in life like he did, but I have a tendency to show some of the survival characteristics, or frames of mind, that he does in terms of being aware of what goes on around me, and knowing how to manage my surroundings." He states, "My dad had a tremendous influence on me and my values...which I am very proud of...Sometimes, I am very proud of being compared to my dad...the way he thinks and handles situations." I asked Lawrence, "Tell me about times that you are not proud of being like your dad." He paused to think. "Umm, I don't know. I realize that sometimes my dad looks at me, or thinks about me and it makes him a little sad. As much as he is proud of how he had influenced his family, he can't help but think about not having that himself as a kid. It still hurts him. He tries to redirect his thinking to how things are now, but sometimes I can see it, or he will say something that reflects his emotions about it. I learned that I can't help him...I cannot relate. I can't really think about times that I am not proud of being like him...it's not that I am not proud, but that is something about him that I don't share. I know that he doesn't want me to share that with him, but it does hurt." During this part of the discussion, while I could personally feel his father's pain, I did not detect that Lawrence felt it. His voice reflection, body language and eye contact did not change at all. I had to maintain my own composure, as I completely understood his father's experience, as a boy and as a father. I believe that Lawrence's demeanor during this part of our conversation

helped me to understand my own emotions and how my son may feel about me, with respect to my pain.

As there is a difference between Andrew and the others, with respect to growing up with their fathers, there is a striking difference in his perception of acquiring his father's traits/qualities/values. In the same enthusiasm as the others spoke with pride about acquiring their father's traits/qualities/values, Andrew seemed adamant about his concerns about not being like his father. "It's not that I hate him." He blares. "I just don't want to be nothin like him." I see Andrew drifting into another level of thinking. He says softly, "Hey, I know what I'm like... You know, my girl in trouble... The choices I make... I try to do the right thing... I don't want to be like him... I worry sometimes that I am." He pauses and I let him gather his thoughts. There is silence for about five seconds. Finally, he speaks again, "Man, you gotta think about what you do... my father don't think." I asked him to explain. "You know... you can't just go around making babies and not taking care of them... What they gonna be?... They gonna end up like you... I ain't gonna do that... I ain't got much, but I am gonna be there... I ain't like him... I don't wanna be like him." His voice volume raises, "I'm gonna take care of mine... it's not good right now, but I ain't leaving... I get help, but I'm there... I hate this... I don't want this." I asked, "What is it you don't want?" He replies, "I don't want to be like my father... leave me and my sisters and brothers to struggle... that ain't right... I ain't gonna do that."

Considering the differences between Mike and Danny having grandfathers; and, Lawrence not having a grandfather; and, the similarities of their perspectives about assuming their own father's traits/qualities/values, this almost suggests that the generative nature of fatherhood may actually start, or is limited to the direct experiences that a male has with or without their own father, with the exception being where there is a strong generative cultural

tradition and influence, which is in the case of Danny. With all of my interviews, the only time a grandfather's influence was implied was in the cases of Danny and Eric.

### Feelings/Emotions

The second most prevalent general topic articulated by all the demographic groups involved how the participants expressed their feelings and emotions relative to the son-father relationship experience. The most prevalent themes associated with the feeling/emotion topic were: a) relationship reflection/importance over time; b) reflection on personal experience/choices; c) expression of emotions; d) father accessibility; e) respect; f) father's pride in adult son; and, g) father qualities.

The following table provides the thematic tabulations for all interviews indicating the frequency of statements made by the participants, relevant to the feelings/emotions category (see Table 4.6):

Table 4.6  
*Tabulation by Wave*

Theme	Tabulation by wave			Total	% of Category
	1	2	3		
Relationship reflection/importance over time	43	58	41	142	17%
Reflection on personal experience/choices	53	54	30	137	16%
Expression of Emotions	30	29	29	88	10%
Father accessibility	16	55	15	86	10%
Respect	16	25	29	70	8%
Father's pride in adult son	22	16	29	67	8%
Father qualities	18	16	23	57	7%
Total other themes					24%

Each of these themes indicated in the above table are illustrated by the following summary representation of my interviews with those participants that most saliently articulated both the relevant themes as well as the feeling/emotion category. I not only address how they talked about their feelings and emotions, but also describe how emotions played out in the interview setting.



### **Relationship Reflection/Importance Over Time**

This particular theme permeated almost across each of the demographic segments, with the exception of Timothy and Andrew, adults who grew up without their fathers. It was, however, most prevalent among the youth who grew up without their fathers, followed closely by adults and youths with fathers. The primary characteristic of this theme centered on the participant's account and associated feelings/emotions regarding their relationships with others in their lives. It was articulated almost equally in negative and positive context. Negative accounts characterize the inability to trust others to genuinely care about their well-being.

Gregory spoke harshly and painfully about his experience with his mom's boyfriend. He followed up his disdain for this man with almost equal distrust of others, particularly men that crossed his path. A great deal of the conversation with Gregory was accompanied by his disregard for showing his pain. "You can't trust these fools out here," he warns. "I had to grow up knowing that nobody cares about you...you gotta watch everyone...even your family. I learned early that you better not trust anyone...as soon as you do, they disappoint you...rip you off." Additionally, Gregory included himself as being untrustworthy. "I learned that you gotta do what you gotta. I'm going to make sure I make it...you know... I don't wanta hurt nobody, but I ain't going down...everybody gotta watch their back." Again, one of the things that struck me most about Gregory and his openness to discuss his experiences was his open display of emotion and pain. Unlike others I interviewed, whom I felt needed a moment to gather themselves, Gregory never seemed to display any need to gather himself. It was almost as if the pain had just become a part of who he is, at least in the context of these types of recollections. I got the distinct impression that much of Gregory's pain was associated as much with his present circumstances as they were with his recollection of his past. His conversation weaved in and out of the past and

the present. He spoke very little about any future—it was always a day-to-day perspective of his life.

In contrast to Gregory, Chris seemed optimistic about the possibilities of positive relationships with others. He struggled with an account of his relationship with an on-and-off stepfather. In his account of this relationship, the stepfather would sometimes make promises that were unfulfilled, which often hurt. In spite of Chris' efforts to expect such actions on the part of his step-father, it was as if his hopefulness would not allow him to harden his feelings. He rationalizes, "I saw him mostly like a friend because you know he really didn't seem like a dad in the way he was always hanging around." He spoke of the relationship in terms of what it meant to his mother, rather than himself. "I think he would say he was just taking care of me, like he was babysitting, I think.... It just feels like, it feels like if I'm unhappy." He goes on to fantasize about his biological father, in the middle of the conversation, almost as if he wants to replace the thoughts of his step with the fantasy.

I further noticed that the fantasy was always about Chris' biological father, rather than his stepfather, indicating a clear distinction between fantasy and reality. This was indicative of my general findings on the characteristics of father fantasy/hunger; being almost totally devoid of reality. The fantasies tend not to be reinterpretations of reality, but total constructions of a different possible reality. Speaking of his biological father, Chris states, "I feel like an experiment sometimes... maybe he's just testing me to see what was I going to do without him, you know... And when I become something he'll come back and tell me something like 'I just wanted to see if you could make it on your own' or maybe that's what I think it is."

