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Exploring What Men's Perception of a 'Good' Family Is, and How This Understanding Shapes Their Roles and Functioning Within Their Family

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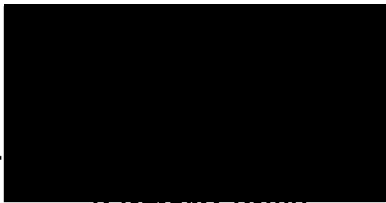
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**Exploring What Men's Perception of a 'Good' Family is, and How This
Understanding Shapes Their Roles and Functioning Within Their
Family.**

By

Grahame L. Paull

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for
Bachelor of Social Work (Honours)

Edith Cowan University, Bunbury.

March 2002

Abstract

This study was based on the belief that the dynamics of personal relationships is the basis of social life and personal well-being. There is growing support in the literature however suggesting that the gap between men's family relationship functioning, and their ideals of how life ought to be is widening. The purpose of this research therefore was to explore through men's own experiences what their perception of a 'good' family is, and how this understanding shapes their roles and functioning within their family. Using the three concepts of family as a symbolic structure of meaning, masculinity and cognition, as the theoretical framework to guide the study, four men participated in unstructured interviews. Results were analysed utilising the symbolic interaction perspective incorporating Kelley's Personal Construct theory and Goldstein's Cognitive-Humanistic approach. Findings highlight the implications for working with men in the human services and the inadequacies of current deficit approaches. A recommendation for development of improved conceptual models based on empowerment and strength perspectives is suggested if meeting men's needs and improving their relationships within their families is to be realised.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- Incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- Contain any defamatory material.

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(Grahame Paul)

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29.3.02
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(Date)

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My thanks and appreciation to 'Andy', 'Bob', 'Colin' and 'David' who participated in this study. This thesis owes much to their willingness and openness to discuss personal aspects of their primary relationships. Without their contribution, an understanding of how men value and understand their family relationships would not have been possible.

To Pauline Meemeduma as my supervisor, special thanks for her valued time, assistance and encouragement to enable me to have this thesis 'see the light of day.'

"I suppose the ideal for me is that my wife would feel loved and highly respected by me, that together we would actually grow in love for each other and respect for each other as we get older.

A bit like a fine wine.

'Andy'

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Chapter 1

Men's perception of a 'good' family

"My dad is too rough, not home enough, he yells too much, and his consequences are much too hard on me. That's the way most fathers are. Why? I don't know."

Boy, 11, from Take Time to Play Checkers, by Misti Snow

Introduction

Story 1 – "Ron"

Ron was in his late 40's, though he looked at least 50. He was referred for counselling by his friend, had been prescribed anti-depressants and was feeling very bitter. A farmer all his life, Ron related that he was not very talkative, shy, but he'd done what was expected of him, worked hard and provided for his wife and two boys. Times on the land had been hard, they'd had periods of financial difficulty. However, something had gone wrong. He was separated from his wife and now filing for divorce and claimed she was preventing his boys from communicating with him. Ron had to think back years to recall some good memories and moments in their relationship. They had never been really intimate and it appeared that he had not been close with his boys for some time either. Whatever he wished for now, it seemed too late. He was depressed, resentful and longing to get into another relationship as soon as he could. Why? If he had not been close for a long time, what did being in a family relationship mean for Ron? Was he looking for intimacy but unaware of his need or how to find it?

Story 2 – "Geoff"

Being one of nine children, and with Geoff's father working away a lot, Geoff's mother was the disciplinarian. However, when home, his father was strict and everyone did as they were told without arguing. This was the way things should be. There was respect! Geoff now sat with tears in his eyes, head bowed and rubbing his hands together. He explained that he would get angry, verbally and emotionally abusive toward his wife and children if they argued and didn't do as he asked. There was no respect anymore. His

wife had finally had enough, and after many threats, had now left. He had worked hard to provide for them like his dad had for him, but was now working only part-time so he could be at home with the children. He loved them. He loved his wife and wanted her back. He was now realising his perceived ideas of his role as husband and father were too rigid, too demanding. He had realised too late. It had taken a crisis for him to be shaken from his ways. Why hadn't he seen it earlier? Why was he so blind? Now he could lose them all – the people he loved more than anything else. The nights were now long, sleepless and full of anxiety. He had thoughts that life was not worth living anymore.

The stories of Ron and Geoff are not uncommon for men today. The relationships and well-being of many men do not appear to be rewarding and healthy. Like Ron, many men want something different but are not sure what. They appear not to understand their own, or their family's emotional needs. Like Geoff, many men are shaped by their family of origin and seem to have little cognitive sense of what is wrong or how to cope. In frustration, their coping behaviour often ends up being dysfunctional. Thus, like both Ron and Geoff, many men are 'out of their depth' in their relationships and end up in crisis.

If family relationships are important to men, why are many men not coping in their roles as partner and father? The purpose of this research is to explore how men understand their primary relationship: the family. In particular, this research explores what men's perception of a 'good' or ideal family is and how this ideal shapes their actual roles and functioning within their families.

Source of the study

The stories of Ron and Geoff were sourced from the researcher's practice placement experience as part of a University Social Work Degree Course and formed part of the awareness of current relational issues for men. The study arose out of the researcher's own status and understanding within the Human Services sector. Specifically:

- The study arose out of a growing awareness and frustration from critical debates such as feminist theory regarding men's negative behaviour within their own family relationships. Attitudes surrounding such critical analysis can often appear to be stereotyping men or be anti male. While these attitudes may well be justified, (though the researcher suspects not) research is needed to understand men by getting men's own stories.
- The study also arose from concern over negative health statistics of men in general and evidenced personally from three instances. Firstly, working in a facility providing meals to people who were homeless and on low-incomes, the vast majority of whom were men. Secondly, from working with teenage boys who had suffered domestic violence from their own fathers, and thirdly from the placement experience in a counselling agency where the stories of Ron and Geoff were sourced.
- The study is also influenced by the researcher's personal experience of family. A career change resulting in role adjustments from breadwinner to student was accompanied by questions related to the researcher's own functioning, and what the fundamentals were that shaped oneself as a man, husband, and father.
- Lastly, awareness of changing masculine stereotypes in society leading anecdotally to apparent role confusion in some men.

Background

In recent years, there has been greatly increased awareness and research on women's psychological health and wellbeing (Hafner, 1989) which has been linked with much improved funding for resources such as Women's Health Centres. While men's wellbeing has received comparatively little attention there is growing awareness concerning the health and well-being of men in society. With health statistics reporting high incidences of mental health, suicide and general declining health outcomes for men, men appear to

ignore their health problems and not to be accessing services (National Men's Health Data, 1998; Lloyd, 1995).

While this has raised some public awareness, much of the attention has been focussed on what Giblett (1997) calls 'plumbing and wiring' (eg. prostate and testicular cancer) and on men as individuals (eg. occupational health, alcohol consumption etc.). While it is acknowledged that a man's functioning in a relationship impacts greatly on his health and vice versa (Giblett, 1997), there has been a dearth of literature focussing on men in relationships and the interconnection between men's functioning in relationships and their overall health: psychosocial as well as physical.

While there is much data concerning men's health, health is measured statistically in terms of how men generally engage in higher risk activity than women. For example men are shown as being more overweight/obese than women (44.7% compared to 31% for women); smoke excessively (32.1% compared to 24.7%); and drink at excess levels (14.9% : 7.5%) (ABS, 1998; Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 1996). Additionally, statistics report that the male-female ratios for the different causes of mortality are:

Motor vehicle accidents 5:2

Domestic and industrial; accidents 3:1

Suicide 3:1

Homicide 3:2

Coronary heart disease 3:2

Lung cancer and other lung diseases 5:2 and

Cirrhosis of the liver 2:1.

This data would appear to indicate that men's health is constructed in physiological and behavioural terms. The issue of men's wellbeing is surely more than the medicalisation of their problems. Men are more than behavioural beings who drive recklessly. They are also cognitive, social, and spiritual. Furthermore, the construction of men's health appears not to have looked at the vast majority of men, and men in their context.

There is an absence of research or health data showing a correlation between our individual health and the health of our relationships (Giblett, 1997). One of the major problems impacting adversely on the health of many men, women and children today is relationship dysfunction and breakdown. As these relationships are experienced primarily in the family, the family is therefore the context for many of these concerns, and the complexity in men's lives generally. As Doherty and Campbell (1988) argue, "the family affects the individual's health, and the individual's health affects the family" (p. 14).

Relational issues surrounding the family, for example divorce, and domestic violence suggest a problematic situation for some men and their families that appear to be deteriorating. Relationally, many women are expressing their dissatisfaction with their intimate relationships with men. Shere Hite's survey (1977) of 4,500 women showed that, for 98% of them, the biggest problem in their current relationship was a lack of emotional closeness. The most commonly expressed complaint (77%) was that "he doesn't listen." In the succeeding 24 years, this situation does not appear to have improved.

Within the family, there appear to be major differences in health and wellbeing between married men and women. Married women for instance report twice the psychological symptoms than married men, and women not employed outside the home reporting up to four times the amount of psychiatric disorder than do their husbands. (Tennant et al., 1982 cited in Hafner, 1989). While men report a level of psychiatric disorder about half that of women, their mortality rate is substantially higher. Hafner (1989) cites additional research by McLennan (1984) concluding that in the age group 15 to 24, the male annual death rate is three times higher for men than for women. The ratio falls to 2:1 for the age range 25 to 75. The death rates for both married men and women are significantly lower than for those unmarried or not in partnerships.

Cultural aspects related to wellbeing are also relevant. While the traditional Australian male behaviour has been linked with negative health consequences (Lumb, n.d.) and relationship functioning (Giblett, 1997), the changing nature and structure of the family toward a more multicultural society may also be impacting on men's functioning and wellbeing. This aspect is further discussed in Chapter 2. It is relevant to highlight at this point however that the cultural aspect is contextualised in this study as it was undertaken

in a rural and regional centre. Literature suggests that men's wellbeing in rural areas is more adversely affected than in city locations. Cheers (1990), for example suggests that rural Australians are generally disadvantaged relative to urban dwellers due to the large geographic distances and variations in population densities which makes serving rural and regional centres difficult. Cheers (1990) argues that the impacts of policies such as competitive tendering, farming subsidies, employment strategies favour larger locations and has contributed to higher rates of stress-related health problems, and higher and more prolonged unemployment in comparison to city locations. This in turn has led to a general feeling of abandonment and alienation by rural populations.

However, one of the consequences of this data concerning men's wellbeing and negative health is that there is poor conceptual framing for considering how best to work with, or help men. While men are visible in the human services, they are arguably stereotyped as a social problem (adjuncts to the lives of women, domestic aggressors and perpetrators) and an epidemiological problem (drink drivers, motor vehicle statistics). If the Human Service sector is to work with men effectively and appropriately, service models constructed around more effective frameworks are needed to successfully address these issues.

Defining the family

The popularity of the Australian family is demonstrated in Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures which show that 88 per cent of all Australians live in household families, that is, with at least one other family member (ABS, 1997:1). However, what is the definition of the *family*?

The ABS (1997) defines *family* as a group of 'two or more persons [who] live in the same household and are related to each other by blood, marriage (including de facto marriage), fostering or adoption' (p. 6). An Australian study of 602 university students reported by Sarantakos (1996, p. 5) found that 90 per cent of respondents agreed that families are characterised by a combination of marital status (being married or living together), parental status, living in the same household, heterosexuality and affinity. In other words,

according to respondents, for a group to be a family the couple should be married to each other, should have children, should live under the same roof, be of different sex, and should be related to each other. As 84 per cent of single parent families in 1997 were headed by mothers (ABS, 1997:1), this definition has important implications for separated and divorced men who may not live under the same roof as their children.

There is however, several types of family structure including single parent, nuclear, cohabiting and homosexual. There is also several types according to composition including extended, stepfamily/blended and modified extended. The majority of family type in Australia remains the two-parent family (53.7 %). Family diversity in Australia is also marked due to ethnicity. Ethnic families are generally defined as those with at least one parent born overseas. In these terms, the proportion of ethnic persons in Australia has increased dramatically since settlement in 1788, such that Australia is now a multicultural society comprising over 140 different cultures (Sarantakos, 1996, p. 67).

Value of the family for men

Research supports the notion that while men appear to be in crisis, marriage and the family have significant value for men, and are positive mediating factors in their wellbeing. Sarantakos (1996, p. 36) cites studies (Glenn & Weaver, 1988; Kurdek, 1991) comparing the happiness of married, single, divorced, separated and widowed persons. These results showed that married persons generally displayed the highest levels of happiness and lowest levels of depression.

What specifically does the family provide in terms of positive, practical utility for men?

To date, what have generally been appreciated as benefits are:

- The provision of domestic labour and care.
- Relational security through attachment.
- The provision of emotional work within the family largely done for them by their partners.
- The resulting progeny from the relationship.

- The provision of nurturing, especially during the children's infancy, the majority of which has also traditionally been done by the partner.

When marital breakdown occurs, men in general appear to struggle adversely compared to women. For example, divorced men have significantly higher death rates than married men (Edgar, 1997) and men are five times more likely to commit violence against ex-partners than current partners (Williams, 1998, cited in Pease, 1999). There is also a strong association between social isolation and mortality for men rather than women (Doherty & Campbell, 1988, p. 53) with the family components of social support being the most predictive of who would live and who would die. With one third of all marriages in Australia ending in divorce, research shows that contributing factors to the breakdown result from resentments and disputes over various forms of marital inequality and abuse of women by men (Dempsey, 1997, cited in Pease, 1999, p. 6).

Overall, this shows that there is clear benefit to men by being in a family relationship and that the vast majority of men enter into the relationships of partner and father within the family. However something is not working, as women are voicing dissatisfaction with their men and their situation. This study is about one aspect of men's relationships within the family, namely how men's understanding of their ideal relationships shapes their functioning.

The family as more than demographic structures

The family is more than a structural institution. It also has a symbolic representation for men. According to Marris (1986), our lives are ordered based on the symbolic meaning we give to objects around us. Marris referred to these symbolic meanings that we attach to significant objects as 'structures of meaning'. It is this symbolic value that is the family's most powerful role.

The family has significant meaning for its individual members. It provides the framework of thinking and action (Sarantakos, 1996, p. 68), and is an idealised system based on strong beliefs, values and norms, which shape the mode of thinking of its members. In ethnic families for example, family life can often be characterised by *familism*, which

puts family before individual rights, ideals, ambitions and interests. Being committed to kinship groups, families often act as an economic, social and personal reference group providing companionship, emotional security, guidance, source of models and a sense of identity and belonging.

According to functionalist theory, the family provides a status role. There is a correlation between occupational roles, income derived from those roles, and status of the families. Parsons (1951, cited in Sarantakos, 1996) believed that the social class position of the child was therefore ascriptively determined by the link between the father's work role and the father's family role.

Critical vs. romanticised notions of the family

Various and contrasting discourses in the literature surround these concerns. Depending on the theoretical orientation of the researcher, the family can be addressed as a social system, a group of interacting personalities, an institution, or the place of interpersonal conflict (Sarantakos, 1996). Across the diverse forms of families, gender is a dominant structural force (Milardo & Duck, 2000, p. xii). The family is the primary arena in which gender is taught, and learned. Parents are the primary agents for reinforcing ideological gender codes and gendered activities in families. Gender consequently must therefore be central to any understanding of family functionality.