Eric and Daryl, both teenagers who have their fathers in their day-to-day lives, also articulated positive feelings about their relationship with their fathers and others. Diamond

(2007) articulates the plight and complexities of adolescent boys as well as asserting a foundation from which teenage boys start to deal with their changing mind, body, and emotions. Daryl, who lives with a single father, speaks very fondly of his father teaching him and his younger sister how to get along with others. "My dad has always made sure me and my sister knows how to act and get along with all type of people...it is very important to our dad that we are comfortable with others." Reflecting upon his father's son fantasy/hunger Daryl adds, "he always talks about how he wished he had known his father during his life. Although he was pretty successful in life, he always talks about how he would have been much happier if he had a dad...he tries very hard to make sure my sister and I have what we need...sometimes he over does it, but don't tell him I said that." He chuckled. Alvero, Edward, and Danny; adults who grew up with their fathers, all expressed similar stories of very positive relationships with not only their fathers, but with others as well. Most of their accounts attribute their ability to adapt and fit-in, in part, to their positive relationship with their fathers.

Alvero was exceptionally expressive of how he feels his relationship with his father has helped him in other relationships. Lewis and Weinraub (1976) discuss the role of the father in the socialization of their son as well as their adaptability skills. Alvero boasted, "I know I have lived a blessed life, and I attributed that largely to my upbringing and my relationship with my mother and father. My father did all he could to make sure his family felt good about who we are. Talked a lot about being proud and taking advantage of our blessings. With him, it was all about feeling good." I asked him to elaborate. He continued, "For all of my life I have always been able to get along with all type of folk. My father came here from Mexico, and made it a point to fit in. I learned from that growing up...from his example, but also from his talks with the family. Today, I recognized how I went through college, and through my working environment, always

being very friendly with others, and always having a great relationship with those around me. That is very important. You take that home.” “How so?” I asked. “My father taught us, if you let yourself have a bad relationship when you are not at home, you bring that bad attitude home, and have a bad relationship with your family. I believe that, and my experience proves it. Good relationships are important for the environment at home.”

Edward’s account of the significance of good personal relationships and its connection with the relationship with his father mirrored the thoughts of Alvero. He adds, “My father’s relationship with me is contagious, in that, not only does my father make it a point to instill values to his family, but he is very particular about how we feel. He is considerate of our feelings, and always wanted to have a good personal relationship with us...Likewise, he sometimes talked about how important it is that we are considerate of our relationships outside of the home...To my father success has to do with relationships. He demonstrated this by his relationships at home and with others...He made sure he instilled those values in his relationship with his children.”

Likewise, Danny expressed how his father was deliberate with not only fostering a good relationship with his family, but explaining to the children how important it was that they maintain good relationships with others. “My dad would say, ‘How are you going to get along with others if you don’t get along with your own family?’” He added, “I remember while I was growing up, my dad once tried to coach my little league baseball team. It was so funny. We hardly won a game, but what he cared about most is how the team felt and got along. After our games, particularly the ones where we were just blown out, he would take the team out for such a good time, you would have thought we won.” We both smiled about this recollection. He then

laughed, “We were terrible, but you could not tell it from how he acted and talked about us to the other parents...I know they thought he was crazy.” More smiles.

### **Reflection on Personal Experience/Choices**

Timothy and Andrew, adults that did not grow up with their father in their day-to-day lives were most representative of this theme. The second pair of participants that most articulated this theme was Chris and Gregory, two youth who are growing up without a father in their day-to-day lives. Primarily, this theme reflects the articulation and discussion involving the participant’s reflections and feelings about their current personal experiences and the choices they make. These accounts are contextualized with particular reference to the role of their son-father relationship experience. Unlike father fantasy, where they reflect on how their lives would have been “if,” these reflections are grounded in the lived reality of their day-to-day lives now, with some reference to the decisions they make, contextualized in how they feel about their day-to-day reality. Father fantasy speculates on what could have been. This theme reflects on what is, and how it feels, now. The implication is that this “true” reality would be different, and feel better, given the fulfillment of the father fantasy.

Timothy was particularly reflective of the reality of his day-to-day life circumstances, including the choices he makes. He offers, “Not having a father in my life, I guess that’s why I have a bad head on my shoulder. Sometimes I’m misguided... by me not having a father, I’m not going to say, messed me up, but ahh, it kind of kept my life on hold, you know.” He further reflects, “I’m not out here doing anything legit, like I’m supposed to...I could be doing something better with my life instead of sitting here, sitting, you know, letting time pass by.” While Timothy does allow for the effect of not having a father, he genuinely articulates personal responsibility of his daily activities and the choices he makes.

Throughout this part of our discussion I could feel him holding back his emotions. Again, he maintained a gaze of distance, as he appeared to navigate his words around the pain of constructing his sentences. He adds, “But, I managed to keep a good head on my shoulder, and stay away from the negativities....and still think about what I’m going to do in life. How I’m going to establish it. It’s going to take some time, but I’m still working on it.” He took his time during our conversation to reflect on examples of what he wanted to say before he said it, and very often his comments were self-critical and about making choices. “I should not have to live like this...a father make sure you have what you need...do the right thing...go to school...I try to do these things as a child...not knowing where you gonna live is not right.” Timothy and I really bonded during our conversation. He seemed to really appreciate that someone “cared” enough to talk to him about him. He stated, “What you doing is a good thing...I am...I like that you care bout me to talk to me...I see you sometimes and you never look at me like...well you know...I seen yo kids before...fathers supposed to do what you do...I’m gonna do some good things...I have to get straight.” As Timothy uttered this final sentence, we paused to allow him to compose. His pain was infectious; however, I knew that if I showed any sorrow for him, it would end our conversation. The manner in which Timothy spoke with me made it clear that he demanded to be considered an equal. He spoke of the research being “our” research, and he demanded that I inform him of the research completion. We remain in touch.

Andrew was also very particular about the role of personal responsibility, with respect to overcoming his perspective of the shortcomings of not having his father in his life. He states, “I know that if I am going to be a good role model for my kids...my daughter right now...I have to work hard to keep working...they have to see me as a provider.” Additionally, he seems to also be aware of the consequences of the decisions he makes. Both he and the mother of his daughter

have criminal records. The mother is currently serving minimum time for probation violations. He holds back tears each time he speaks of her. The daughter was born to the mother who was incarcerated, but released to the grandmother. Andrew has the benefit of having a very supportive extended family, which includes his own mother, his adult sister, very supportive uncles and aunts, and the baby's maternal aunts. Andrew anticipates, "We cannot do the wrong things anymore...I have to be there for my kids...she needs her mother too. We can't let temptations and other people make us do what we know we get in trouble doing...I will not let my kids not have a father, like I didn't. I know I did wrong things, but I can't do any more...my kids will need me."

Gregory, a teenager who primarily lives on the streets also acknowledges that he is responsible for his daily situation. Very similar to Andrew's statements about personal responsibility he states, "you know...I do what I do...I ain't going to blame anyone...my father didn't try to show me nothing, but I know what I do." Anticipating his influence on children he mutters, "I don't know if I should have kids...if I did, I would be...I would try...kids need a good father...I don't know if I...I'm not going to try to have kids now...I can barely take care of myself." I watched Gregory go through a number of thoughts, constructing his thoughts as he goes along. I got the impression that he had not thought much about many of the issues, particularly those about his influence on others, including the possibility of his own children. However, he had clearly thought a lot about his role in his circumstances. "Maybe sometime...I should stop a lot of what I do...I will."

Chris briefly discusses personal responsibility in the context of being a leader. He states, "I think I have to be more disciplined in how I act out because if everyone else sees me as a leader they're only looking upon me if I mess up." He follows with, "It's okay to mess up, so if

I'm going to take that role as the leader I have to lead them right. I just can't lead them to a dead end or a cliff." Both Gregory and Chris speak in the general context of how their experience feels. Gregory says, "sometimes I just feel bad...I want to be different...I want it better...I don't know...it just hurts sometimes."

### **Expression of Emotions**

Throughout much of the interviews there was an abundance of emotions that were expressed. I found that not only were these participants very willing to share their experiences and reflections on their lives, in the context of their experience with and/or without their fathers, but very often they were not ashamed to let their emotions flow. On several occasions some of the participants openly cried during the discussion. Additionally, I found myself not only needing to give them time to gather their thoughts and composure, but having to gather mine as well. Some of the examples that resonate with me are from my interview with Chuck, for instance. He was very collected with respect to being able to articulate his relationship with his father. He explained the contemptuous circumstances under which he told his father that he was gay. Discussing the blatant disappointment his father expressed unleashed his tearful expression of emotions. At one point, when I attempted to give him space to gather himself, he explained that his tears were not exactly about his relationship with his dad, but some more current things going on in his life. Without judgment I accepted that explanation, and Chuck's need for dignity. And, I could feel his pain.

Another example of one of the participants that was very open with their expression of emotions was Paul. Similar to Chuck, Paul was a man who grew up with his father in his life, yet he nevertheless described his family as dysfunctional. Also, like Chuck, Paul is gay. He is the father of two children, who he rarely sees. Unlike Chuck, his family background was of



considerably less financial means. During one stretch of our conversation, Paul attempted to explain how he has had to survive in the streets of Hollywood without employment, and his relationship with a male friend. “It’s like, I don’t want to do what I do, but I have to eat, you know...my friend, he acts like he don’t understand, but he gotta place to live.” Paul then puts his right hand over his chest and the other up to his mouth. The tears are then revealed. We pause, and I asked him whether he wanted to stop. “No, I’m OK...I’m just...We go through this over and over...I am not a whore...I just gotta eat...I can’t go home...They ain’t got shit... I can’t live with him...they ain’t having that...I’m just out here.” Tears flow with every breath he takes. “I really want to be with him...but, what can I do? I don’t want to do this...I don’t like these other men.” His pain starts to get to me, but I just listen, and allow him space. He pauses to wipe away the stream of tears dropping to the hand on his chest. I wait. After a few seconds I make an attempt to change the direction of the conversation. I asked, “Tell me about the relationship you have with your children.” He looks up at me and stares for a second or two. “Relationship?” Tears. Nothing but tears. His next words were right back where he left off, talking about the pain he has for having to prostitute to “eat.” And, how he really wishes he could be with his friend. “I know this hurts him really, really bad. I love him, but he don’t really believe that. I protect him...his family don’t want to know what he really is...so, I don’t go there...at his house...I don’t know what we gonna do.” At no point during this stretch of our conversation was there a time of no tears. We had to take several breaks. I think it was more for me than Paul. The crying seemed to help him to feel better.

The other two most notable participants that exemplified similar open expressions of emotion and pain were Gregory and Andrew. In the case of Gregory, he openly expressed a deep sense of resentment and disdain, directed primarily to his mother’s boyfriend. We spoke

adamantly about a boy needing to learn how to be a man from his biological father, not “some fool wannabe.” Each time Gregory spoke of needing to be taught how to be a man by his biological father, he was interrupted with tears. Moreover, Gregory mixed his emotion of pain with anger. “This ain’t right.” He would retort. “I am disgusted.” Andrew’s expression of emotion centered on his insistence not to be like his father. Much more than a passing expression of desire, Andrew expressed disdain at the thought and reflection of what his life had been like, and how adamant he was that things would be different for his children. Very often Andrew would express his emotions by just pausing, staring, and reflecting. But the disdain was clear with his facial expressions. Andrew is determined to be different, but for now, much of what he expresses is fantasy about the future, tolerance about the present, and anger about the past.

### **Father Accessibility**

Clearly, the participant that contributed the most to the father accessibility theme was Daryl, who lives with his single father and younger sister. During our conversation he only spoke in passing of his now deceased mother of seven years. As mentioned before Daryl is well aware of his father’s son/fantasy hunger as he has had frequent lectures from his father about how he wanted to make sure his children’s lives were much different than his, primarily due to a missing father in his life. Daryl speaks very fondly of the time his dad spends with him and his sisters. “My dad is always there...at school...at home...at anything me and my sister are doing...He will not miss it.” I asked him to explain how this makes him feel. “Well, very special. My friends already know my dad will be there, and they accept it...if he is not there, everybody will ask where is he?...I feel good that he is there all the time....He talks with my teachers, my coaches...everybody about how I am doing...I know I get special attention from others, cause they know they will have to deal with my dad.” I followed up with, “How do you think it makes

him feel?” “Oh man!” he replied. “My dad really makes sure that I do the right things...if I am not doing right, he is all over me...but, I can always see how proud he is of me, and my sister. We get good grades in school...we don’t get in trouble too much...and my dad really likes hearing good things about us...he is proud of what he is doing as a father...he really loves us...he don’t let anybody make us think about being bad or nothing...we have some cousins that sometimes get in trouble, and he always say to us that we can’t do what they do...we can tell he loves us...he is always there.”

In contrast to Daryl’s sentiments, Andrew’s reflection on father accessibility was exclusively about its absence. Throughout our conversation Andrew consistently referenced the effects of not having his father in his life, or his father not being accessible. He expressed a great deal of anger and disdain toward his father; and, as mentioned above, this manifested in a profound sense of self-perception and fantasy with respect to being like his father. Additionally, Andrew not only expressed thoughts about the lack of accessibility to him, but he was almost equally affected by the notion that his father was likewise inaccessible to a number of other children, and the possible effect. “You know...you can’t just go around making babies and not taking care of them...What they gonna be?...They gonna end up like you.”

Similar to Daryl, David also speaks with profound pride about his father’s life long accessibility and expression of appreciation for his son. David reflects much on how his father, even at the revelation that David was gay, never wavered in his expression of love and support. He has fond recollections of his father exposing him to things in his own life, and always being attentive. David credits his own sense of self-respect and pride to his son-father relationship experience. He explains, “In the circle of friends that I have, mostly gays and lesbians, there is a great deal of stress and ambivalence, particularly with respect to having to deal with your family.

Lots of my friends spend too much of their time stressed out about either being exposed as gay to their family, or dealing with the aftermath of their family being aware. For some of them, they feel invisible, in the lives of people they still love. I am really blessed, in that I have never felt like that. Even from the start, I don't recall feeling anxiety about having to share with my family who I am." I asked David about the types of conversation he has with his father about being gay. He responded, "You know Chris, we really don't talk about that. I mean, do you talk with your father about being straight?" I refrained from answering that question, as I believed I got his point. He continued, "We talk about the same types of things other normal father and sons talk about...the same things we talked about when I was growing up...the same type of things he got me interested in as a child...he talks about his profession, and experiences he has had, and so do I. Our relationship is no different than most father-son relationships." I then asked about it being different than other father-son relationships where the son is gay. "Yes," he says. "As I mentioned, in a lot of instances, it isn't about what they talk about...there is no communication at all, and it is very stressful." I found it pointedly interesting that the issue of stress did not come up in any of my other conversations, in the context of the son-father relationship experience. Even as I think back upon my own son-father relationship experience and its ramifications, I actually do not recall thinking of the displeasure as being stressful. Although one could easily diagnose the levels of stress in many of the accounts shared in this research, I nevertheless find it striking that the term was never used.