Feminists have drawn attention to the mismatch for both males and females in idealised presumptions about families and gender stereotypes. Critical perspectives posit that traditional romanticised views of the family reinforce relationship processes and a division of labour that are unfair to women (Milardo & Duck, 2000, p. 17). Feminism as a theoretical framework defining women's needs has thus highlighted the power imbalance between men and women. Within this paradigm appear wide-ranging perspectives that include portraying men synonymously with the 'patriarchy'. Associated translations of men in this power imbalance are often as "aggressors" and "perpetrators" (Orme, 1998). Here gendered patterns observed in the family have structural rather than biological roots. There is no fixed or universal pattern and human behaviour in relationships and families has the potential for infinite variety.

The 'good' family

Amidst the apparent difficulties and contrasting notions of the family, literature also refers to the ideal of a 'good' family, and a 'good' relationship. However, what does a good family look like? Higson (2001, p. 44) suggests intimacy, and practical and emotional support between members would identify 'good' family relationships. She states, "partners who share a close, supportive relationship are also likely to have *good* relationships with their children" and, "he is a *good* man. He is quite helpful in housework and emotional support." Other definitions of good families may have strength and resilience in mind, such as the Australian Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (cited in Silberberg, 2001, p. 52.) that aims to build stronger family and community relationships. Alternatively, a good relationship may simply infer a 'happy' one, or require a parent to cope with everyday demands and be just 'good enough' (Good Enough Parenting, 1978).

It is not the purpose of this study to debate the philosophical nature of what is good, but to identify the term as a symbol used in common everyday language to connote an ideal that individuals and families aim to achieve or to become. Goldstein's (1986b) Cognitive Humanistic approach to counselling suggests that people make meaning and order out of the world they experience. Order is found by thinking through how life ought to be, which is an ideal, and then what actions are needed in order to achieve that ideal. However, as this chapter argues, some men are in crisis. For some, the 'gap' between their actual lived experience and their ideals may involve changes that are too great to bridge. As Higson (2001) ponders, "perhaps "happiness", in the final analysis, is simply a reflection of the fit between expectation and reality."

Why are men in crisis?

Current literature appears to focus on three interconnecting factors that help explain the current crisis in men's functioning. These three factors are:

- The changing structure of the family.

- Deconstruction of traditional gender roles, particularly masculinity, and
- The part socialisation plays in shaping roles and beliefs.

Changing structure

Changes in family structure and functioning have resulted due to a number of factors. Especially after World War II, the proportion of women and mothers in the workplace and the number of dual-earner marriages increased dramatically. Fathers are no longer the sole providers of the family or providers only, and their participation in household tasks has increased. Social conditions have led to families being under severe pressures more than before. Poverty and unemployment pressures have placed excessive stress on families, to the extent that a single income is no longer adequate for the families to maintain reasonable expectations of living standards (Sarantakos, 1996, p. 417).

The results of these changes are that men are fighting social pressures that mediate against having a more positive part in their families. Participants at a conference on fathering (Fatherhood, 1994) identified five major social barriers that currently prevent men from active involvement in family life:

- Men are not reconciled with their own fathers.
- Men have grown up without male mentors and good role models.
- They have not developed the skills to be involved.
- There is a lack of liveable resources, thus men are preoccupied with the issues of survival and their own usefulness.
- There is a lack of support from business, education, and personal, which doesn't allow men to be fathers. For example, there is a social stigma against men utilising paternity or parental leave.

Deconstruction of traditional gender roles

With the traditional family structure undergoing rapid change in society, men's traditional role within the family has, and still is, changing (Wolcott & Gleser, 1995). Levant (1996) believes the crisis is a loss of mastery and control of traditional roles. Thinking that there is any one "right" way to be a man is now seen as a confining and crippling belief.

With changing societal values, the patriarchal family is seen by many to be on the way out. Egalitarian attitudes of sex roles and a democratic family are replacing the former authority of the father/husband.

Buchbinder (1994) believes that with this disintegration of traditional boundaries, the individual's sense of how the social world is constituted is threatened. What were apparently self-evident truths are contradicted and as other possibilities are offered, men can, and have, reacted angrily when their worldview is criticised.

Socialisation

Literature points to a growing genderised culture. Pease and Camilleri (2001) and Pease (1998), for example argue that sexuality and gender have traditionally been situated in patriarchal culture. This has shaped men's accomplishments and their family interactions. Denzin (1992) asserts that woven through this culture are the ideal stereotypes, myths and beliefs surrounding, "romantic love, the beautiful woman, the handsome man, the perfect family, and erotic sexuality contained within a monogamous marriage structure" (p. 31).

This genderised culture is reinforced by media definitions of roles, which reinforce sex-role stereotypes. Donovan (1997) believes that men's socialisation leads to the individual beliefs that can promote abusive behaviours. If many of the beliefs that men hold are the cause, or at least aid the troubles in their lives, then the starting point for working with men is surely to assess their beliefs.

This study will use these concepts of family, masculinity and the part socialisation plays in shaping male roles, and the concept of cognition, that is how men think and make

sense for themselves about the family and their role in it, as the basis for the theoretical framework used to guide this study. This framework is further described in Chapter 2.

Research purpose

Due to the general crisis in men's lives relationally, there is a clear need to understand what is happening to men in their relationships. Two critical issues arise from these concerns:

- How do men understand their relationships in the family, and how do they think a family ought to be, in other words, their idea of a 'good' family? How do these understandings shape their actions within their family?
- The importance and appropriateness of conceptual framing for social workers to understand how men understand.

From these two issues, the purpose of this research is:

To explore what men's perception of a 'good' family is, and how this understanding shapes their roles and functioning within their family.

Research significance & objectives

This study is based on the belief that the dynamics of personal relationships are a basis of social life and well-being. While existing discourses appear to speak on behalf of men, there appears to be an urgent need for exploring a new conceptual framework for social working with men;- one that seeks men's own perceptions of how things are for them and that benefits and compliments both men and their family relationships equitably.

The way men think of the family, that is its symbolic rather than structural significance to them, and their roles within the family is important in giving order and meaning to their world. These meanings are shaped in part by perceptions of how things are, and our ideals of how things ought to be (Goldstein, 1986a, p. 42). Only through an analysis of understanding how men conceptualise their ideals and roles within their family, that is what they perceive as a 'good' family, may we realise possible reasons how this shapes their functioning.

Secondly, authors such as Thompson (1995, p. 75) stress the importance of linking theory and practice by social work professionals with the aim of improving service provision to clients. It appears though that surprisingly little exploration has been undertaken to derive a conceptual framing of *men's* needs. As Goldstein (1986a, p. 33) asserts in his cognitive framework "understanding our clients and their problems is achieved when we are able to comprehend their subjective worlds." Unless we gain a clearer understanding of men then, social work intervention may be at risk of being irrelevant to men's beliefs, hopes and expressed needs.

While this study focuses on men, it recognises that not all men share the same race or class, or similar experiences, life chances, status and health functioning. That is, men are not a homogenous group. A rationale for this paper however, is the belief and need to recognise men's capacity for wanting the best for themselves and their relationships and to do this by hearing their own stories through providing an opportunity for dialogue.

Friere and Shor (1987) state that "the structural social worker must develop a dialogical relationship with service users - a relationship based on horizontal exchange rather than vertical imposition." Within this way of working, each are equal, each learning from and teaching the other, sharing expertise and insight. Experience and wisdom are accepted from each other. From this critical perspective, the dialogical relationship is not simply counselling or interviewing, but consciousness-raising, and results in some change or action. It thus breaks down misconceptions and increases understanding.

This exploration therefore has three objectives:

- To contribute knowledge to the social work profession concerning men's *own* understanding of family issues. The aim of this is to improve conceptual framing for practitioners and hence better delivery of, and more appropriate services for men.
- To provide men themselves with an opportunity, and a sense of the contribution that they can make, toward self-empowerment, and,
- To add to my knowledge and understanding of what shapes my own role and functioning in *my* family, with the aim of being a better husband; father to my own four boys soon to be young men themselves; and as an effective social work practitioner when working with other men.

Chapter two will present the theoretical framework for this study.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

"Perhaps 'happiness', in the final analysis, is simply a reflection of the fit between expectation and reality."

From, State of the Union, by Rosalie Higson

Introduction

The strength of the contribution of social work to the human services is its emphasis on the social context in understanding the personal issues people encounter in their daily lives. Arguably the most significant context surrounding much of the complexity in both men's and women's lives is the family. The way men think of the family, and their roles within the family, are therefore important in giving order and meaning to their world. Only through an analysis of understanding how men conceptualise their ideals and roles within their family may we realise possible reasons how this shapes their functioning. This understanding is crucial for working with them to improve their wellbeing.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a conceptual framework to begin to understand men's perception of an ideal or 'good' family (to use colloquial language), and how that perception shapes their action and functioning within their family. This chapter will provide a conceptual framework that is guided by the three concepts of family as a symbol, masculinity and cognition. This framework will also be used to analyse the results of this study. This chapter consists of four parts: firstly, a rationale for using these three concepts; secondly, a description and discussion of the family including its changing nature, symbolic meaning and usage in the literature; thirdly, a description and discussion of masculinity including various contrasting discourses surrounding masculinity in the literature; and fourthly, a description and discussion of the role that cognition plays in men's understanding and behaviours in relation to their relationships.

Rationale for concepts used

The first concept of family as a symbol is used to illustrate the significance that the family has for men, as both a symbol of meaning and due its practical utility for its members. This symbolic meaning arises from both the functional roles the family provides for men, as well as the 'cognitive script' that men create for themselves around their notion of family. This concept will allow an analysis of how men's individual experiences and understandings within the family shape their meaning and actions toward these relational symbols. This thesis will explore the concept of family as a symbolic structure and institution in men's lives, while also acknowledging its significance in women's lives. As a symbol, the family represents many meanings for men which shape, and are shaped by its functional expression.

The second concept of masculinity is used to examine how constructions of masculinity have led to particular masculine identities, roles and practices by men. This analysis will illustrate how the sub-concept of socialisation shapes both society's and an individual's understanding of gender identity and expectations of masculine roles within the family. This will also allow an exploration of the extent to which social constructions of masculine roles are transferred to, and within the family.

The third concept of cognition is used to illustrate a link between men's thinking and behaviour. Individuals are a product of what they think, believe and value. Although there is philosophical debate as to the exact nature of the relationship between cognition and behaviour, cognition is undoubtedly a key dynamic that helps shape life in all contexts of the human experience. An analysis of cognition allows for a perspective into understanding how men's behaviour is shaped by how and what they think about their family relationships

Family

This section discusses the changing nature of the family within Australian culture, the symbolic meaning ascribed to the family by its members and the theoretical and research usage of the family in literature.

Changing nature

The dynamic of the change process requires a modification or adjustment from one circumstance, value or idea to another. While the nature of the family in western society has been changing since the industrial revolution, the once clearly defined roles of its members have changed rapidly within the last generation. This rate of change, the lack of certain direction that the change is taking, and what the end result of the change will be is effecting member's roles in the family, especially those of men. As Weeks & Quinn (2000, p. 5) assert, "the dominant themes, then, for Australian families are coping with change and uncertainty."

For generations, child rearing has been the shared responsibility of both biological parents of their children. While the dichotomisation of gender roles may have existed in many cultures, it has not generally excluded fathers from parenting roles and responsibilities, which might be defined as teaching, nurturing, supporting, communicating, disciplining and caring for their children (Tift, 2001).

Only in recent history, since the Industrial Revolution in the western world, have we seen a major emphasis in the separation of the male from the home. Previously, cottage industries permitted mothers and fathers to live, work, and raise their children together in the home. They largely also taught their children their trade, or sent them to the home of a tailor, harrier etc. With the removal of the father from the home, or village, the commitment toward fatherhood and to their village tended to decrease (Walcott & Gleser, 1995).

The nature of marital and family arrangements in Australia, as in most other Western societies has undergone a major structural and cultural shift. According to Edgar (1997b), a marriage boom during the post war recovery period was characterised by early marriage, early and prolonged child bearing resulting in a baby boom up to 1965. For most women this brought full-time home duties, and a period of cultural 'breadwinner husband-housewife nuclear family'. The societal relationship norm in the early 1970's was marriage. In 1971, marriage rates implied that 99 per cent of men and 100 per cent of women would marry. However just twenty years later, the norm had changed markedly. In 1991, rates implied that only 63 and 65 per cent respectively would ever marry.

The Australian divorce rate rose steadily for decades but rose sharply from 4.2 per 1000 married couples in 1971 to 12.5 in 1982, and reducing to 11.5 in 1992. Sixteen per cent of children are now likely to experience the divorce of their parents before they reach their 16th birthday (ABS, 1997). This rise in the 1970's can partly be attributed to the introduction of changes to the Family Law Act in the 1970's, however family breakdown has continued to rise in the 1980's and 1990's.

According to Sullivan, (2001), another indicator of change on the family is the increased number of one-person households. One-parent families now comprise 13% of all households. According to the ABS (2000), 53 per cent of divorces in Australia involve children under 18 years of age; 19.3% of all families with children under 15 are headed by a lone female; compared to only 1.9 per cent of all families with children under 15 which are headed by a male. As Sullivan (2001) reports, the effects of rapid change on the family "includes an increase in the number of children who do not have a male figure consistently in their lives" (p. 46).

According to Edgar (1997b), the increasing labour force participation of married women (up from 5% in 1933 to 61% in 1992) has raised important issues for both family policy and the place of marriage and family life in Australian society. Rising education levels for females and later age at first marriage may indicate that their workforce attachment has become stronger. It may also indicate a growing need and trend by women to give higher priority to income earning than to traditional home-making duties. Additionally, rising housing and child-rearing costs force a majority of families to become dual income earners. However, a contrasting study on maternity leave by the Australian Institute of

Family Studies (cited in Walcott & Gleser, 1995) indicated that women still give child-rearing and home-making high priority. This priority however competes with their need and desire to work for both psychological and income benefits. Although some work places offer childcare, and flexible working hours for both mothers and fathers, Australia's working parents have struggled to fit their family life around the demands of their jobs rather than push for political change. The resulting impact on men is that their longstanding role in the family as the sole breadwinner is changing.

While the 'two-parents-with-children' model has decreased, it is still the dominant pattern. Bryson (1997) reports that Australian surveys time and again indicate a strong affirmation of 'family values'; marriage is still seen as a preferable state for the rearing and protection of children; family life ranks well above work life as a source of satisfaction and focus and interest; and commitment and stability are seen as desirable components of 'coupling'. Current trends however indicate that choice and the option to change unsatisfactory partnerships take priority over conformity for the sake of social acceptability. It appears that Australia is a multi-cultural, multi-model society in which exist a number of optional forms of intimate adult relationships. Indeed in a critique of functionalism as a perspective on family life Sarantakos (1996, p. 13) argues that "there is no ideal family system but many and diverse family forms, all of which are acceptable and legitimate in their own right."

With these changes, the experience of family life in Australian culture is one of diversity. While the family has important practical value and symbolic meaning for people, the meanings will vary due to the different experiences and value given to both family culture, that is the traditions and daily activities of families, as well as the structure: who a person's family includes, such as grandparents and other relatives (Edgar, 1997a, p. 8).

Symbolic meaning

The family not only has practical value but also has symbolic representation for its members, including men. Duncan (1968) argues that,

It is impossible to talk about human relationships without saying something about meaning. And... meaning is usually studied through the interpretation of symbols, for it is in symbols that meaning (as attention and intention) can be observed. (p. 5.)

To Duncan, the symbolic concept a person has of the family shapes what importance and value is placed on it (attention) and what actions are desired (intention). According to Charon, (1995) people see according to the set of symbols, or symbolic framework they have. "Our symbols are our guides to what we see, what we notice, how we interpret – as well as what we miss – in any situation" (p. 47). For example, the concept of family for an individual as a place of harmony and nurture, may accord a positive value and high importance to them in resolving conflict and meeting other's needs. In this way, symbols ascribed to the family create and sustain beliefs in the way its members act because they serve as 'names' that represent either the best, dubious, or unacceptable ways of expressing relationships (Duncan, 1968, p. 22).

According to Ephross & Greene (1991, p. 211), families are termed *primary* symbols "because it is within them that social ideals, values and definitions of normality are derived". While there is some consensus of meaning towards symbols by us, one individual's meaning of say what a 'good' family is, may be different from another's, and therefore meaning is not intrinsic to the symbol itself (Charon, 1995).

What happens for men when their symbolic meaning of the family and their place in it is threatened? Marris (1986) states that:

The disparity between life chances and the assumptions and learned expectations men come to adopt about their world and their place in it become incongruities that give rise to finding a new sense of self and place. (p. 136.)

To some this may mean simple adjustments, however to others, it may result in strong resistance to change. In trying to maintain a symbol, for example that 'the man is the head of the home', the need to maintain attachment to the symbolic ideal may be enacted in dysfunctional ways such as authoritarian behaviour. This can occur when pressure to change is great or when the ideal is being suppressed.

This study seeks to understand how men construct the family by exploring what symbols of meaning shape both their understanding and actions in their family.

Theoretical and research usage

The family has been the focus of study more so than any other institution (Weeks, & Quinn, 1997). Since the 1980's there has been a growing critique of the welfare state and its effect on families; a reassertion of family values; and a revaluation of the role, effect and nature of the family on the part of some feminists. Debates on the family have thus been political. It is not the purpose of this study to critique these debates, but to briefly discuss some literature that has highlighted the family as both a private, as well as a public sphere of study.

This study seeks to explore how the personal experiences of men can be improved by more appropriate intervention that assists men in achieving better family relationships. In this way, the personal in this study is political.

The family is the institution that relates most centrally to both the interpersonal and the structural dimensions of society (Edgar, 1997a). C. Wright Mills (1959, in Edgar, 1997a, p. 4) made the distinction that the individual and society arise out of each other in terms of divorce and unemployment, which are both public issues and private troubles. The family, with its marital and parenting relationships, is both public and private, both society and individual, both institutional and personal at the same time. The terms 'family', 'marriage', 'parenthood', 'husband', 'wife' have a history and socially constructed character whose meanings are both institutional and individual. Several of these meanings are undergoing reconstruction at the present time, politically through social policy, socially due to gender norms, and privately between men and women by interacting in their everyday lives. Because each family has its own meanings, own divisions of labour, own structures of relevance to it, change is often not smooth.

By accepting the division between private and public spheres and excluding the private from scrutiny, Pateman (1987, cited in Bryson, 1997) points out that until the 1970's,

theorists, "have excluded women from the scope of their apparently universal arguments" (p. 22). Feminist theorists thus exposed this 'error' and asserted that the private and personal are as political as the public realm.

Families construct their own realities and may not share a stable or uniform view in society. They are the site for multiple realities, 'his', hers', 'the child's', each different view of marriage and the family being different (Edgar, 1997a, p. 5). Indeed Edgar (1997a, p. 6) cites research by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) that suggests men and women approach and experience marriage and counselling with very different personal 'languages'.

The family is also fundamental to how individuals construct their own sense of identity. Edgar, (1997a) states:

Family themes and family-based activities are important in individual's lives in giving them a sense of self, an anchor of security, a base from which to predict and control (as far as possible) their interactions with others. (p. 5.)

Families therefore provide an important and 'safe' social context for learning and defining what is acceptable in relationships and where self is defined in relation to others. In western, capitalist society, the notions of the 'self', and of the 'individual', have particular emphasis. Edgar further states that this is linked to:

notions of private property, free enterprise, personal and competitive 'agency', and the family is the main conveyor of that ideology, with all its imperfect successes and contradictions. (p. 5.)

Families thus also provide the context for, and are translators of, cultural ideology. The family's ability to translate or absorb rapid cultural change however is arguable. With the rapid changes over the last 30 years, the basic power relationships have altered (as in birth control, improved education, social mobility, technological change, greater access to paid employment for women, changes to youth transmissions to marriage, fertility and divorce), and no clear rules exist for their reordering. Adelaide author Dr Goldsworthy (cited in Williams & Savage, 2000, p. 5) believes there is a mismatch between how men

and women are evolving in society, which is behind men's confusion about their roles and marriage breakdown statistics. The impact of this on men, according to Williams and Savage (2000), is that men either employ violence as a means of controlling what appears to be going out of control around them, or retreat to an emotional distance, or both.

In summary, the rapid changes in Australian, and western society generally, has affected the nature, structure of the family and the roles of its members. While literature points to the negative impact this change is having on men generally, Marsiglio (1995, cited in Sullivan, 2001) points out that much sociological research to date has relied on women's reports of men's attitudes and behaviours. The purpose of this research therefore is to explore what men's own subjective realities are.

Masculinity

This section describes the various and contrasting images and views of masculinity in literature and discusses the effect that attitude changes in society concerning these images has on men's roles within the family.

Australian masculinity

Australian masculinity has traditionally been linked with images of the macho, anti-authoritarian larrikin, and the tough bushman (Harris, 2001). However, the dominant socialised male ocker image often represented appears detrimental to some men and their families. This is evidenced by an apparent link between socialised male behaviour and negative health consequences such as excessive risk taking (Lumb, n.d, Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 1996), and in relationship functioning (Giblett, 1997).

While Goldsworthy (cited in Williams & Savage, 2000, p. 5) believes men's struggle with trying to find an identity, "somewhere between the snag (sensitive new age guy) and the macho male" is due to adjusting to rapid changes in the family, Harris (2001) believes that a lack of Australian national identity today is linked with men's struggle for

masculine identity. He argues that Australian's are fascinated with national identity, a true and deep meaning of what it means to be Australian, however they are struggling to find a 'cultural' stereotype except that of being a multicultural community. It appears that men are similarly struggling with this sense of who they are. Men's experience of class, race, sexuality, age and ideology constitutes their social identity (Pease & Fook, 1999), however this social identity can be understood as being formed through competing discourses which are causing confusing signals to some men. Masculinity is thus at crisis point according to many (Connell, 1995; Pease, 1999).

Gender and 'masculinities'

There is however, differing and opposing views on reconstructing masculinity that confuse the issue. According to Connell, (1995) "masculinity" is a recent historical concept, which looks at gender in a culturally specific way. Analysing masculinity within cultural contexts has resulted in difficulty for researchers to arrive at a definition. Pease (1999, p. 99) believes that in this post-modern era, variations among men is seen as central to the understanding of men's lives. Rather than defining masculinity in singular terms, he argues we should be exploring 'masculinities.' Connell (1997, p. 15), defines 'masculinities' in broadly cultural terms as, "sustained in institutions, from corporations and armies to the Australian Football League. Masculinities are sustained in workplace culture, and informal peer groups.

Theoretical usage

Literature indicates that various and contrasting theoretical perspectives surround the definitions of masculinity. It is of importance to this study to analyse what the literature is saying about men and current definitions of masculinity, so that the various discourses can be evaluated against what men themselves are saying. The discourses discussed in this section are essentialist versus normative; critical versus popular; and structural versus personal.

Essentialist

According to Buchbinder (1994, p. 36), an essentialist perspective of gender asserts that masculine traits are innate, that is essences, in the individual. For example, an essentialist view of gender often explains aggression in 'men' as the result of testosterone levels in the individual man. Though male hormones do play a part, this hypothesis cannot solely cause this, nor can it explain acts of female aggression. One difficulty with this theory of gender is that it can effectively deny the possibility of change and discourage attempts at it.

Normative

Normative views of gender prescribe through socialisation social norms for men's and women's behaviour. In differentiating between the genders it guides how men ought to be. Particular social significance is therefore ascribed to sex differences and roles are allotted accordingly. Gender expectations such as assertiveness in men is thus seen as a strength whereas in women it is bossiness (Thompson, 1997, p. 16)

A similar category of gender theory is constructivism. This proposes that gender is not innate but rather learned or constructed. Behaviour is the result of interconnecting historical, cultural and social factors (Buchbinder, 1994, p. 6). While recognising that in any culture, certain gender constructions are dominant, behaviour can change as experiences and constructions of those experiences change.

Critical

The critical literature highlights masculinity in terms of its sociological status, its use and abuse of power, its relationship to femininity, and its connection with political patriarchy (Tacey, 1997). Tacey uses the phrase "the hermeneutics of suspicion" to describe this approach. Hence, the language is about "hegemonic", "oppressive", and "patriarchal" masculinity. Its aim is to deconstruct the subject, where the father is seen as the, "central pillar of patriarchy, and complicit with, and a beneficiary to, an institutionalised system of injustice" (Tacey, 1997, p. 26).

Feminism as a critical discourse has forced men to review their own positions and assumptions (Buchbinder, 1994, p. 14). From a feminist perspective, many of the current problems of women and the modern family are related to gender and power (Rabin, 1996, cited in Pease, 1999). It is concerned not only with men and masculinity, but also with the structures of patriarchal society that perpetuates and advantages their oppressive role. "It has therefore attacked the entrenched male culture and exposed its negative aspects such as violence and issues of male power and control" (Williams & Savage, 2000, p. 2).

In spite of their relatively advantageous position, many men however feel disadvantaged compared to women (Pease, 1999). Critics of feminism argue that if men don't feel like powerful patriarchs, then the feminist analysis must be wrong. While this then leads to blindness to the institutional power of men, Tacey (1997, p. 23) argues that if not self-critical, the critical literature can be critiqued for being almost paranoid and extreme in its criticism such that "masculinity is symbolically blamed for rape, abuse of power and all men become abusers and destroyers."

Popular writers such as Biddulph (1995) and Bly (1991) argue that traditional masculinity has been destructive for both men and women. Until recently however, the focus of much critical literature has been on men's deficits as the oppressor generally, and as the aggressors in domestic violence specifically. Some authors such as Connell (1995) and Pease (1999) however believe that feminism is an appropriate emancipatory practice framework for men. Similarly, Pease and Fook (1999, p. 106) believe that, just as feminism is a counter discourse that resists the hegemony of male domination, the contradictions in patriarchal discourses can also be a starting point for men for their transformation. Men have much to gain from feminism they argue because of the hegemonic masculinity on their own lives.

Additionally, according to Pease & Fook (1999), most of the current literature concerned with improving men's wellbeing has a psychological focus. They state that "the orientation is on therapy and the use of the healing metaphor to address issues such as the father 'wound' and crises of emotions and personal meanings" (p. 107). These personal issues tend to overshadow the political nature of issues such as sexism and domestic violence. However, Middleton (1989, cited in Pease & Fook, 1999) argues that the

critical view can lead to a conclusion that makes oppression definitional of men such that if we define men solely as oppressors, there is no room for change.

Popular

In sharp contrast to critical discourses, the popular approach is governed by the hermeneutics of affirmation (Tacey, 1997, p. 23) where the interest is in affirming what is good and right about masculinity. It focuses not on negatives but on positives and setting men free. Popular writers are informed by humanist ideals and how to recover male pride, dignity and nobility. The passion of these writers is not to deconstruct, but to heal and cure and build bridges (Tacey, 1997, p. 23). Popular literature contains programmes, answers and solutions for how to heal the father/son relationship. Biddulph, (1995) for example writes of "fixing it" with your father. Robert Bly in his book *Iron John* (1991), advocates ritualistic retreats to reconnect men with their lost 'wild man' inside. The popular men's movement, which "offers relief from despair and respite from suffering has been constructed by critical writers such as feminists as a backlash against change" (Tacey, 1997, p. 25).

Nonetheless, amid these contrasting discourses, there appears a lack of masculine defining concepts. According to Tacey (1997), a discourse is needed that brings together the values of the critical intellect and the affirming heart. The social and the personal reality of men are split and centred in opposing discourses highly suspicious of the other. He asserts that:

Analysis of men's social power, and authority, and patriarchy is kept to one side, whereas the recognition of men's emotional pain, internal suffering, and search for new spiritual values, is confined to the opposite side. p. 27.

Semiotics

A semiotic study of gender analyses signs and symbols of meaning and their relation to referents such as men. Semiotics assigns meaning, mediated through and influenced by cultural and historical circumstances, to symbols such as sexual difference. Behaviour is

seen as distinct and in contrast to the 'other'. Masculinity is in effect seen as different and contrasted to femininity. The media in general, and television commercials in particular, are one of the many sites where our symbolic orders are constituted and transmitted (Roxburgh, 2000). Beer commercials for example are representations of masculinity that have historical and cultural antecedents in discourses of Australian national identity that are almost exclusively, according to a critical critique, patriarchal.

The effect of change

While masculinity appears to be in crisis, Buchbinder (1994, p. 8) argues that it is the mythology of gender that struggles to remain stable by continuing to insist on a particular outdated behaviour and attitude. Today men are as socially diverse as women and this diversity entails differences between men in relation to class, ethnicity, age, sexuality, religion, bodily facility, world views, parental/marital status, occupation and propensity for violence (Collinson, 1992, in Pease & Fook, 1999). While this may be demographically and structurally correct, the effect of the crisis on men's lives is still a reality for them.

Levant (1996) believes the crisis is a loss of mastery and control of traditional roles.

According to Marris' (1986) Loss and Change theory, the reactions to social changes can be thought of in terms of bereavement. We can learn something about the management of men's loss of identity from the process of mourning. As Marris (1986, p. 93) states, "The loss of identity which colonisation inflicted on the colonised can be likened to the loss of masculinity." To Marris, people seek meaning to life that gives them purpose, regularity, conceptual coherence and function to life. Marris called this need a structure of meaning. As Marris believed that people have an innate need for attachment, loss of attachment removes the structure of meaning. Grief is evoked not only by death, but also by any profoundly disruptive loss of that structure of meaning. This includes the loss of attachments and a predictable environment where ones meaning of life may be threatened prospectively.

Men's roles as father, provider and carer

Do men provide specific benefit, strengths or roles in the family that are different to those of women? Tift (2001), states that, "one of the twentieth century's most famous observers of family dynamics, Dr. Margaret Meade, wrote in 1956 that fathers are a biological necessity, but a social accident." Until recently, however too few studies on parenting have considered the role of fathers and have mainly concentrated on mothers (Fatherhood, 1994). Recent research has attempted to define what critically important roles men play in the lives of their family members.