The remaining themes that were excavated from the analysis of the category of feelings—respect; father's pride in adult son; and father qualities—were all somewhat limited in the overall tallies, but were very much present within the context of other themes. For example, in much of the conversation regarding the relationship reflection/importance over time, there was

a significant inclusion of respect. Likewise, in much of our conversations regarding the son assuming the father's traits/qualities/values, there were significant contributing elements of both the father pride and father quality themes. Such results merit the inclusion of these additional themes as they pertain to the overall categories presented in the themes outlines above.

### **Respect**

This theme, much associated with the relationship reflection/importance over time was most articulated by Chuck, Paul, and David, who all grew up with their fathers in their lives and are gay, while at the same time each had very dissimilar experiences with their father, specifically related to being gay. Nonetheless, the issue of respect was prevalent and significant to each of them. Throughout my conversation with each of these participants the issue of respect was consistently present. Chuck was very poignant with his characterization of a father's influence upon his children. "I think in a good relationship a father is someone that you respect, someone that you might fear, you know, demands respect." Additionally, in his discussion about the ordeal of being confronted by his dad about being gay, he tearfully confided that his father's words felt disrespectful of him and he ultimately feared a long-lasting feeling of mutual resentment and disrespect with his father.

Dissimilar to Mike's privileged upbringing, Paul's childhood was an experience of poverty and family dysfunction; however, very similar to Mike, his father was extremely unaccepting of Paul's sexual preference, to the degree Paul left home to survive on his own on the streets of Hollywood. In addition to his feeling a lack of respect from his family, he was also very emotionally expressive of his feeling of alienation and misunderstanding from his primary sexual partner. Throughout our conversation he suggested that he worried that his partner did not respect him, similar to his father. He cried, "I know I do things they don't like, but I have no

choice...I want to be respected...they don't have to disrespect me...I'm disrespected by the tricks...I don't respect." Many of Paul's sentences were left incomplete and overtaken by his emotions.

### **Father's Pride in Adult Son**

In the case of both Lawrence and Danny there was a great deal of overtone about their father's pride in them, both as youngsters and as adults. Much of this was illuminated along with the themes of assuming their fathers traits/qualities/values, as well as father qualities. Both were very expressive of a mutual respect with their fathers that permeated as far back as they could remember, and persist today. Other terms they used about their father's pride in them were support, being there, dependable and consistent. Lawrence spoke very proudly about his father's pride in him during high school football. "Everyone on the team and others would harmlessly tease me about how my dad would just sit in the stands with other observers...no, he was on the sidelines...the coaches know how my dad felt, so they let him on the field. Sometimes, when running a touchdown, my father would be almost running beside me on the sideline. I didn't notice, but everyone would say, 'the only person close enough to tackle you is your father.' My dad is a good man, that I am proud of." Discussions with Danny were quite similar to those with Lawrence. Throughout his life, his father demonstrated an abundance of pride in him and his accomplishments. "Yes, my father really put pressure on his children to be successful at whatever we were involved in...it didn't matter. He wanted us to be at the top of the group. However, he also showed pride...not in himself, but in us...and we could feel it...he was very open with expressing it verbally, to any and everyone. Yes, that always felt good, and I see myself doing the same thing with my son. I learned from my father how important it is that your

son know that you are proud of him...for who he is, not just his accomplishments. Don't get me wrong...I expect a lot of my son, but I am also very proud of him.”

Gregory's sentiments and expressions related to pride derive primarily from his father/fantasy. Gregory's father hunger is ignited by not only his fantasy of having a father presence, but also a biological father presence that embodies a number of fantasy characteristics, including pride in him. Gregory's fantasies are contrary to the reality of his experience with a stepdad who he does not share a feeling of pride with or about. His fantasies are fueled by the pride, respect, and attention he perceives others experience in their son-father relationships, in addition to his perception of a positive outcome resulting in these relationships experienced by others, juxtaposed to his existence of having to fend for himself. “I wanted a father like them. I would have so much fun...and things. I wouldn't be out here. I would dream about it.”

### **Father Qualities**

The father qualities theme runs decisively parallel to the “father's pride in adult son” theme discussed above, and its juxtaposition of the son assuming the father's traits/quality/values theme. Both Lawrence and Danny were very expressive about their emotions relative to how their father showed pride in them, as well as their desires to be like their fathers. Again, the primary contributors of this particular variation of the father pride/traits/quality/value theme are Lawrence, Danny, and Gregory; however, this strand of thinking can actually be found in most of the participants at various levels and with widely varying perspectives. While many of the conversations relevant to these themes were of a positive nature in that some of the participants characterized their son-father relationship experience as having supportive and respectful qualities, there was no shortage of accounts where these qualities were conspicuously missing. Throughout my interview with Gregory he alludes to the absence of a feeling of value about

himself; attributed to the absence of a quality relationship with a father. He states, “I know that my situation...being on the streets like this...not worth a damn, would be different if my father gave a damn about me...my sister...man, what can I do?” Conversely, Lawrence beams with pride in his discussion about his father’s positive and supportive qualities. “My dad is always there. Growing up it was not something I had to think about...he was there. Sometimes it felt as if I could do no wrong...he supported me my whole life...he respected me.” As mentioned above, in many of the accounts where the participants shared that these qualities were missing, there was a parallel fantasy/hunger for such qualities to have either existed in the past, thereby changing the present and future; or, exist in the present, thus enriching their lives now, with the projection of a fantasized future. In essence, quality of life in the past, present and future was of significant importance to all of the participants. Danny adds, “It is clear to me that I carry over the qualities of my father, with my own son. Sometimes I can hear my dad saying the very thing to me that I say to my son...acting the same way as my dad. I suspect my son will be the same way.” And, it is this lived and/or fantasized quality of life that helps define, through their collective accounts and reflections relevant to the emotions associated with their father/son relationship experience, how they see, respect, and value themselves; how they relate, respect and value others; and, how they perceive they are seen, respected, and valued by others (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997).

## **Leadership**

**Self-leadership.** The final topic articulated by the group of participants involved how the participants expressed leadership concepts in the context of their overall perspective of the son-father relationship experience. The primary theme emanating from this topic was self-leadership (see Table 4.7):



Table 4.7  
*Tabulation by Wave*

Theme	Tabulation by wave			Total	% of Category
	1	2	3		
Self-leadership	18	28	23	69	50%
Total other themes					50%

The themes that were categorized under “total other themes” were effective leadership, leader’s role to direct, and expectations of leaders. Collectively, there was minimal conversation on these topics beyond their relevance to self-leadership. The most poignant discussion on effective leadership and the leader’s role to direct was articulated by Edward. He briefly explained some of the challenges facing his father and mother as immigrants. “My father really had to work very hard for us to try to make it...he say that I have to help with job he do...but I have to be a leader...he say school is better, which help me with leadership...I can get people to work hard and make it better for my family...he talks about being the leader of the family, but a good leader that make a different.” In deference to the expectation of leaders, Danny was particularly contributory. In this area his father was profoundly influential. His father put special emphasis on the role of a father to not only be the leader at home, but to assume leadership credibility in all areas of his life and profession. “My dad never gets tired of talking about leadership, and what the family community expects out of leaders. He made sure I understood that a failure to lead and direct was more than just a failure of myself, but a failure to the family and community. The community expects me to be an effective leader, which means the family and community trust me to be sincere, honest, and knowledgeable. I can still hear him asking, what good is it to have the role of leadership, if you are not effective.” Berson et al. (2006) illuminate on a relationship between attachment theory and the development of one’s perception of leadership. They write, “According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979), people examine the behaviors of significant others with whom they interact by relying on mental models, called

internal working models of relationships” (p. 165). Vygotsky and Cole’s (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) provides additional context for the relationship between a boy’s relationship with his father and the development of leadership values.