Research to date has not concluded what father's bring that is unique compared to what extent parental roles may be interchangeable irrespective of gender. Lamb (1979) argues that whereas father involvement in the 1950's seemed to be associated with greater masculinity in boys, today there is more of a blending of sex-role standards in both boys and girls. Some findings however point to four major roles of fathering: breadwinner, moral teacher, sex-role model, and teacher and nurturer (Fatherhood, 1994).

Tift (2001) reports on research suggesting fathers have a supportive role for the expectant mother, contribute to gender identity development and conscience formation, and as a mediator. Research has shown the importance of fathers in the lives of their children. Lamb (1979) found that the father's masculinity is much less important than his warmth and the closeness and nature of the father-son relationship. This is an important finding, as warmth and intimacy have traditionally been regarded as feminine characteristics. Men are now sharing in child care with 31% of fathers (51% of mother) taking days off work to care for sick children (Tift, 2001).

Research suggests that the division of parenting or household tasks is not as critical as cooperation between the parents and actively parenting together as the strongest predictor of positive outcomes for them and their children (Focusing on fathers, 1997, p. 2).

Unemployment has a negative impact on father involvement (Focusing on fathers, 1997, p. 6). Family research gives various reasons why the roles of fathers have changed:

- Economic transformation, which has seen mechanisation and the evaporation of jobs, and companies employing cheaper overseas labour. Physical strength is therefore no longer financially appreciated or remunerated.
- Cultural emphasis on personal freedom and individualism which pursues self-gratification and de-emphasises other values key to the healthy development of family solidarity, such as collective responsibility, fidelity, moderation.
- Changes in family law, divorce and custody laws, tax codes, and welfare policies which have not been equitable toward fathers.

With these pressures, men need assistance and supports to stay engaged with their children (Tift, 2001). Just as it takes a whole village to raise a child, it takes a whole village to maintain a family. At a conference on fathering, (Fatherhood, 1994) participants identified 5 major social barriers that prevent men from active involvement in family life:

- Men are not reconciled with their own fathers.
- Men have grown up without male mentors and (good) role models.
- They have not developed the skills to be involved.
- There is a lack of liveable resources, thus men are reoccupied with the issues of survival and their own usefulness.
- There is a lack of support from business, education, and personal, which doesn't allow men to be fathers. For example there is a social stigma against men utilising paternity or parental leave.

In summary, various discourses compete for men's allegiance and are subject to rapid change. Thus, the nature of masculinity is one of the key sites of discursive struggle for men (Weedon, 1987, in Pease & Fook, 1999). Resisting and challenging dominant discourses is important in the development of alternative positions to aid men's wellbeing. This has implications for social work practitioners. Resources must be available for the individual to have agency. These include definition of ones self as one who makes sense of meanings within discourses; access to alternative discursive practices; and access to others with similar ideals that will support alternative positionings.

Cognition

This section describes and discusses the role that cognition plays in men's understanding and behaviours in regard to their relationships.

Cognition and men's behaviour

Cognition refers to the mental processes by which knowledge is acquired and meaning is made from a person's experience. This process can include perception, intuition and reasoning. Cognition appears to link socialised behaviour and men's healthy functioning.

One author, Lumb (n.d.) states that men "experience socialised psychological pressures which lead them to take risks". According to two authors, Williams & Savage (2000) the negative health data pertaining to males may in fact be behind some men's confusion about their roles and marriage-breakdown statistics.

In addition, because of changing and conflicting role expectations, a mismatch between men's perception of what should be (their ideals) and what is (their actual situation) may be linked to men's dysfunction in the family. Unrealistic expectations of one's roles as a parent for example, can "soon breed a sense of failure and resentment" (Good Enough Parenting, 1978). In contrast, men's positive functioning may be linked to similarity between ideal perceptions and actual family relationships. One study revealed that the more similarity participants perceived in actual and ideal partners, the more satisfaction could be expected from the relationship (Langis, Sabourin, Lussier & Mathieu (1994, p. 410).

Cognition is used as a concept therefore in the theoretical framework to illustrate a link between men's thinking and behaviour. This analysis allows for a theoretical perspective into understanding the reasons for what shapes men's behaviour in relationships within the family. Although there is philosophical debate and different theories that argue the exact nature of the relationship between cognition and behaviour, cognition is undoubtedly a key dynamic that helps shape life in all contexts of the human experience.

Research application

According to Piaget's Cognitive Development theory, people's thought processes change over time. People adapt to their environment by forming mental structures or concepts, which are used to organise information and regulate behaviour (Kail & Cavanaugh, 1996). As new experiences occur, they are 'assimilated' into existing concepts, or concepts are modified to 'accommodate' the new experiences. Two theories, which argue that cognition has a key role in understanding people's behaviour, are examined in this study. These theories are Kelly's Personal Construct Theory and Goldstein's Cognitive-Humanistic approach.

Kelly's Personal Construct Theory

The basis of Kelly's theory assumes that "making sense of the world and what it means to be a person, is the basis that underpins all of what constitutes their behaviour and experiences" (Atkinson, 1996, p. 50). Similar to Piaget, Kelly believed that individuals perceive events according to existing schemes or constructs. Their behaviour depends on how they interpret those events.

The essence of Kelly's Personal Construct model is based on the premise that knowing these personal constructs are central to understanding an individual's behaviour. Pervin (1990) elaborates on this point:

To understand a person's cognitive process, one must know something about the constructs the person uses, the events submerged under these constructs, the way in which these constructs tend to function. (p. 234.)

Using this relationship between cognition and behaviour, this study seeks to explore men's personal constructs, or conceptual understanding of the family and how these concepts shape their behaviour in their family.

Goldstein's Cognitive Humanistic Approach

Goldstein's theory sought to answer the question, "How do we begin to make sense of and find some order and meaning...?" for clients (Goldstein, 1986, p. 6). Goldstein believed that mental processes affected people's behaviour according to the meaning they placed on events. He argued that the mind is intentionally seeking to make meaning by, "constantly seeking to create patterns of order and meaning out of what might otherwise be regarded as random and meaningless in the individual's experiences" (Goldstein, 1986a, p. 37).

A major premise of Goldstein's approach is that people are likely to ascribe different meanings to the same event due to the respective 'frames of reference' each one has. To make sense of and understand the meaning in other's lives, Goldstein (1986b) posited four frames of reference, which arise out of an individual's unique experiences and histories. These four frames of reference that people have are:

- **Psychological**: Individuals are persons of the mind. The dynamics of mind, emotion and intellect will help explain an individual's behaviour. This is useful in questioning men's motivations, self-concept and character traits to enable the researcher to establish what is important to their functioning in their relationships.
- **Socio-cultural**: Individuals are persons of the community. This concerns the social context in which an individual's life and issues exist. This is useful for questioning men's expectations, deficits and strengths, roles, values and nature of their family relationships.
- **Moral-ethical**: Individuals are persons of principle. This concerns the personal and interpersonal dilemmas and definitions of what people understand as being right and wrong, good and bad, and obligations to self and to others. This will be useful in establishing what men consider to be a good family and what principles they adhere or aspire to in their family.

- **Spiritual**: Individuals are persons of faith. Spirituality concerns the deepest subjectivity of a person embodying one's symbols, deeply held beliefs and transcendent commitments and ideals. This frame of reference will provide an insight into men's personal beliefs that empowers and motivates them as well as their ideals and what keeps them committed to their relationships.

Goldstein believed that "a more accurate understanding of our clients and their problems is achieved when we are able to comprehend their subjective worlds" (Goldstein, 1986b, p. 6).

Using the framework of these four frames of reference, helps in understanding the reasoning associated with individual men's meaning making and consequent actions.

Chapter summary

The purpose of his chapter has been to provide the conceptual framework to begin to understand men's perception of a 'good' family and how that perception shapes their action and functioning within their family. This conceptual framework has been guided by the concepts of family, masculinity and cognition.

The first concept of family as a symbol illustrated the significance that the family has for men as both a symbol of meaning and for practical utility for its members. This has allowed an analysis of how men's experiences and understandings within the family have been shaped in Australia by their meaning making and actions toward relational symbols.

The second concept of masculinity was used to examine how constructions of masculinity have led to particular masculine identities, roles and practices by men. This analysis has illustrated the influence of socialisation, and offered a critique of various discourses in literature that portray gender identity and expectations of masculine roles within the family.

Thirdly, the concept of Cognition has been used within the framework to help understand the link between human thinking and behaviour. Cognition has been examined primarily

using Kelly's and Goldstein's theoretical perspectives for understanding what shapes men's behaviour in relationships within the family

Chapter three will present a rationale for the selection of the methodology that is used to guide the research.

Chapter 3

Methodology

"So I'd want to be a little Aussie kid, but I couldn't do it 'cos I had no one to teach me. So that was a big thing, and it's still there... that sense of 'place.' "
'Bob'

Introduction

This chapter provides a rationale for the selection of the methodology used to guide the research. In providing this rationale, the chapter consists of the following sections:

- The epistemological knowledge guiding the methodology.
- The theoretical perspective or philosophical stance used.
- The Methodology, and
- Methods used conducting the study.

The chapter also includes the strengths, limitations, and ethical considerations of using this methodology to explore what men's perceptions of a good family are, and how this understanding shapes their roles and functioning within their family.

Epistemology

According to Crotty (1998, p. 8), epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge (how we know what we know). Epistemology provides a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that it is both adequate and legitimate in relation to the phenomenology of experience.

The epistemology guiding this research is constructivism. In adopting a constructivist paradigm about how the social world is known, meaning is not discovered; it is constructed via engagement with the realities of the world (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). People

invent concepts, models and schemes to make sense of experience, and continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience.

Ontology questions the nature of knowledge and social reality. Denzin & Lincoln (2000, p. 165) suggest that constructivism entails an ontology of relativism and of local and constructed realities when they state, "There can be multiple, often conflicting constructions and all, potentially, are meaningful." The personal aspect of constructivism then suggests that people can, and do, assign different meaning to the same symbols and events in their lived experiences. Accordingly, each individual will give meaning to the family as they structure and make sense of what the family is for them.

As well as this personal dimension, there is also a sociocultural dimension to this construction;- we don't construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared age, class, cultural and gendered understandings, practices, language etc. Although people assign meaning in different ways even from the same event (phenomena), society is held together due to some common experiences of culture allowing some consensus of meanings. Greenwood (cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 54) says that "social reality is therefore a function of shared meanings; it is constructed, sustained and reproduced through social life. Rather than the meaning making of the individual mind, (constructivism), the focus of social constructionism then is on the collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 58). Therefore, while constructivism points to the unique experience of each of us, social constructionism emphasises the influence that our culture has on us.

This cultural influence however can be both limiting and liberating. Rather than the sense we make of things to be the way things are, this research accepts a critical aspect to this constructionism. The critical perspective goes beyond exploring understanding and seeks to bring change by critiquing constraints (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). This critical aspect of individuals and society acknowledges the position of self, emotions, power, and gender in the interactionist's interpretive study. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 125). The interaction between researcher and participant provides the context for facilitating change where, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000):

One's constructions are challenged when one becomes aware that new information conflicts with the held construction or when one senses a lack of one's own intellectual sophistication needed to make sense of new information. (p. 129.)

Change, as an outcome objective of this study is anticipated both for the participants of the study and for those working to make social work intervention more appropriate for men.

This study then takes the position that the world that people construct is a function of both a social context as well as an innate, intrinsic uniqueness as individual human beings. Due to the conceptual difficulty in separating these two constructions of reality, both constructivism and social constructionism are used as the philosophical knowledge guiding this research. Using these epistemologies, this research will explore men's own subjective understandings and meaning making of family relationships. Constructivism allows an exploration of how individual men construct their own perceptions of what a good/ ideal family is. Social constructionism is also used, as there is some consensus of meaning surrounding notions of what men as a collective group perceive and convey as their ideal and expected roles within the family and which is influenced by social interaction and socialisation. A critical perspective is included that will explore limiting and liberating aspects to men's perceptions with a view for change and empowerment and how to make intervention more appropriate to men.

Theoretical Perspective

According to Crotty (1998, p. 3) a theoretical perspective is the "philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria." This section outlines the choice of symbolic interactionism as the theoretical perspective informing this study.

Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is the theoretical perspective in which constructivism is embodied. Crotty (1998, p. 7) suggests that symbolic interactionism is a qualitative perspective "that grounds the assumptions of language, communication, interrelationships and community in most explicit fashion."

An early advocate of symbolic interactionism, Herbert Blumer (cited in Denzin, 1992; Crotty, 1998, p. 72) enunciated three basic assumptions of this perspective:

- Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them.
- The meaning of these things is derived from, and out of, the social interaction one has with one's fellows.
- These meanings are handled in and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.

Guiding the first assumption is that humans are purposive agents. Individuals engage in 'minded,' self-reflexive behaviour. They confront a world that they must interpret in order to act (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 124).

The second assumption asserts that meaning for an individual arises within a social context. We inherit a 'system of significant symbols' (Crotty, 1998, p. 54). That is, language and other symbolic tools that humans share and through which we communicate. Through dialogue, we become aware of the perceptions, feelings and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings and intent (Crotty, 1998, p. 75). Through symbols such as the family, symbolic meaning allows a shared or similar meaning for individuals within society or a social network. We view the world through cultural lenses. "Culture brings things into view for us, endows them with meaning and leads us to ignore other things" (Crotty, 1998, p. 54).

The third assumption argues that humans select, check and transform the meanings within the context in which they are placed. Meanings toward symbols are used and revised to

guide and form action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 1994, p. 124). It focuses on how people interpret and what is taken into account in their interpretive process. This suggests then that the meaning a man attributes to his concept of 'family', and how a family should be, is used to guide his actions, roles and functioning in his family. The recognition of differing family types and differing masculinities within society is both a function of the different meaning that individuals place on those symbols and the social context within which they are located and from which their meaning of those symbols is derived.

Symbolic interactionism then, is used to explore how men construct a perception of a good family within their social context and what meaning is applied to important symbols such as 'family,' 'marriage' and 'masculinity.' In addition, it is used to explore how this understanding shapes men's role within their family.

Research application

The symbolic interaction approach is concerned with the interaction of people and the way they perceive the world, and create, maintain and change it and their interaction (Sarantakos, 1996, p. 15). This approach sees the family as a unit of interacting personalities and stresses the significance of the symbolic, that is the interaction through symbols, gestures, norms, and the like. It looks at the interpretations people make of their world, marriage, family and society (the way they respond to them and the resulting interactions) and allows a study of issues such as socialisation, personality, mate selection, marital roles, positions, role assignment, marital adjustment, marital conflict, sexual interaction, personal adaptability and marital dissolution.

Critics such as Sarantakos (1996) stress that the symbolic interaction approach fails to account for macrosociological processes and is thus of little use to policy makers, who are less sympathetic to personal impressions and individual accounts of reality. This study rejects this argument and maintains that policy should be relevant to personal needs. To be relevant, the personal must be political (a feminist tenet) and individual voices are thus necessary. Men's subjective views are therefore necessary to frame social policy in relation to men's lives. The consequence can then be an intervention that is

effective and relevant to felt need (Pease & Cammilleri, 2001). If it is not, social working with men (and their families) is in danger of being irrelevant to them.

Methodology

Denzin & Lincoln (2000) define methodology as the best means for gaining knowledge about the world and the process behind the choice of particular methods (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). This section describes the methodological design suited to undertake the research.

The particular methodology employed in this study is exploratory ethnographic enquiry. Crotty (1998), states that, "in the spirit of symbolic interactionism, ethnographic enquiry seeks to uncover meanings and perceptions of participants in the research, viewing these understandings against people's worldview or culture" (p. 7). The nature of the research therefore supports the appropriateness of this approach. Being a qualitative approach, the objective using this methodology is in "understanding how others experience life, in interpreting meaning and social phenomena, and in exploring new concepts and developing new theories" (Alston & Bowles, 1998, p. 9).

The exploratory ethnographic enquiry approach embodies the personalised nature of accessing knowledge and gaining understanding of a group. As an exploratory approach, the questions and unstructured interview attempt to engage the participant in a process of mutual discovery and to find out what reality exists for them and which is fundamental to their experience. This methodology is used therefore as it allows, through men's own stories, an exploration and understanding of their own subjective system of meanings and perceptions of what a 'good' family ought to be and how this worldview is actually enacted. This approach is inductive. It allows movement from specific interactions and understandings, to general ideas and theories of how best to work with men.

Methods

This section describes the techniques or procedures used in the research to obtain and analyse the information related to the research questions (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The methods described include sampling, data collection and data analysis.

Sampling

This section describes the sampling technique, criteria under which participants were canvassed and the strategy employed to access the sample group.

Sample Technique

A non-probability type purposeful sampling technique was employed. Alston and Bowles (1998, p. 90-92) suggest this sampling type is well suited to qualitative exploratory research because it doesn't make any claims to be representative of the population under study and therefore generalisability of results is limited. Alston and Bowles (1998), claim that a purposeful sampling technique is justified when participants are sought who typify the issues to be studied. Those approached enabled some variety in the sample with respect to age and perceived life experiences.

Sample criteria

Disclosure forms were given to prospective participants that typified the following criteria:

- Male.
- Over the age of 21.
- Either in, or previously in, a married or defacto relationship. There was no time duration stipulated of the relationship. It was assumed that a short relationship

duration may have yielded data that focussed more on ideals while a longer duration may have yielded more varied data. All experiences were thus considered relevant.

- Participants did not necessarily need to be a father.
- Sample was limited to between four and six participants due to time constraints of the study.

Entry to the sample

Two strategies were employed to access the sample group. Initially, six disclosure forms were given to a university staff member considered a key informant for gaining access to the sample group. This person distributed the disclosure forms to friends and acquaintances fitting the sample criteria. The disclosure described the study's purpose and inviting participation. This strategy ensured that the identity of possible participants was unknown to the researcher and therefore their entry into the study would not be able to be influenced by the researcher. Three respondents contacted the researcher showing interest as participants. The lack of response provided an ethical dilemma for the researcher;- should the researcher contact the non-respondents to gain a response? The ethical decision was made not to approach these men as their relationship was not with the researcher but with the key informant. Contacting them may have resulted in agreement to participate but under conditions of being pressured.

A second strategy was therefore employed to obtain the desired sample size of four to six. Due to the initial lack of response, the lower limit of four was adopted. The second strategy involved the researcher distributing a disclosure form to someone known to the researcher. This necessitated a departure from the initial ethical stance of the design. This person however responded willingly.

Feedback from the key informant on the initial lack of response revealed that although two men from the initial sample community showed verbal willingness to participate in the study, they did not respond. One conclusion from this was the practical issue of the business of men's lives, which resulted in not undertaking activities that were desired. A

second conclusion was that, in contrast to women who are a larger client group in the human services/social sciences, men are a smaller client group and therefore may present as a more difficult research group.

In both strategies, the disclosure forms were distributed in person allowing for discussion of initial questions and concerns from individuals about participating in the study. Individuals were given subsequent time to allow them to decide whether to participate in the research. Those showing interest then initiated personal contact with the researcher. This allowed further information to be provided and the opportunity to discuss any further issues such as confidentiality and anonymity. The procedures such as the audio taping of interviews to assist with later data analysis were also discussed and the proposal by the researcher to provide the participant with a copy of their transcript. At this time, the researcher also reiterated that the participant could withdraw at any time during the interview, or at any later time for any reason. A consent form was then given to those agreeing to participate, signed by the participant and a date and time arranged for the interview.

Data collection

The instrument used for collecting data was an unstructured interview. This instrument was used as it "allows far more flexibility for the researcher and participants to vary topic areas, questions and stories depending on the issues being explored" (Alston & Bowles, 1998, p. 69). The nature of this process as an interactive one indicates its appropriateness as an exploratory instrument and gives meaning and guidance to the interaction and exploratory process.

Interviews were held either at the participant's home or the researchers home at the participants choice. The structure and nature of the interview was again explained along with confidentiality assurances and that participants could withdraw or were under no compulsion to answer any question.

Socio-demographic information was obtained from each participant during the interview. This information included:

- Age,
- Birthplace,
- Length of time living in the present locality,
- Length of time in their current relationship, and
- Highest educational qualification achieved.

Generally, these questions were asked to gather information about cultural and family background as well as to assist both the researcher and participant begin the interview process. More specifically, the rationale for requesting this information was as follows:

- Age sought to provide possible understandings for any differences or similarities across generations for the influence of socialisation on concepts such as masculinity and meaningful aspects of family relationships.
- Birthplace and length of time in present locality sought to identify any geographical distance or proximity to significant family members. The researcher's own experience of moving interstate away from family of origin influenced this aspect.
- Length of time in the current relationship sought to help understanding of the aspects related to attachment and commitment and information on any change in early and current ideals over time.
- Educational level achieved was of interest in identifying any apparent qualitative correlation between problem solving skills, communication or cognitive capacity to academic or socio-economic status.

Information was not requested that could later identify participants. For example, employment details were not requested as this was considered to be highly identifiable

considering the relatively close, semi-rural locality within which the study was undertaken.

The interview questions asked were based broadly according to five key themes. These themes were in turn based on the research objectives and derived from the underlying conceptual framework. These objectives were:

- How do men describe the family?
- What conceptual framework do they use to make sense of the family (and their relationships).
- What factors shaped their descriptions, content and framework?
- How does this framing act to shape (or influence) their actions (or roles).
- What helps and hinders men from achieving their relationship goals and enacting their roles

Themes and theme questions were related to the objectives. An outline of themes and related questions is provided at Appendix A.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim. There was no record kept of non-verbal communication or intonation or emotional intensity of voice. Some background noise and soft level of speech resulted in some spoken phrases not being able to be transcribed. Participants were provided with a copy of transcriptions pertaining to their interview.

Data analysis

The method of analysing data was qualitative. This involved identifying themes, and analysing responses around recurring themes related to the key concepts of family, masculinity and cognition. As interpreting qualitative data in this fashion is highly subjective, participants were given a draft of the reported data pertaining to them so they could verify that what they intended was what was to be documented.

Ethical Considerations

Alston and Bowles (1998, p 20) state that “ethics is a vital part of every research project.” This section outlines the criteria considered necessary to ensure the research was ethically acceptable.

Sensitivity and Anonymity

Two ethical considerations for this study are that “participants should not be identifiable in print, and that they should not suffer harm or embarrassment as a consequence of the research” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 175). Firstly, given the sensitivity of the subject matter (i.e. men's relationships) the structure of the interview and information provided would enable respondents to have maximum control over what is discussed. Details of referral services that participants can utilise were provided in the event of having sensitive issues being uncovered. Giving participants freedom to withdraw at any time or not discuss certain issues was informed to respondents prior to entry and reiterated during interviews. Additionally, access by participants to written material after data analysis was given prior to publication for their feedback and to give participants maximum control in the process.

Secondly, utilising coding techniques gave more assurance that the names and identity of respondents were concealed. This coding was discussed with respondents to ensure their satisfaction with techniques used in reporting. The audio tapes used in interviews are to be kept for six months and then destroyed to remove any possibility of later identification of participants or unauthorised use of data.

Closure

The qualitative nature of the research enabled the researcher to be a participant and the participants as co-researchers. This can enable a closer relationship and identification with the group. Generally, this can be a positive benefit for the researcher as a necessary

entry, acceptance and identification into the sample group. However, as a transient, the researcher will abandon the group at some stage. An exit interview was therefore arranged concurrently with providing feedback prior to publication. The main objective of the exit interview was to gauge any concerns by participants and the need for follow-up action.

Transparency and openness

Providing sufficient knowledge to the participants so as to ensure transparency and openness about the topic and study's purpose was an ethical consideration for the researcher. The methods employed within the research design ensured the participants were given truthful, accurate and sufficient information regarding the study's purpose and aims prior to the commencement of the interview. This was attached to the disclosure form.

Additionally, participants were asked if they had any questions, as well as provided with the knowledge that they could ask any questions. This was reiterated prior to consenting to participate in the research, during the interview process and again after undertaking the interview.

Positive Potential

Related to the above, and within the aims of the study, was an objective to enable participants to gain a sense of the contribution that they were making by involvement in the study. This was named and identified in the disclosure form. An objective of the research was to understand men in positive terms and not simply negative terms. Men's potential for good in their families was therefore explicitly emphasised in information provided as well as the commitment they were making in endeavouring to achieve this objective.

Limitations and Strengths

Although qualitative research claims to begin research with no pre-conceived ideas, and allows the patterns or themes to emerge from their experiences (Alston & Bowles, 1998, p. 9), no research, or researcher can be value free due to the nature of people's different meaning making from the same phenomena and the consequent different values ascribed to those meanings. Limitations and biases therefore exist. Four such limitations can be argued as existing in this study's design. A fifth may be argued: namely that the researcher has identified limitations to the researcher's own research!

Role of researcher in translating meaning

The process of placing the researcher in the research may be argued as lacking objectivity eventuating in a shared understanding of responses and possibly missing some deeper meanings. This probability may be strengthened as the research is conducted within a local environment shared by the researcher and participants, and the socio-economic status, educational characteristics and gender biases of the researcher and participants may therefore be similar.

Social meaning and the significant symbols for each participant however are viewed methodologically in the research as constructed. Any shared understandings or missed deeper meanings can therefore be argued as not limiting the study's design, purpose, or findings.

The researcher impacted the study as a translator of what participants said in two ways. Firstly, by what the researcher paid and didn't pay attention to and what was therefore expanded on. Secondly when analysing the transcripts, the researchers own meaning was imposed onto participant's answers and assigned to a meaning category. The researcher therefore may have interpreted participant's meaning as his own. The research design includes providing participant's with a draft of the results and discussion to enable participants to be informed and check the researcher's meaning making with an opportunity for change if requested.

Methodological

A methodological issue for the researcher was when and where to prompt when participants appeared unable to easily answer a question, or appeared to be attempting to find a particular word or phrase to answer a question. Prompting helped in a number of instances to clarify one way or another participant's thoughts. However prompting can bias the interview by leading the participant through trying to interpret what is said and putting the researcher's meaning making on the question rather than the participant's. This may lead the participant along a certain cognitive route they may not have independently chosen to go along without the prompt. This however is the dynamic of the interaction and the nature of action research.

The use of language and particular words used in framing questions may also have different understandings to the participants. Symbols of 'masculinity' or words such as 'space', or 'roles' may have had different meanings for the researcher and participants. However, the principal objective of the research was to explore meaning attached to such symbols.

Sample bias and generalisability

Similarly, due to local demographics, even though sampling was from two sampling points (students and acquaintances of staff), participants were arguably from one defined social group. That is, from predominantly white, middle-class, tertiary educated males. As results are qualitative and not being reported as generalisable, there was not considered to be an issue of any sample bias in this respect.

Researcher's personal bias

The author is writing from the bias of personal experience as a male constrained by his own gender, class, race and ethnicity. While acknowledging the importance of these in the construction of masculinity and its various meanings and expressions for men from

non English speaking backgrounds and Aboriginal men, the author's experience is Anglo-centric. From such a positioning as a man, the author is considering the current position of men within families and the interpersonal and intrafamilial issues and struggles men appear to be facing.

The researcher's bias may have resulted in a choice of questions that leads or biases discussion rather than having the participants share understandings of their experience. A strength of the study however is the informal nature of the interview and open questions that enabled participant's latitude to discuss areas of importance to *them*. The choice of an informal setting in which to conduct the study was also important to aid this. Additionally the questions were derived from within the conceptual framework.

Additionally, the outcomes are a legitimate part of the interactive process between researcher and participant. Lincoln and Guba (1994) argue that the researcher,

Cannot, and should not, be neatly disentangled from the observed in the activity of inquiring into constructions. Hence, the findings or outcomes of an inquiry are themselves a literal creation or construction of the inquiry process. (p. 128).

Indeed, to engage in critical evaluation requires the interpretive researcher not to be distanced from the inquiry.

Choice of concepts

The choice of concepts used in the study was very much shaped by the literature reviewed. This choice was in turn informed by the researcher's own values and political stance. An alternative bias and reading of literature may well have resulted in a different choice of concepts. For example, a more critical theoretical framework may have utilised associated language and concepts such as hegemony, or patriarchy instead of socialisation. This acknowledges the position of the researcher as subjectively influenced, however the concepts used are believed to be useful and relevant, and their validity tested by the research.

Additionally, the research took the position to move away from a 'labelling' negativism and to look for a more positive, strengths-based perspective. Rather than a simplistic reductionist approach that portrayed men synonymously with patriarchy, the research suggested that men want the best for their key relationships, as do women.

Chapter 4 will present the results of this study.

Chapter 4

Results

"I'd say family would be family...friends are friends. I mean you've got good friends and you've got family, and there is a difference I think, yeah."

'Colin'

Introduction

This chapter provides a description of the results. The results are presented in a qualitative format using quotations from interview transcripts. Where applicable, the researcher's prompts are provided within brackets before the participant's quote. The responses provided by the participants to the questions asked form the basis of the results, however it is acknowledged that individuals talk across topics. Other areas of importance to participants were therefore raised and discussed within the framework of the study. It became apparent that people's lives are not neatly packaged due to the interconnectedness of experiences.

In presenting the results, a case study format was chosen that provides four separate studies. Rather than presenting participant's answers collectively for each question, the value of the case study format enables both the researcher and reader to follow each participant's story with greater clarity. Additionally, this enables the researcher to more ably explore each participant's perception of what a 'good' family is and how their separate understanding shapes their individual roles and functioning within their families.

To value the individual input of each participant, and to ensure their 'realism' as actual men, personal pseudonyms were given to each participant. Names were assigned alphabetically according to the order interviewed. For example, Participant A is 'Alan', Participant B is 'Bob', C is 'Colin', and D is 'David'.

Additionally, in numerous instances, full quotes are given which might not seem to be fully applicable to the theme question involved. There are purposeful reasons for this. Firstly, as the men may not have talked about their relationships in this way before, the process was new to them. They took time to enter into the discussion, and realisation sometimes occurred gradually as they talked. At times, participants seemed to struggle with articulating what they were thinking. Therefore, full quotes have been provided, as the process of telling men's story is considered as important as the content of the story itself. The researcher decided that to do otherwise would have compromised the richness and meaning of the ideas embodied in the quotes and would not do justice to the participants involved.