To my surprise the connection between how the participants perceived leadership development generally had little to do with their feelings about the son-father relationship experience. While the adult men who grew up with their fathers seem to acknowledge their own leadership qualities as well as the leadership qualities of their fathers and acknowledged that their own leadership qualities were probably attributable to their relationship with their fathers, this topic was rarely discussed in the context of importance. Additionally, the consistent focus on the topic of leadership development was primarily about the development of self-leadership. Interestingly, there was a slight difference in how the two groups perceived the impact of their son-father relationship experience on “self-leadership.” While those with fathers tended to acknowledge the possibility of an influence, those who did not have positive relationships were clear that self-leadership was developed on their own. The latter examples of respondents thus fantasized that they may have developed better leadership qualities had they had the example of a father in their life to guide them.

Examples of these variations include an instance in which Mike talked somewhat fondly of learning how to work hard by watching his dad; however, when he discussed his own leadership qualities, he fell short of attributing it to having a positive son-father relationship experience. Lawrence, who also spoke highly of his relationship experience with his father, particularly his father’s consistent involvement in his life, also did not seem to find this a topic to elaborate much on. The group that seemed to have the most appreciation for the connection was that comprised of the youth who are currently growing up with their fathers in their day-to-day

life: David and Daryl. This was followed by the adult, Timothy, who did not have a father, and the youth, Gregory, who did not have a father. Both Timothy and Gregory spend a great deal of their time street surviving.

David, who is gay, expressed throughout the interview a very supportive and appreciative relationship with his father. He especially appreciated how the revelation of him being gay did not seem to have any effect on his father's support and guidance. David's father is a fairly successful attorney, who would take David to his office when he was younger. Subsequently, David expressed an abundance of admiration for his father, particularly how he gets along with people, including the family. David pronounced, "I have been proud of my father for as long as I can remember. Every time I think about him I recall how people always seem to like him...even when he was telling those things to do...even us. He really knows how to talk to people, and make them feel good about doing what he wants you to do."

The most profound account of the connection between leadership development and the father-son relationship experience was articulated by Daryl. He shares, "Our dad has always given us every bit of himself...even when my mother was alive we counted on him. For the last seven years, since our mother's passing, I have admired how he did not change at all...he is our leader...he is my hero." With specific reference to leadership development, he shares, "I admire my father very, very much. He never has to tell me what to do, or what to think...he shows us with his actions. Me and my sister are both learning how to be leaders by watching him. I am so looking forward to being a hard working family man, just like my father. I always volunteered to be in leadership clubs at school, and the captain of my sports teams...my father has taught me how to be a man. He has taught me that to be a leader you have to take care of your family...I can't thank him enough." The tears sliding down Daryl's cheeks were obvious tears of

admiration and appreciation of his father. The tears sliding down my cheeks were obvious tears of my own father fantasy/hunger.

On the other side of the spectrum are Gregory and Timothy. Both, not having fathers in their lives, and spending much of their current existence as street-wise pan-handlers, perceive self-leadership in the context of survival. While much of both of their accounts were about the pain and disappointment of not having the guidance, support, and leadership of a consistent biological father, or father figure, they both seemed to resolve that it was something they had to get past, and that their survival depended upon their ability to move on, adapt, and have control over their own behavior, actions, and future. While they both fantasize about the prospect of changing their current state of existence, and possibly providing fatherly guidance for children of their own, they both have a strong sense of day-by-day self-dependence.

Gregory, in his utter disrespect and disdain for the transient men in his life, including his mother's boyfriend, had a profound sense of self-determination and dependency. He believes that his future depends solely on his own ability to transcend his current "predicament." Anger and pain seems to permeate his daily existence, with a slight glimmer of hope embedded in his fantasies of someday being a father figure that "knows how to do it right" in his words. He reacts, "I know it has to start with me...I can do better than these fools out here...but I gotta learn how to be a good man...I gotta learn on my own...that's what a leader is...somebody who has self-control and can do good things for his kids...that is what I want to be." I asked him to describe someone he knows who is a good example. "Ah man, shoot. I told you man, I don't know no one like that...you know on TV it looks like that's what a father can do...but I don't know one. My friends who got fathers...some baby-daddies runnin' round, but them ain't fathers...the father is the leader...but he gotta lead his self first."

Timothy is particularly self-reflective about the physical and social challenges he faces. He reflects much about the need for self-improvement. “Not having a father in my life. I guess that’s why I have a bad head on my shoulder. Sometimes I’m misguided... by me not having a father, I’m not going to say, messed me up, but ahh, it kind of kept my life on hold, you know.” Timothy has a genuine sense of belonging with respect to trying to fit in to a community. He reminds me that he has seen me several time during his life, and that he tries to be a good person. He asks people for money at the filling station but he is never disrespectful. He says, “I know what a leader does. He takes care of his family and his self...you gotta be able to take care of yo’-self first...how you gonna take care of somebody else of you ain’t together yo’-self. I see you take care of yo’ family. I seen them all the time...yo’ kids with you...you know. You been taking care of them...I see you as a good leader...you have taken the time to sit down and talk with me...that’s what a leader can do...take care of yo’-self and your family...and care about other people.” Timothy starts to cry again. But through our tears I see a gaze of hope in his eyes. He looks out over the street, an airplane goes overhead drowning out the sound of the cars hustling by us. This allows us to pause and reflect on his desires to have it better. Timothy closes our conversation. “Hey man. Good luck. I love you. Stay up.” As I get into my truck to drive away, I realize that I am leaving a large part of my heart and soul with Timothy. I ask myself, how many other Timothys are there out here? I pray that Timothy is able to find the self-leadership to at some point in his life live out some of the dreams he has for himself.

## Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusion

### Interview Findings

The purpose of this research was to explore what the son-father relationship experience feels like, as articulated by purposefully sampled boys and men who agreed to be interviewed. The central research question was: How is leadership development influenced by the phenomenal characteristics of the son-father relationship experience, including how sons articulate their feelings about the relationship, at and over time? Additionally, consideration was given to uncovering the degree to which and the manner that the reflective experiences offered by the participants manifest into leadership development, a relationship that had previously been neglected in the literature on both the father's role in child development, and leadership development. The deliberately multidimensional characteristics of the participants ultimately yielded a wide range of results with respect to the ties between the son-father relationship and leadership development. For example, while Timothy fantasizes about what having a father should be like, "You know, as you get older, you can be just like your father...do the things he do." Chuck reflects upon his father's disappointment upon discovering that his son was gay; "that was the first time in my life where I really came to grips with the fact that there could be moments where I can have an irreconcilable point of view with my dad."