Interview Length and Process

The length of interviews varied from 40 minutes to fifty-five minutes. The variation was the result of both the amount of time participants spent answering questions and the semi-structured interview format that enabled further questions to emerge from responses. Successive interviews also enabled the interview process to be improved with respect to framing questions. For example, questions asked that related generally to 'men' were changed in favour of personal questions to obtain more specific answers. The wording of some questions was also changed to help make them clearer. Additionally the socio-demographic questions were asked at the start of the interview process for the latter three interviews to help ease participants into the interview process.

Socio-demographic results

Results from socio-demographic questions yielded data about cultural and family background and aided in possible understandings of mediating factors of age, length in a relationship, geographical distance to significant family members, education on present functioning within men's family relationships.

Participant's ages were 38, 43, 52 and 57 years.

Two participants attained year 10 level with one currently undertaking undergraduate study. Two participants achieved postgraduate qualifications. The type of qualification is not recorded to ensure anonymity of the sample.

Residency in the Regional city was: 8 months, 8 years, 17 years and 5 years. Of the four participants, one was born in Australia. The remaining three participants emigrated from northern and central European countries at the ages of 10, 15 and early twenties. Two of these three came from countries where English was the second language spoken.

The lengths of time in their present relationships were 5.5, 16, 31 and 12 years. Three men were in a married relationship and one had been separated from his previous partner for 5 years.

Themes

In order to gain insight into how men understand the concept of the family and their ideal family and how this understanding shapes their functioning within their family, themes were derived from the theoretical framework. These themes formed the initial questions asked of each participant from which discussion and further questions followed. The question, 'In practice, what 'participant' considers is necessary in order to achieve his ideal of a good husband/father,' was not asked of Andy. The nature of the interview process as an exploration was one that enabled a refining of the format with each subsequent interview. The initial questions were based on:

- How 'participant' defines the concept of family.
- The most significant experiences for 'participant' growing up.
- Role models that helped shape 'participant's' ability to be a husband/father.

- Where else 'participant' got his definitions of how to be a man/husband/father.
- What 'participant' considers to be a good family.
- 'Participant's' ideals for his family relationships.
- In practice, what 'participant' considers is necessary in order to achieve his ideal of a good husband/father.
- What supports 'participant' considers men need most today in order to achieve good relationships.

Participant A - "Andy"

Andy is 38, has been married for 5.5 years, and has been in the locality for 8 months. Andy achieved an academic level of year 10 and has worked for a number of years. He is currently studying at university as a mature age student. Andy was the first participant interviewed and chose to be interviewed on the back veranda of his home, this being a favourite place outside in the sun from which to observe nearby bush. Andy's dog also made himself at home with us during the interview. The nature of the interview was therefore casual, unstressed and conducive for communicating. Andy wished to acknowledge the point that 'guys' relate best in such a casual setting as this.

How Andy defines the concept of family

The family has value for everyone, however variations exist as to the importance and role the family plays for individuals. For Andy the family had several meanings with a unifying theme as a symbolic 'place'. It is a place of love, hereditary structure, security, belonging and where needs are met. This symbolic place is a firm base on which these components are built.

"A loving place. A place where...I was born into it. It's probably the first place that offers the greatest place for security...A place that also gives you a sense of belonging." "I find it as a place that meets your personal needs and gives you that base, that platform."

The family is a positive place that provides these qualities to Andy by virtue of him being born into it. The family is a relational concept between partners, between children, between parents and children. Andy identified this relational component as the important aspect of the family's impact on him.

"In growing up as a child, It's your parents that meet all your needs, so you grow in appreciation of that particularly as an adult as you reflect back."

The value of family is often taken for granted in childhood. The realization and appreciation of the family's practical importance is only realized as he reflects as an adult.

The most significant experiences for Andy growing up

The significance of family does not exist apart from life events and within some context. These act to impact on the individual's experience of family. For Andy, the significant event was the experience of migration. This event brought a sense of loss at being 'torn' from that symbolic place. The depth of significance is sensed from the language used.

"Migrating to Australia was the most significant because you get a sense that I was torn away from the place where I belonged." "We just left an entire extensive network and I felt the loss of belonging, and in many ways I still have. That extensive belonging has only come back. And I have a sense that I'm part of a larger network."

(Because of your wife's family?)

"Yes, and my family's a bit more extensive now."

Andy, in his late 20's went back to his birthplace. This experience brought a realisation of 'belonging' that he'd missed, yet the reconnection to his cultural heritage didn't restore the sense of belonging. His identity had been shaped by both cultures and he was stuck in the middle. Andy highlights the impact on him of migration, which is alienation, and then digresses. The impact on society generally due to families migrating or even relocating within one's own country due to work transfers is the loss of ability to make meaningful relationships. .

Alienation

".. I wasn't able to identify this til...I went back to the country as an adult...I hadn't had that sense of belonging and yet when I came away from even there I...know too much and I'm not the same as them. As a migrant you get caught in no man's land."

Ability to commit to meaningful relationships

"It's one of the consequences of constantly uprooting and travelling we won't realise til 50 or 100 years later. Unless we look at it honestly, the impact on the family of this constant transition...may explain for me why we have a shallow and superficial society where people are constantly uprooting and we don't have to bond with people and develop this substantial relationship. It's difficult to maintain those relationships of substance. I have a number of friends that have moved on and it's not the same. It's difficult."

Andy's sense of belonging, provided via his extended relationships, was significantly affected by migration. The impact however was only realised in his adult experience of family. The past does not stand alone, but is connected to the present and is a basis for shaping the future. Migration meant dislocation, loss of connections and sense of belonging. Reconnection to a 'place' of belonging was being experienced via a new network of extended relationships facilitated through the family.

To Andy, the impact of change on the family is negative. This also affects society. Dislocation to Andy brings alienation, instability, and a loss of ability to connect deeply with others. There is no sense of place or base from which belonging and reconnection can take root and grow.

Role models that helped shape Andy's ability to be a husband

Andy had few significant people who he considered as positive role models. The need for positive models though still exists to guide how he is supposed to be as a husband. He uses to his own advantage the quality of respect he was taught to proactively observe and reflect the modelling in other's relationships.

"Very few. Very few. I was raised even as a little kid to respect the wisdom of people who've lived at least 50 years." "I seek out people that age and just quiz them."

Where else Andy got his definitions of how to be a man and husband

Andy's role definition of how to be a man and father was from his own father, although he didn't consider him as a positive role model. Having a contrast between positive and negative role models was seen as important. While negative role models, either dad's or TV, may shape some young men toward negative functioning, Andy uses contrasting models to shape positive functioning.

"I think probably the initial definition without actually realising it is from their own father. I was fortunate to have a grandfather...to get a contrast. But...nowadays it comes from the dad definitely."

"You just absorb it because there's a need without realising it." "The other one is I think television."
"People watch television so passively. They take on the values and any forms themselves without realising it. I can see the impact."

In Andy's experience, definitions appear to be gained from negative models subconsciously whether via fathers or the media. A contrast of models however is required to be able to discern positive ones. Andy believes that fathers provide the greatest impact of definitions, either positive or negative.

What Andy considers to be a good family

'Good' is a commonly used term that has different meaning to each individual. To some it means what is; to others, what is not; and to others, what might be. Andy had a ready answer to this question which displayed an existing thoughtfulness. As Andy is not a father, his answer references three quality characteristics already experienced with his partner. He is experiencing 'what is' good, and this inspires him for more.

Respect

"Respect would really be a central part. Respect for one another. Both parties to regard each other as equals and probably really early on in the piece to find out one another's strengths and weaknesses...and how we complemented each other, and to encourage each other in our role."

Respect is reflecting, and reflected by, complementarity. Knowing one's own and one's partner's strengths and having complementary cross-gender roles was seen as more important than stereotypical roles. Proactive self-knowledge was evident.

Knowledge of self and other

"Again it's something that I've read about and thought about and reflected on to bring into our own situation in that way. And It's met with some success and some failure"

Communication

Communication was also important, as was an awareness of perceived differences in communication by men and women.

"I really realise how important it is to communicate more and more, and clearly communicate. I think what amazes me is the difference between men and women. You know that statement about males and Venus whatever it is, there's a lot of truth to it. It's almost a cross-cultural experience."

To Andy, a good family does not have to include children. A respect and genuine regard for the other, knowing them more intimately, and communicating clearly and with understanding appear related ideal qualities that he is already striving to practice. Partners need to be active in exploring their own and the other's strengths, or 'good' qualities, so as to then encourage the other in their role for mutual benefit. This takes proactive effort. Andy has read, thought and reflected about his relationship. He acts contrary to literature which suggests men generally may be reluctant to try what is unfamiliar due to the fear of failure (MacDonald, 1997, p. 195). Andy invests in his relationship despite experiencing some failures at implementing the knowledge gained. This may be because what is good, (that is the experience of successes), may outweigh the failures.

Andy digressed and talked of changes in gender expectations that have, and are, affecting what makes a good family relationship. There have been major changes in the roles of women and men within the family. These changes, as a result of the feminist movement, have led to self-determination of women in their roles. Traditionally, according to Andy, women learnt and reacted to the decisions of men and the patriarchal society. Today, however, these

changes have meant a follow-on 'restructuring' of men's roles whereby women's expectations have affected men's expectations.

Changes in gender expectations

"Traditionally, a woman tolerated so much more. She learnt in a sense and be given the roles that the man or society decided to. My wife is not that type of person and I think the majority of modern women are not. So, the women's movement has had an impact and has restructured. And I suppose I've responded to the social change that's taken place by those movements and expectations."

"It's true in middle class and upper." "I think a lot of conflict in the working class have not understood the change and grown up in working class and not made the change they need to make which creates a fair bit of social tension."

Today, the tables have turned. Men are now the gender that are reactive to women's changed expectations and roles. Andy perceives that class mediates how these reactions or adjustments are made. The working class who are lacking understanding are seen as the men who are struggling with role transition. Though Andy does not posit why, he may be linking understanding with education as his reason for men's different reactions with respect to class.

Andy's ideals for his family relationships

Roles within the family are the specific parts individuals play, influenced by their expectations of what is appropriate. Men's roles within the family are therefore dependent on how they think, feel and act about their usual functioning as a man, husband and/or father that enhances good relationships. While having an ideal for his relationship, Andy found his role within that difficult to name. Gradually, through conversation, key characteristics were identified: support, effective communication, reciprocity, faith, reflective learning, valuing the other and vision.

Support/strength

Traditionally, men have been seen as the strong gender but today roles are blurred. For Andy, he has needed to provide strength and support for his wife. However, while this has been important, he is unsure where this role comes from. Roles can be learnt implicitly and unconsciously. We do what we have to at times without assessing why.

"I don't know. It's difficult to come up with a specifically man type of thing." "I wonder whether it's like being a strength, you know traditionally being strong for a woman in times of despair and being there." "...My wife has needed me to be there for her and uphold her. I don't know whether that's tradition or the way we were raised or what...." "Whether it's conditioning."

Effective communication

Communication is a key aspect in an ideal relationship. Andy recognises that this is complex and 'incredibly difficult.' To maintain a good relationship, absolute and personally important values must be compromised and negotiated for mutual satisfaction.

"Each situation is so unique, it's so difficult to say. The thing that strikes me commonly with all relationships is I think communication. How easy it is to take your partner for granted and how difficult communication is. And then the negotiational values because you don't negotiate everything up front before you get married.... you know I find this incredibly difficult and you're making compromises on things that are really highly important, and yeah you make compromises to maintain your relationship."

"I think that the difficult issues that arise for me has been the clash between the 2 values. Even though both my wife and I are Christians we understand certain things in a totally different way and a number of things have been incredibly difficult for me to respond to and I've had to make compromises on things that I've held very dearly and to me are really significant. And I've had to realise that she's had the right to not hold something as dearly or as important as I do. We have to create that environment.

At the same time my concerns need to be addressed and the majority of those things we're still in the process of negotiating." And "demonstrating to her that in my new understanding and new position I have taken into consideration her feelings and thoughts and I've also presented to her some of my own ..the things that I need to take place around that issue for us to move on."

Effective communication is important in resolving differences. While Andy and his wife have the same faith, there is a difference between the object of their common belief and the way this, and other values, are understood. Resolving differences requires accepting gender and personality differences and conflict, finding ways to work with and manage the differences, demonstrating change and then an ability and willingness to move the relationship forward.

Reciprocating as an equation

The value a person places on their relationship shapes their commitment to it. Andy has observed and cognitively appraised what this means in practice; that the one who values the relationship more will sacrifice more to maintain it. If the equation is in the 'blokes' favour, then the partner will maintain the relationship when they need to withdraw support.

"To me it makes sense, and is very evident, that the person who really wants to hold it together will make much more compromises than the other person. And I think negotiating that up front, it's a relationship of equals. But the best advice I ever got from marriage is from my mechanic. His advice was (and he'd been married for 55 years) marriage is giving and taking, and he says for blokes its 70% giving and 30% taking. That way you've always got a bit of surplus in that little pool for the hard times when you need to take a bit more or when she needs to take a bit more. For me, It's the wisest thing I've ever actually heard, and I think its true for all relationships."

Faith

Faith is a confident, unshakable conviction or trust in something or someone greater than us. In a changing secular world where there is little room for absolutes, faith in the sacred provides direction and purpose. For Andy, his Christian faith provides both his clear ideal and the motivation to live up to the ideal. However, there is always a 'shortfall' that results in a tension between what is, and what is strived for.

"It's difficult for me to reference people who've made me who I am. The core of who I am in a sense is that I'm a Christian person. I would regard myself as a nominal Christian, I'd regard myself as highly committed to Jesus." "So I have a very high ideal that... drive is not the right word I'm thinking of....that inspires me."

(Motivation?) "Yeah, it motivates me, its the core of who I am, so its also my theoretical perspective the way I see the world through those things and every thing that I see I take the gospels, Jesus' account.."

"My faith provides my ideal, it provides my inspiration, and it provides me with energy to attempt of implementing that ideal."

(So its like your faith is the ends but its also the means to that ends?)

"Absolutely. Absolutely. That sums it up really well. It's a shortfall. But people of faith live, you know, live in that tension between the ideal and the shortfall."

Reflective learning

The continual and rapid societal changes that affect the family can either leave individuals behind and struggling to adjust to their expected roles, or cause them to reflect and reassess their functioning. Andy recognises that reflection is needed to distinguish between what is

important and to be maintained in the relationship from what is expendable. The metaphor of the baby and the water helps him to think through and explain this.

"I've tried to take out the good things out of the modern social changes that have taken place, in the family and in relationships I've tried to learn -what I suppose I've tried to do is not throw the baby out with the bathwater. First, I've reflected on what in my faith is the baby, and what is the water so I could recognise the baby and then just throw out the water and I think I've done that. And I've tried to apply that same thing to our society whether it be in relationships or in other things to first struggle to work out what the baby is and struggle to work out what the water is and it's not so easy because the social changes that are taking place are so many and there's very little time between those changes to accurately see what is real and what is not."

Value and esteem 'other'

Love that esteems and highly values the other is a glue that cements the relationship. For Andy, the ideal is realised by his wife feeling the value he places on her. Andy uses another metaphor. Rather than being stagnant, the process must be fluid and fresh, and growing in maturity like a 'fine wine.'

"I suppose the ideal for me is that my wife would feel loved and highly respected by me. That she would have the opportunity, in a sense, to become the person she was born to become in God's sight and that in our relationship together we would actually grow in love for each other and respect for each other as we get older. A bit like a fine wine!" "To keep our relationship fresh."

"I think one of the qualities to be sensitive at all times in the sense that attentive to how my wife is feeling and thinking and not to take for granted what I understand."

"Again these are ideals and I really want to emphasise that I fall short."

Vision and inspiration

With two individual personalities and wills, there is bound to be conflict in the relationship. Andy's faith inspires him and provides the vision ahead to ensure his role and actions are other-centred and not simply self-centred in the present.

(It's a tension between the ideal ...)

"...And my reality. My ideal still inspires me to go on. If I didn't have that ideal I would revolve into selfishness, I would be self centred and I want my way cause often what I've found is in relationships including my married relationship is that there is a conflict of wills. It's what I want and it's what you want. And again my inspiration of my ideal is that it's not my will but at that same time if it's constantly her will then it's detrimental to me so we have to negotiate a common will that's for our common good."

Men may be reflective and analytical about work but have been criticised for not applying the same abilities and effort in their relationships. Andy however does! While he is not sure whether some roles are conditioned or innate, he recognises that his faith provides both his ideal and inspiration for ensuring a good relationship. The complexities of differing wills, requires reflective thought processes and effective communication skills for compromising, and sacrificing self in the interest of esteeming the other. While faith guides Andy in an ever maturing good relationship, it provides a contrast with what is - a 'shortfall'.

What supports Andy considers men need most today in order to achieve good relationships

While men appear to be struggling relationally in the family, they are stereotyped as unwilling to seek help when needed or engage in services to improve their relationships. How accurate is this perception of men? If the stereotype is accurate, what prevents men from accessing

services, which would help them to achieve or maintain a good relationship? Andy highlights coping with change, other male role models, access to services, and communication as mediating factors that help or hinder men in achieving good relationships.

Coping with change

Change is a part of everyday modern human life. For Andy, the rapid pace of change, like never before, is causing important longstanding traditional values to be lost in favour of new superficial and temporary ones. For Andy, the effect of change on families is negative. As Andy is a thoughtful, reflective person, this essential aspect of assessing what is important and what is not in maintaining a good relationship has become increasingly difficult.

"I think we have a western world that is rapidly spinning off its axis in many ways because there's such a blurring (of values), of anyone traditional, you know it hasn't reflected and kept the baby. It seems to have thrown everything out and constantly throwing things out without thinking about them. If you look at the greater history of the world, for a change to take place, a minor change took hundreds of years. If you think about the changes taking place in the family since the industrial revolution, they've been phenomenal. And never mind just the industrial revolution but even the changes that have taken place since transport. People....moving. Not enough time has transpired."

"There's certain things about life that aren't findable until time passes by."

(So, reflecting and analysis seems to be important then?)

"Yeah, for me it is essential."

Male role models

We learn what is appropriate from significant others and collective societal norms. As individuals, we tend to gravitate toward others with similar beliefs and values. Change

however has blurred what is appropriate and Andy believes men are confused. Andy believes that men need help in enacting their ideals and beliefs. Older, more experienced male role models who think similarly and have struggled give hope to persevere. Society needs to play a role in reinforcing positive models and their achievements.

"I think other men who share the same ideals and try to implement those things in their lives. Older role models. In a sense people who have been doing it for a long and demonstrating that its worthwhile to struggle." "I think it's a society that's confused."

"And as a society this needs to be highlighted even a lot more - that positive role model."

Access to appropriate services

Ensuring equitable access to services in the human service arena across groups in society is a current issue of social justice. To Andy services for men are inappropriate to their need, especially those in the working class. Before men will access services, work is needed to help them cognitively rethink their beliefs and help them adjust to changes. Social services to him have taken the easy road by catering to the middle class rather than those that need services more.

"A lot of places that exist in our society are places for middle class men don't access. A lot of the social services don't address the needs. They're trying to address the needs, but very poorly I think, of working class guys. They're not getting to them to encourage them to rethink, to integrate, not necessarily totally rethink, but to integrate into their existing world views to sharpen it up to make it better, to make them a bit more sensitive to their women."

"I think a lot of the services are delivered by middle class people and it's much easier to deliver a service to middle class group."

For Andy, access and communication were related reasons why existing services are inappropriate to men's needs. Firstly, effective use of services relies on effectively communicating. Class differences exist however due to different education standards available and achieved. As services are delivered by the middle class, services are not appropriately communicated to the working class. Secondly, as men and women's communication patterns differ, the absence of men in the human services was seen as an important reason hindering working with some men.

"Well they develop their communication often through education."

"Actually just one thought on service delivery. Its often women delivering services to men and it doesn't go very well particularly for working class men".

Summary of "Andy"

Who is Andy? What sort of man is he? What impressed the researcher most was his proactive curiosity of other's relationships to help his own. Contrary to critical and popular literature, he also has great capacity and ability to reflect on past events such as migration and its impact on his relationships and sense of identity. Perhaps practical life experience rather than education has been his key.

How did Andy describe the family? He saw it as a symbolic place to find belonging, and security. His sense of family as a migrant was a 'place', not only geographical but also relational and he therefore felt a sense of loss at being disconnected from his extended network. Marriage brought something of a reconnection to another network.

His ideal family relationship is one that has respect and equality, and where his wife feels loved and respected by him. Tying to achieve his ideal inspires him to go on. His ideal can be

achieved by good communication, negotiating what's important, and adapting, being cognitively aware of his wife's needs and astute at meeting them.

The conceptual framework Andy appears to use to make sense of the family, and his relationships is a symbolic 'place' which has connection to others for growth, direction and support. The factors that appear to have shaped Andy's descriptions and framework are the loss of belonging due to migration, his spiritual faith as an ideal and a means to his ideal and the rapid pace of societal change that impacts relationships detrimentally. This framing has acted to shape (or influence) Andy's actions (or roles) through a realisation that there is a tension between his ideal and the shortfall of actual experience. This has led to a need for reflection and an analysis of society.

Andy believes that what hinders men from achieving their relationship goals and enacting their roles is: a lack of knowledge/skills to communicate, television, no places of communication for men to improve themselves relationally, the rapid change in society, the lack of men in the human services resulting in inappropriate communication of services by women to men, and the mode of service delivery by, and catered to, the middle class which further marginalises the working class.

Andy perceives that what helps men in their relationships are both formal and informal strategies. These are: Communication skills gained through education; having more men delivering services to particularly working class men; having a network of other men with similar values, and older men who are seen as wiser who can role model positive, healthy relationships and advise others both at both an individual and societal level.

Participant B - "Bob"

Bob is 43 years old, has been in his current relationship for 16 years and is a father of two children; a son and a daughter. He has lived in the region for 8 years, the last four of these

years residing in the regional city. Though Bob was born in Australia, he was shaped by the heritage of his parents who emigrated from a northern European country. After studying at university, Bob graduated with a Bachelor of honours and later undertook postgraduate study.

Bob was the second man interviewed and preferred the option of being interviewed in the researcher's home. Like most men, Bob works during the day. Therefore, the interview was conducted in the evening, relaxing in the researcher's lounge room whilst enjoying 'a coffee.' Bob talked at length, and like Andy, the casual interview seemed to give a unique chance for him to talk about his thoughts and ideas regarding his ideals for his family.

How Bob defines the concept of family

The family has value for everyone. While Bob's experience was similar to Alan's, his concept of family contained variations. Bob's concept of family was in terms of structure - a traditional one. His immediate family came to mind first, then his extended one.

"The first thing that comes into my mind is a fairly traditional one, of like a nuclear type thing. So, male and female, kids. So I'm really relating it to my immediate situation and then after that, I guess, if I gave it a bit more thought I'd think of the extended family life. My wife's family, the relationship of our kids to them, and my relationship with them. I get on fairly well with them. I guess it's a fairly traditional model."

Both structure, and the relationships within the structure are of importance. Bob's concept relates to his own personal experience of family as a positive one rather than what others may experience, or what he hears of others experiences.

"When you say the word family, I'm thinking of a positive thing. So I don't have any images of dysfunction, or severe dysfunction. So when I'm thinking of family, I'm thinking nice, get on okayish, you know."

The family is both a structural and relational concept within which its members interact. The important aspect for Bob is how its members interact. Whereas Andy valued the relational aspect for its utility as a place for meeting his needs such as security and belonging, the important relational aspect for Bob is the quality of those relationships. The family has symbolic meaning for Bob as a structure that is safe so that he can be himself, where he is understood, accepted, and which is held together by strong bonds that enable barriers to be overcome.

Acceptance

"I think there's something about acceptance with people. People being able to be themselves, and people understanding where people are coming from. And that's accommodating their quirkiness or their little habits that's annoying. So, if I think of my own family, like my brothers and sisters, there would be things that shit me off with each of them and visa versa. But the bonds between us are strong enough that we go past that sort of stuff, whereas if it's an acquaintance or a friend you'd say that's it. In my case it's about overseeing those barriers where you can and always I guess making yourself open to be there. And I'm not always good at it."

The saying, 'you can choose your friends, but can't choose your family' is alluded to here. Bob seems to suggest that as members cannot choose to be family members, they make allowances and accommodate others' differences. This aspect appears to be an ideal that Bob is not always good at achieving. Where there is choice, however as in friendships, individuals are not compelled to commit.

The family of origin shapes individuals in ways that are often subconscious. That Bob has talked more about his siblings than his immediate relationships, suddenly dawns on him. In listening to Bob, the researcher had difficulty in naming what he was saying. Words such as 'civility' came to mind in endeavouring to encapsulate what was considered as the intent.

Harmony and civility

The ideal for this extended family is that members 'get on'. Closeness and intimacy is not necessary. Bob is not seeking a perfect relationship but a more pragmatic, realistic one.

"I guess the structure part doesn't really worry me in terms of importance. Its how you get on with people."

"It's interesting when you asked about family; I talked about my family - my wife and my kid, and then straight away jumped into the family I was born into. So the ideal is that we get on ok. We don't have to love each other, but we get on ok. And we put aside our differences. In thinking about it, I can do that but I don't have a particularly close relationship with my brother. We don't get on that well."

The symbolism of family as a strong bond between members ensures effort is provided for maintaining the quality of relationships. As an example, Bob relates a situation, where by doing their parental duty, the bond between spouses was strengthened.

Being there, support

"You can certainly have fights and arguments and you patch them up too, but there's always that desire to look after them in a way, or be there for them. Here's an example. The education of one of our kids, (was) a potential problem area in terms of schooling. And so we went there because it was important for us to be there. And it was interesting after we left, the bond between us was closer. Cos I guess how I saw it, we're doing something for our son, you know." "It's funny, just doing that little thing made it stronger again ...And part of it is for us to be together, but also to assist our children."

Balance

Life is a balance. The relational aspect of the family includes self giving to others and others giving to self. There is often little time and space however made for self giving to self. Bob's sense of self needs nurturing and space as well as giving to others in maintaining his close relationships. Although overcoming a hurdle concerning their child brought he and his wife together, his own 'space' is also important.

"Like how do you get the balance between having your own space and doing stuff together? And that's an issue I've got. Yeah I think it's those issues of doing things together that's important - the nice family holiday you have or something like that."

As with Alan, Bob's concept of family is relational. While the symbolic value for Alan is as a place of nurture, for Bob it is the quality and strength of its bonds. Family bonds provide a safe place where one has freedom to be oneself, and are strong enough to overcome barriers within and without.

The most significant experiences for Bob growing up

The family provides a significant context where values are shaped and significant events can be experienced together. Values learned within the family are related to one's 'place' within it. For Bob, loyalty was a quality that resulted from his particular place within the family as the eldest child. This quality had pre-eminence for him, even if his senses said otherwise. Such is the power of being raised to 'do the right thing.'

Structural position - 'the oldest'

Within the family, one 's structural position in the family can define one's roles. The

oldest child often provides parental support, and often before their developmental capacity to do so. Bob's roles as the oldest child were that of mediator and carer.

"I think with me there's always that strong sense of loyalty, which I've hinted to already. It's always been a strong point with me even with friends for many years. You know I'd always still be there. Maybe when it was sensible to let that friendship run. But that sense of loyalty, and being there, and doing the right thing has always been there for me."

"Particularly in terms of the family stuff, maybe it's the oldest son syndrome - I've always gotta do the right thing."

"Always being the one that was counted on. So that carries through very much. And in my family as we got older, in my late teens I'd be the peacemaker in the family or the one that would bring people together. Mum and dad would get on but I wouldn't say their relationship was the best. And if there was problems there, I would be the ear for her to talk to, or even to bring my brothers and sisters together. So yeah, it was a funny sort of relationship. I guess normally, that sort of stuff might be the eldest daughter that does that or brings things together. But that was my role within that family."

Bob perceives that relational and caring roles are more feminine than masculine, however as the oldest child, he automatically bore these. By default, his responsibilities and inherited duties were more adult than childlike.

Connection with cultural ties

Life events also impact on individuals in the family shaping their experience of family. These events can strengthen bonds. Bob recalls a significant experience that he considered 'positive'. Why? He states twice that, 'we did it as a family'. As with Andy, migration had a significant impact. The initial recollection triggers two additional significant positives for Bob. The experience brought new knowledge, with a benefit of

increased academic achievement, and it brought him in contact with family he'd not seen before. Connections.

"The other thing we did which was great. We did it as a family; we went overseas for 6 months. I was eight. And that had a huge impact on me. And was the best thing we ever did. It opened my eyes to the world."

"We went to see relatives overseas, and by boat - 1 month there by boat, 4 months there and 1 month back by boat. And two things happened after that. One thing was that academically I achieved a bit more. It has stayed with me to that day. So that was a really positive experience I've got. But that was something we did as a family."

"Oh and I'll tell you the other positive thing for me here, cos I come from an immigrant family, and we're the only people here. What was really significant for me, then was to realise I had all these other relatives overseas, and that was very important to me. And I actually went back to Europe in my early to mid 20's and rediscovered that again, and It was interesting cos we'd never had or known any immigrant migrant families."

As Bob continues to talk of this experience, he recalls other effects of the experience.

Sense of 'place'

Like Andy, Bob also uses the symbolism of a 'place' to describe his sense of belonging and identity that his new extended family and cultural ties provided. His cultural roots were also important to him as they provided a new social network, and answers to familial idiosyncrasies. It explained why he was like he was.

"Why? Cos I didn't have anything. My parents are very quiet socially."

"But it was this sense of place which I feel that I've missed. Like when I went back to "name of country". It was really interesting to see my uncles, aunties and cousins, and see my sense of humour and where that comes from, and quirkiness, or whatever and get on with it. Some of those relatives I reckon are great. I just thoroughly enjoy their company. So, I'd missed all that."