While I found the men and boys that I approached to interview to be extremely receptive, cooperative, and particularly open about discussing their feelings and emotions relevant to their overall perception of the son-father relationship experience—and their personal experiences, for the most part, there was very little connection being articulated about how their feelings, emotions and thoughts about how the father-son relationship experience influences or is related to leadership development directly. While there is considerable consideration being acknowledged to an anecdotal connection between how boys are, or should be, affected by the

leadership qualities of their fathers, very little was articulated about how the participants felt their own leadership development was influenced by the relationship experience, particularly juxtaposed to the amount of attention the participants spent on describing their feelings and emotions about their son-father relationship experience. In this respect, what is particularly noteworthy is the richness of the interviews with respect to the participant's accounts of the phenomenal characteristics of the son-father relationship experience, including how sons articulate their feelings about the relationship, at and over time. While there is significant research that suggest various cultural and socio/economic factors play a significant role in how fathers and sons experience and perceive their relationship (Allen & Conner, 1997; Myers-Walls et al., 2006; Leeder, 2004; Pleck & Pleck, 1997; Ricketts, 2007; Roopnarine & Gielen, 2005), my interviews did not discern such factors. The findings of my interviews, with respect to the strong emotions expressed about the son-father relationship experience, seemed to cross ethnic, race, sexual orientation, and economic lines, leaning much more on the personal experiences of each individual participant.

It is additionally noteworthy that each of the interviews resulted in profound findings related to the primary theory-based questions, particularly; a) what are the perceptions of the son-father relationship that adolescent boys and men have? and, b) how do adolescent boys and men describe their feelings and emotions about their own son-father relationship experiences?. And, less so with c) in what ways do adolescent boys and men describe leadership characteristics and qualities in the context of their own son-father relationship?

### **How the Findings Address the Research Question**

In what ways is leadership development influenced by the phenomenal characteristics of the son-father relationship experience, including how sons articulate their feelings about the relationship, at and over time?

As suggested above, while part of the central research question, particularly the focus on leadership development, was not directly addressed very often during the interviews, there was considerable consideration and articulation on the part of sons about their feelings about their own son-father relationship experience, at and over time. The leadership aspect of this question was articulated mostly in the self-leadership sub-themes brought out in the interviews. Other sub-themes that suggested an association with this aspect of the central question were effective leadership and leader expectations. Danny spoke about his father's perspective of a leader starting with the family. He stated, "My dad never gets tired of talking about leadership, and what the family community expects out of leaders. He made sure I understood that a failure to lead and direct was more than just a failure of myself, but a failure to the family and community." Mike spoke of how watching his father work hard throughout his life helped to establish in him the value of hard work and being a good family man, but not necessary leadership development. He reflects, "We talk about work, or I mean he's been retired for a while so it would be my work but what's going on around the house with my grandparents."

For each of these sub-themes the primary focus on the part of the participants seemed to be on themselves, in terms of what they felt were quality leadership characteristics to have. Additionally, there were moments where some of the participants suggested the lack of such leadership characteristics in their own father, however, rarely was there a suggestion by any of



the participants that there was a direct relationship between their emotional son-father relationship experience and the development of these leadership characteristics in themselves.

With respect to the second part of the question; “how sons articulate their feelings about [the son-father relationship experience] at and over time,” there was overwhelming contribution from all of the participants. The dominant sub-themes derived from the interviews that support this concept were discussions around father fantasy/hunger, the changing nature of the son-father relationship over time, and son fantasy/hunger. For example, both Mike and Chuck were very articulate about the changing nature of their son-father relationship experience. Mike states, “...it is funny how our relationship seemed to evolve as I was growing up. And, especially now since I am now a father. I notice how he admires me and the man I have become with my children.” Chuck shared about the last days of his father’s life; “There were various points in time when I would be like sitting in his hospital room, and whatever, and he would say, ‘why is it that we never really got along?’ And, there was a little bit of sharing going on.” Despite Chuck’s sexual orientation, his ultimate relationship with his father suggest credibility with Ilardo (1993) who points out a strong positive relationship between the presence of a masculine father, a positive father-son relationship, and the son self-consciously thinking of himself as a male, in the likeness of their father with respect to characteristics like commitment to family, dedication to hard work, and valuing education.

To me as a researcher, the participants were openly and unapologetically emotional about their reflections, desires, and experiences related to their father. Balcom (1998) discusses the role of emotions of both fathers and sons in determining the significance of their relationship. In Andrew’s discussion about the differences between his experiences and those of his cousins he stated, “We would be over my cousins’ house and my uncle would be so nice and making them

feel good. I would have fun, but it really hurt sometimes because I realized that after I get home, that is not my reality... They seem to have everything they need. Now they have been to college and doing good... My uncle was a good man and taught my cousin how to be a man and not get in trouble like I did... I still don't think my mother knows how much I cried when she was not around. I just didn't understand why... how could I not have a father." Those that were relatively pleased with their own son-father relationship experience were no less emotional and expressive about their accounts than those who were considerably less happy about theirs. For instance, Lawrence described his father's involvement during a typical school field trip to an amusement park. "he would go on all the rides like, you know like he was one of the kids... and even interact sometimes with some of the kids." Speaking about the consistency of his father's involvement, he adds, "even as I got older, umm, in high school, umm, my dad would, you know, sometimes, it seemed like he was better friends with some of my friends [chuckle] than I was." Time after time, during my interviews I could readily sense the appreciation of all the participants for having an opportunity to have such a conversation. On many occasions this was explicitly expressed to me, again, from those who felt they had rewarding son-father relationship experiences as well as those whose accounts were felt and expressed to be less rewarding. I reflect back on my conversation with Mike after the official interview, where he continued to talk about his father, and mentioned that he felt the interview was very good for him to experience, as it allowed him to reflect on his son-father relationship experience. Harking back to the literature in Chapter II, Kotelchuck (1976) asserts that developmental psychologists have virtually ignored the father's influence on the infant's early social development, instead studying fathers only in their absence. My research not only supports Kotelchuck's assertion but extends his conceptual hypothesis to include male teens and men, some of whom have lived with their

fathers and others who have not. By extending the questions to include adolescents and men, the findings of this research offer a more longitudinal perspective on the lasting effects of the son-father relationship experience.

Lamb (1976) further elaborates on the need to not only examine the mother-child relationship, but also to the importance of appreciating the complexities of the father-child relationship. My research is structured very deliberately to do just this—to illuminate the complexities of the son-father relationship experience, as articulated by young men. Moreover, I also seek a greater depth of understanding of the lasting impact of the fatherless experience of young boys, which often affects their perspective of themselves as adults. This can be seen in Andrew's suggestion that, "Lots of boys would do much better in their lives if their fathers taught them how to be men. Boys need a role model to follow, and it needs to be their own father. Another man cannot motivate you to be like they are. A boy wants to be like his father." This holds also, and maybe in particular for those who fanaticized a father. But there are also sons who grew up with a present father who do not want to be like their father, which is also an outcome of this research.

Whereas the research shows a significant need for sons to be seen, valued, and coached by fathers about being a man, the critical literature on masculinity suggest that the nature and quality of what it means to be a man is also culturally shaped (Allen & Connor, 1997). In this context, it should also be seen that the way the participants experience their relation to a father figure is likely to be influenced by the normative societal expectation that the best environment for children to grow is with two biological parents of opposite sex. This question is, however beyond the scope of this research. Again, by including men with and without their fathers in their

lives, this research broadens the scope and relevance of the conversation about the son-father relationship experience from a first person perspective.

I would summarize the answer to the research question as follows: Men and boys are enthusiastically expressive in their articulation of their feelings about their son-father relationship experience, at and over time. However, while they are somewhat expressive and articulate about leadership characteristics that may or may not exist in them and or their fathers, they tend not to be very expressive of any influence on leadership development deriving from their son-father relationship experience.

With respect to these findings being relevant to current fathers and future fathers, and how they may think about fatherhood, I am struck by Lawrence's interview, and how he points out how his father approached fatherhood with specific intention, based on his own son-father relationship. While it may seem instinctive that men would do such, what seemed unique with Lawrence and his father's approach was how his father shared this with Lawrence, rather than just acted upon his intentions. Likewise, Daryl discussed how his father was open about his intention to teach him how to be a family man and provider. None of the literature I reviewed in preparation for this research discussed this type of approach to fatherhood. Much of the literature, instead, speaks of the generative nature of fatherhood being reflected by fathers passing down to their sons values that were passed down to them from their fathers, without explicitly discussing it with their sons, as in the explicit discussions Daryl had with his father. Additionally, the literature is replete with studies about boys not being afforded fatherly values when being raised in the absence of a father. The data gathered from Lawrence's interview suggests a new approach to research on this topic that delves into the affect of fathers sharing their fatherless experiences, feelings, emotions and thoughts with their own sons.

Moreover, the enthusiastically expressed articulation of the feelings, emotions, and thoughts from the men and boys interviewed is further supported by the findings relevant to the additional theory-based questions described below.

### **What Are the Perceptions of the Son-Father relationship Among Adolescent Boys and Men?**

Based on the text of the interviews conducted it is my conclusion that while adolescent boys and men perceive the son-father relationship in varied multi-dimensional characteristics, somewhat dependent upon the nature of their own experience, there does seem to be a general expression of value in its existence. Clearly, while this may seem intuitive, however, there were some interesting variations noted, with respect to the varied elements and perspectives of the relationship that are valued. For example, many of the characteristics of the son-father relationship experience that were expressed to be valued (fantasized about) by those who did not have their father in their lives while growing up, were not exactly the values expressed by those who did have fathers in their lives while growing up. The emotional relationship between sons and their fathers was expressed in high regards with those who did not have fathers, while those who did have fathers were less expressive about the importance of the emotional connection and more expressive of the example setting and changing nature over time characteristics of the relationship experience. Clearly, the lived experiences of the two are distinctly different. However, the fantasy experiences of those without fathers are not necessary aligned with the reality experience of those who had or have their fathers in their lives. With respect to the extended effects of father fantasy/hunger, Machtlinger (1976) points out the element of fantasy father attachments, from his observation of fatherless children. He argues, fatherless children experience the most intense and persistent attachments to fantasy fathers, which they construct out of even the most minimal relationship or contact with any man at all. (p. 299). What my

research helps to illustrate is the extent fatherless boys will go to have a son-father relationship experience, to include no male at all.

Another interesting observation related to the perception of the son-father relationship experience was the articulation of the son fantasy/hunger concept. Here, some boys who experienced father fantasy/hunger while growing up found this emotion evolving into a son fantasy/hunger; experienced as a fantasy of having a son who would not grow up with the pain and hunger of not having a father in their lives. Interestingly, this theme was articulated by sons who had fathers, reflecting on conversations with their fathers, rather than fathers expressing it to me themselves. With respect to this focus on the perspective of the father, Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2006) conclude that the father's perception is also a significant factor related to the father's role in the child's development. While their research primarily focused on caregiving activities, paternal warmth, nurturing activities, physical care, and cognitively stimulating activities as the most significant domains of father involvement, associated with the father's perception of what fathering constitutes (Dermott, 2008; Morman & Floyd, 2006), my research also suggests the significant impact of the generative nature of fatherhood, and how the son-father relationship experience, as articulated by sons who later become fathers, has a significant affect on the perspective of their sons.

I would summarize the answer to the research question as follows: The perception of the son-father relationship experience (in general), as expressed by adolescent boys and men, is largely influenced by a number of factors, primarily associated with their own experience and the experience of their fathers. These factors include; the nature of their son-father relationship experience (i.e. nurturing, supportive, abusive, missing, transient, etc.), the nature of their father's son-father relationship experience, and stories told by or about their own fathers.

Additionally, I feel it is significant to relate this theory based question to the central research question. This is accomplished by pointing out the minimal articulated perception of the son-father relationship experience.

### **How Do Adolescent Boys and Men Describe Their Feelings and Emotions About Their Own Son-Father Relationship Experiences?**

This theory-based question has been addressed in my summary of the central question as well as the previously discussed theory-based question. While the nature of participants' responses was largely dependent upon their personal experience, their enthusiasm and willingness to share was consistent almost surprisingly emphatic, and very much noteworthy.

The literature in Chapter II points out the overwhelming impact that fathers have on the social development of their children, and particularly their sons. As illustrated in the Diamond (2007) quote above noting the need for young men to create an autonomous life that is separate from their families, the father/son relationship has implications for the entire range of essential elements of a fulfilled life, such as career, relationships, and a sense of belonging in the world. While the research is clear on the affect fathers have on the social development of their sons, what my research makes clear is the willingness for adolescent boys and men to express their emotions about their relationship experience.

Each of the participants was not only openly expressive, but outwardly emotional. Very often I shared emotional moments with a participant, both sad emotions and happy emotions. On one occasion one of the participants began to cry, and explained that the tears were related to something other than what we were discussing in the interview. Overall, I got the sense that men need to have an opportunity to openly express their emotions about a variety of things, and that the topic of their relationship with their father seems to provide a conduit for allowing their emotions to flow. What I did find very interesting is that I was able to present myself to men,

who I did not previously know, in a manner where they felt comfortable enough to be emotional. I fostered such an environment through a mindful approach to the interview process that positioned myself as emotionally open in terms of my own feelings, which allowed me to characterize the interview as founded on the experience of mutually sharing experiences in a fundamentally non-judgmental way. Clearly, the fact that participants did not know me personally could have very well been the reason they were willing to be so open and emotional; however, truly establishing such an environment requires, on the part of the interviewer, a clear presence and ability to appear nonjudgmental.

I would summarize the answer to the research question as follows: Given the opportunity to have a conducive environment to express their feelings, emotions, and thoughts about their son-father relationship experience, men are generally extremely enthusiastic, willing, and open. A conducive environment includes a nonjudgmental listener who shows the ability to actively participate in the interview as a listening participant rather than a detached observer. Again, the findings of this theory-based question tie directly to the central question, particularly with respect to how sons articulate their feelings. Additionally, I make the point that not only is it important to understand how men articulate their feelings, but also to consider the type of conditions under which men are most likely to articulate and express/demonstrate their emotions.

### **In What Ways Do Adolescent Boys and Men Describe Leadership Characteristics and Qualities in the Context of Their Own Son-Father Relationship Experience?**

Finally, the final theory-based question presented to the participants resulted in different results than were anticipated. This may very well have a lot to do with the overwhelming emotional attachment the participants had to the primary subject, their son-father relationship experience. In Chapter II, it was noted that Berson et al. (2006) explore the relationship between attachment theory and the development of one's perception of leadership. They write:



According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979), people examine the behaviors of significant others with whom they interact by relying on mental models, called internal working models, of relationships. People form these models on the basis of early childhood experiences...we examined whether these attachment models were also related to individuals' perceptions of leaders. (p. 165)

This may very well be the case, however, it is not articulated by the participants in my research. Notwithstanding the aforementioned research perspective, in my research, while the relationship experience conversation elicits, or invites emotional responses, my questions related to leadership always seemed to change the tone of our conversations. I noticed that the participants would tend to change their posture, tone of voice and facial expression when I brought up leadership. After a few such experiences, I tried to find less obvious ways of bringing the topic into the conversation, but I always got the same type of reaction from the participant. For the most part the only strand of conversation I was able to generate, as it related to leadership, was discussion about the presence or lack of leadership the participants felt was demonstrated by their father. Also, they all seem to have thoughts about what it meant for them to be leaders; and, in this sense they had perspectives of what leadership was and was not. But, there was little association made about the development of leadership, either influence to their son-father relationship experience, or from any other source. These results clearly indicate to me, as a leadership scholar, that there is an abundance of leadership development information required for the general public. I am postulating that these findings may suggest that in the context of a number of environments, circumstances, and relationships people are not cognizant of how relationships affect and are affected by the characteristics of leadership development. This may very well suggest that this is an area of research that requires much more attention.

I would summarize the answer to the research question as follows: Adolescent boys and men describe leadership characteristics and qualities as incidental to their son-father relationship

experience. While they acknowledge the presence and distinction of leadership characteristics and qualities, there is little articulated relationship between the development of such characteristics and qualities and their feelings, emotions, and thoughts relevant to their son-father relationship experience. It must be noted, however, that these findings are contrary to other research findings regarding parental influence on leadership development. For example, Sinclair and Wilson (2002) state, “The leaders we have interviewed...carry into their approaches to management and leadership deep-seated attitudes and orientations substantially shaped by family characteristics, family circumstances, schooling, and social experiences” (p 39). I suggest more research is warranted on how relationships influence leadership development, particularly research that takes a multidimensional approach designed to identify the nuanced range of parental influence.

### **Limitations of the Research**

The primary limitation I find with this research is relevant to the time span. I believe that the finding would be strengthened and more reliable with a longitudinal type research approach. With respect to this theory-based question and the central research question, the primary limitation of this research was the inability to engage the participants in direct dialogue relevant to the ways leadership development is influenced by their feelings, emotions, and thoughts about their son-father relationship experience.

Retrospectively, other research tools (such as a pre-interview questionnaire) may have been used to assist in constructing interview questions that may have generated more answers to this specific topic. Additionally, I now think that the interview sample should have further targeted individuals who have profound leadership roles in their community and or business. Considering the emotional responses generated by the relationship experience element of the

interviews, second interviews focusing on leadership development may have been utilized to elicit responses more relevant to leadership development.

These findings do not necessarily suggest a lack of connection between participants' son-father relationship experience and leadership development, but rather indicate a difference in understanding and dialogue about what leadership is, and what constitutes evidence of leadership development. Time for additional interviews would have allowed space and opportunity for the participants to make the connection between their experience and leadership development in light of various perspectives on leadership. To the student of leadership there is ample evidence of leadership development imbedded in the accounts given by the participants; however, within the framework of a phenomenological approach, my role as the listener was to represent the responses of the participants in the spirit of their sharing, as prescribed by the tenets of the research methodology being used. Within this context, there was minimal connection made by the participants themselves between their relationship experience and leadership development despite the fact that each participant was given the opportunity to discuss leadership development, from their perspective. In each case the leadership strand seemed to be a different conversation for the participants. The general conversation about the relationship experience seemed to center on the participants' emotional connections with their father. While some of the participants recognized some leadership development being influenced by their father, they did not include these influences in the context of their emotional relationship with their fathers, or their relationship experience. Nevertheless, in allowing the participants' responses to guide the research process in accordance with my chosen methodology, it can be argued that foundational representations of leadership qualities emerged in the form of incidental information that is readily categorizable and applicable to the parameters of leadership research.

## **Future Research Opportunities**

While I have suggested that my research did not seem to be influenced by social/economic factors it is my instinct that future research should delve more into the possibility that such factors do in fact play a significant role in the son-father relationship experience and its effect on leadership development. Mirande (1991) warns of the errors against: a) ignoring the potential effects of ethnicity, thereby assuming that all fathers are alike; and, b) conversely, assuming that ethnicity has the same effect on all members of a given ethnic group. Connor and White (2006) elucidate the challenges of fathering without male role models; sometime experienced in urban communities. They share, “Although young Black men understandably need the guidance and intimacy which generations of Black fathers can provide, many urban Black men begin the fathering process without the benefit of close bonds with men in fathering roles” (p. 12). Considering the growing multi-cultural construct of American society, further research could be done on the impact of various cultural differences, from a global perspective. In a discussion about families in Japan, Murray and Kimura (2006) share, “[In Japan] Father’s involvement in child care or housework is generally seen as ‘helping’ the wife, rather than assuming these tasks as part of the father role. There is indication that men are attempting to reinvent fatherhood.” (p. 303).

Although this research did not produce the level of explicit detail on leadership development that I had originally envisioned I might discover, the process resulted in perhaps just as valuable an understanding, namely, a picture of the specific emotional and circumstantial ways that the foundations of leadership development are grounded in the meaning made of our relationship with others, beginning with those relationships and expectations of the individuals who have an influence earliest in our lives. In a discussion on how adolescents acquire leadership

skills, Linden and Fertman (1998) share, “[while] there is very little formal learning experiences in families...there can be much informal learning experience that prepares and encourages young people to take on leadership roles outside the family circle” (p. 60). Much of this influence may go unnoticed to the youth, which may account for the lack of connection in their account of the son-father relationship experience.

Clearly, there is indeed a phenomenal relationship between how many of my interviewees articulate their son-father relationship experience, and their concepts of leadership development, although it was often not expressed or was left unnoticed. Again, this point is suggested by Gardner (1995) in his position that leadership is a process that occurs within the minds of individuals who live in a culture, or the day-to-day circumstances of the interviewees. The research of Burns (1978) and Bronfenbrenner (1961) also support the undeniable link. Perhaps more direct follow-up questions about the connections between these two concepts (son-father relationship experience and leadership development) may have elucidated a more explicit understanding and connection with the participants. For example, in the first wave of interviews both Timothy (adult w/o father) and Lawrence (adult w/father) articulated feelings that were judged to be associated with self-leadership. The next wave of interviews may have focused on this particular theme for saturation. Future interviewees may have been asked to discuss ways in which they judge their own sense of self-leadership, and how it is or is not influenced by their son-father relationship experience. It would not have been unforeseen to circle back to the first wave of interviewees for their responses. Obviously, the response may very well have generated related questions. This same process could have been applied to the case of David (youth w/father) from the second wave of interview, who articulated feelings associated with the leader’s role to direct; and Gregory (youth w/o father) and Danny (adult w/ father) of the third

wave, whose feelings about leadership centered on the expectation of the leader. Again, this process would have involved circling back to previous interviewees, and could have generated other, stronger connections between the son-father relationship experience and leadership development.

Finally, I believe that overall, the dynamically evolving interaction between our emotions, mind, and body provides for a “self” in the context of our expected and perceived relationship with others (real and/or fantasized), and that it is this dynamically evolving “self” that informs our day-to-day decision making, social behavior, morals, and contribution to our community and society at-large, in essence, the heart and soul of what in the end constitutes leadership.

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