Unlike Andy who remembered being 'torn' from extended family, Bob never knew he had one, yet he too didn't feel the loss until he realised what it was that he had lost. The realisation came through discovery. However, Like Andy, the discovery put Bob in no man's land between two cultures. Although the loss was strongly felt in his youth as his identity was being shaped, the sense of loss is still present.

"It was only after. Because we had a very quiet life and were not a typical Australian family. You know, I wanted to go kicking around with a footy, but dad never did that. So I'd want to be a little Aussie kid, but I couldn't do it 'cos I had no one to teach me. So, that was a big thing, and it's still there, that sense of place. It's not as strong now as it used to be. But up until then, it was an interesting thing. And even now I think about it."

Sense of 'space'

The transition to adulthood for adolescents often involves a struggle to achieve an identity. This requires independence to be able to experiment with possible identities (Kail & Cavanaugh, 1996, p. 260). Another significant positive memory for Bob is the 'space' his parents gave him during his tertiary years.

"I'll always remember when I went to uni., my parents were okay with whatever I did. So, that was terrific. I was my own boss and made my own decisions. So, I really value that. It gave me the space to do what I wanted to do, which was good."

Like Andy, the discovery of extended family for Bob was a significant event. He too symbolises the experience as giving him a 'place' of belonging and identity. 'Space' also provided the opportunity to search for, and be, himself.

Role models that helped shape Andy's ability to be a husband and father

The effect of living in a migrant family is dislocation from significant others who act as role models. Substitutes take their place. As Bob had no uncles or extended family members in Australia, there were few close role models. After some thought however, Bob is aware of conscious role models that have shaped how he is supposed to act. These are his peer group, extended family connections, a male teacher, the experience of travel, and parents.

Peer group

Peer groups provide a sociocultural context for young adults that influence beliefs and behaviours. Bob's experience of peer group is that strong views about how men should behave are explicit. Though not influenced personally by them, sport and television provide models of male behaviour that may be more implicit.

"Now that's interesting cos I do things a bit differently. Well I like to think I do things a bit differently from my dad. I would say a lot of it is the peer situation. Like going through uni. That's where I reckon I got most of my stuff. Obviously, I got things from my parents too. But there's probably subliminal ones and that I'm not always aware of, so it would be peers. Yeah, essentially I reckon peer group."

"I don't know. I suspect it's still peer group that's pretty important for most guys... I got in with a bunch of guys that went to a private boys school, and they had a very set definition of what blokes should be like, and how men relate to women. And what I notice was really common amongst them, it was quite different from me, so I'm assuming it's still school and peers as the most dominant thing.

And I guess part of that too might be footy club or whatever, but I don't know cos I don't do that stuff. And I guess it's what age you're at too. I've got no doubt that to some degree television would shape social morays and values about how you act in the family and those things as well. I just can't recall that."

Extended family connections

(You wouldn't have had uncles over here would you?)

"No, nothing. No, no one really stands out like that. It's interesting, I know when I first came back to Australia after travelling around for a number of years, I was really impressed with my wife's family. Because I thought this is a great family, this is what a family should be like."

"Well they just seemed to be a more sociable, open, typical Aussie family. But I loved it. But I didn't realise what it was like until I met them."

Like Andy, Bob's partner provided the extended family connections for seeing how family is supposed to be. Being Australian, his wife's family provides a needed sense of belonging and place within which to fit.

A male teacher

Individuals at an impressionable age spend much time in educational settings. The only male role model for Bob is a teacher. He is able to discern what it is he learns from this role model, and like Andy, contrasts his model's strengths and weaknesses. Bob takes for himself what he admires and considers positive - the teacher's relationship with his partner.

"But I know when I was single, and just out of high school and early years of uni, I'd go and see this teacher, who I got on really well with, so I still kept relationships with this past teacher. And I guess I

didn't mind some aspects of his relationship with his family, but I wouldn't do everything he did. Cos he would just drink too much and shit like that. But in the sense that he seemed to have a good quality relationship with his partner, and they had a good fun relationship with their kids. In that sense but not necessarily everything else." "I was very aware of his weaknesses."

Parents and family

"So hopefully most people would also get it from parents, in laws, a family member, or relative or something like that. It's just that that wasn't much of my life."

Migrants are caught between two cultures. Bob suspects that a non-immigrant family would provide the role modelling that he missed so as to 'fit in'.

Where else Bob got his definitions of how to be a man, husband and father

Travelling

Travel provides a context for discovering something new. Bob's experience of travel enabled him to clarify what his strengths were and find his sense of self as a man through being independent and self-reliant. A sense of completeness, accomplishment satisfaction, self-fulfilment and not living with regret is important to Bob. It appears that the 'space' gained in travelling enabled Bob to discover a lot about himself.

"I think in my case I got my sense of myself, which is what I call my definition of manhood, when I travelled." "And its when I stood on my own, and did things on my own for a few years that I worked out what I was good at and became a lot clearer about what I wanted. Actually, I had that before. I had that through uni., but that firmed it up."

"Part also just the freedom to do what you want to do. If I wanted to go here and take this risk I did it. Also for me a sense of completeness 'cos I actually did things that I'd dreamt of doing. So, I consider myself quite lucky in the sense that I've fulfilled my childhood fantasies. I'm not saying that it's finished, but I've been able to do it. It's not as if I've sat and said 'oh I wish I did this all my life.' "

Feminism has highlighted women's struggle for equality in the domestic sphere. Women appear therefore to have done much of the thinking regarding their status and roles in the family and are more proactive in meeting their needs. For Bob, what it means to be a husband is shaped more by his partner than his own definitions, as his requirements and expectations are not as clear as hers. His definition of fatherhood however is more oriented and defined by himself.

Partner

"But some of that is just shaped up with my partner. You know if I had a different type of partner, there might be some things that I'd be doing differently too. I think in terms of 'father' its ok. I don't think I'd be that much different. But in terms of a partner, my wife's relationship with me is not shaped back because she's very clear what she wants and expects, and if I'm getting a bit slack at times, she lets me know about it. So then we go through a phase of renegotiating.

Father

"And probably without her I might have slipped into much more of my father's habits. Ahh, just sit back and let everything happen around you, cos that's his day, and my father's a bit like that."

Definitions and roles for Bob's father a generation ago were more contrasted and socially defined than they are for Bob today. Whereas society may have defined roles then, women such as Bob's partner appear to be influencing definitions today. Perhaps for Bob, the more

equal or egalitarian relationship of being a husband is less definable than being a father. However like his dad, he 'lets it happen.'

What Bob considers to be a good family

'Good' is a term that has different meanings to each individual. To some it means what is realistically possible, to others the opposite of 'bad', and to others an ideal of what can be. For Bob, he has hopes and vision for his family. To achieve a good family Bob wants the best for his children, for members to operate as a whole not individuals, to persevere and 'ride' the ups and downs, and to move and grow together. Like Andy, a good relationship is not stagnant.

Hopes and vision for others

Bob has hopes and dreams for his family. A good family has tolerance, understanding, fun and positive shared memories as key ingredients. Space is again mentioned as an ideal.

"I guess I'd like to see that we've got some tolerance and understanding of each other but also some fun, you know, we want to be able to enjoy ourselves and have fun. We don't want it to be all bloody hard work. And I'd like to have some shared memories. You know I put a lot of time into my kids but I'm hoping that later on they remember some of those things. The other thing is I guess some scope for people to do their own thing a bit."

(Some space?)

"Yeah. For my daughter its more or less that she's got great personality and I just hope that she fills it up rather than retreating back. So, my wish for her is that she just grabs life and takes the opportunities."

"So, family to me should be able to foster that and encourage that."

Wanting the best for others

Wanting the best for his children in practical terms doesn't exclusively translate into a duty of providing for their future economic wellbeing. It is more about providing general support and connecting with them emotionally. To do this he realises that what was real for him may not be real for his children due to societal changes.

"Yeah, it's that. And it's more about the relationship with them in that emotional sense. Like I don't have a big sense that I've got to financially do a whole lot of stuff for them and set them up. That's not in my headspace at all. I'd like to be able to help them a bit. And I guess what I've got to come to terms with now is that the world's a bit different to when I was a uni student.... very much independent and my wife and I when we were 17 or 18 we chose to be on our own and look after ourselves but that's obviously not the case these days, with these kids. It's a different world."

Operating as a whole, not as individuals

A good family is one where individual members have space to do what they want, but at the same time put collective family needs above their own.

"We've basically been on a single income for 12 plus years. But I've always allowed her to have the space to do what she wanted to do like to go out and do some voluntary work, go to uni. Do that stuff. And I think it's about making that space for people as well. Rather than me saying, 'well your in this 50-50 you should work, I should work.' Like, I'm not like that. So for me that's a bit about giving space, or putting what we think is more important for the family ahead of just getting money. That's what I'm trying to say."

Persevering: 'riding' the ups and downs

There are many pressures on relationships today. For Bob, a good family hangs in there longer than others and rides through the hard ups and downs.

"Yeah, and I've been able to do my stuff while I'm working so its ok. I guess in my mind I realise that divorce rates are pretty high. It's pretty hard to just hang in. But my picture of a good family is that we can ride through that stuff. Those sort of ups and downs that you get. So, I would like to keep sticking at it. And I guess in my mind be able to hang in a lot longer."

Growing together

Separate agendas and stagnant relationships are not good, but destructive. To Bob, a good family is one that copes with change by maintaining cohesion as members moving together in the same direction.

"A bad one is just when you both, well, it doesn't necessarily matter if you're going separate ways but when you're going separate ways and its destructive, or something. Where there's no growth. You're not moving together in any way, so it's stale. Which is not necessarily good. But stale doesn't mean bad it's just stale."

(It's not going anywhere.)

"Yeah. So, a good one is ...where you can change and adapt and still stick together, and find some commonality. It doesn't have to be everywhere, but as long as you can find something that you can work on together."

Bob's concept of family as a strong relational bond compares well with the qualities he considers makes a good family; cohesiveness, putting collective needs above individual needs, growing together, and being able to ride the ups and downs.

Bob's ideals for his family relationships

Individuals play specific roles within the family influenced by their expectations of what is appropriate. Men's roles within the family are therefore dependent on how they think, feel and act about their functioning as a man, husband and/or father that complement their relationships. Andy believes he has invested sufficient time in his relationship as a father and as a result it is 'basically good.' Through conversation, Bob identified key characteristics for his role in his ideal relationships. These were: space for each other as husband and wife; support from other men; space for personal interests and maintaining boundaries to reach his ideal.

Time and flexibility

"Well, I think my relationship with the kids is pretty ok, it could be improved a bit here and there but it's basically good. I put a lot of time in so that's ok. I guess it'll be tested soon as my daughter is moving.... So that'll be a lesson for me to see how flexible I can be. And my wife's better at picking that up than I am, but no doubt between us we'll probably get there."

Space for each other

Bob's ideal for his marriage is more closeness and more room for just the two of them. His present assessment however is that his relationship has been 'really good' due to riding the ups and downs over many years. When questioned whether getting this 'space' was a goal, Bob's reply indicated a desire to achieve the goal.

"And for our relationship, it's been really good, we've been together a long time and we've had some ups and downs, and it's just about working through some old stuff so we can move together. We need a bit more closeness, that's what we need. We need some more space where it's just time for us, instead of with the kids. And that'll be good for us to get."

"Yeah. Oh, we'll get there. I'm pretty comfortable about that"

Support from other men

The role of other men in a man's life is important. In relocating 4 years ago, Bob's male connections had been lost and the relational need of other men is not being fulfilled.

"The other key thing for me, and this relates to both being a good father and a good partner, is that I think our relationship is...obviously assumes some of my own interests, and basically I need to connect back on that. And that's a little bit since we've just relocated. I have a very good, strong, or had a key network of male friends. And this relates to the question of male supports. So, if I was there, I'd have most of the support I needed. But I'm not. They're there, and I'm here. And in this town, I don't have that as much. So its how... or who I meet that I can connect with easily to have that same relationship. There's a few people I get on ok with but it's not the same personal level of sharing that I probably need."

While Bob may not share at a personal level with other men, there is a need and desire to do so. It is a need that Bob is cognitively aware of and readily articulates.

Personal interests

There is also a need to have personal space for rediscovering interests and talents for satisfaction and fulfilment that were lost due to the constraints of family relationships. While both partners give to the family, Bob again considers his partner to be better at managing self-care than him.

"The other is that I just need to get back to my hobbies and interests and rediscover some of that again cos I've been too busy to...discover and I've let that slip. And my partner's pretty good at that. She's

sorted herself out nicely, and that's ok. I just need to get back and do something for myself." "And they haven't stopped me. I've probably stopped myself, and I need to just find something again."

Women do appear to nurture self better than men which supports the argument that women's health and wellbeing is generally more positive than men's.

Maintaining boundaries to reach the ideal

Stereotypical expectations can often subconsciously hinder relational goals. Bob perceives that the pressures of work and being the stereotypical breadwinner have resulted in this loss of space for self-interests. This was an unconscious or semi-conscious shift that he 'slipped' into. Though he doesn't specify why, he is now more conscious of the need to maintain boundaries around protecting family relationships and appears to be thinking about how to implement this. The positive benefit of communication is also highlighted.

"Yeah, it's a bit of the breadwinner syndrome type thing that you can slip into. It's a mixture of that."
"It used to be that busy, that I'd come home exhausted. Whereas now I'm a lot more conscious about not giving so much without, er, making more space to be with my family and getting dialogue. And I'm just starting to flesh that out a bit."

The ideals for Bob's relationships within the family are the similar to his ideals for his family as a whole. Bob appears to be close to his ideal as a father and desires some working through of parenting issues with his partner. Bob's ideal relationship is to be able to go somewhere and not be stagnant and so resolving issues is required to be able to move the marriage relationship on.. Space for each individual as well as space for Bob's relationship with his wife is seen as good for them and the family.

In practice, what Bob considers is necessary in order to achieve his ideal of a good husband and father

People interact with their social environment, which results in change for both the person and their environment. Just as Bob is shaping his children's lives, their needs are shaping his actions. Bob recognises that he needs more awareness of others, and to be more present and attentive to children's needs.

Awareness of others

There is much to capture men's attention. Bob is aware of his need to focus more on his children's needs, and to think more before acting.

"In practical terms to be really good at that, I probably need to be a bit more conscious of what stage my kids are at and how to react to that; to think a bit more before I might react to a question. To be a bit more here. So there'll be times where my kids might ask me something, but my headspace is still elsewhere. So I'll give a short answer, or perhaps I'll say no, or whatever. And I haven't really thought about what they're asking or processed whether it's reasonable or not. So I think I need to be a bit more conscious about some of those things."

Modelling his partner

Yet again, Bob believes his partner is meeting his ideal. He considers her a 'good' character role model. That she is not seen as perfect, but still fits the ideal, would indicate that Bob has made a considered, if not realistic, assessment.

"Which my partner would do. I think she's really good at that. She's sort of like a model for me of where I should go to in terms of a reasonable character. Well, in terms of some things, not all."

Bob perceives that women are different cognitively to men. Rather than focussing on more than one thing at once, they;-

"...Or refocus quicker perhaps."

As well as being willing to change and bend and giving each other space,

To be a role model for his son:

Bob is meeting his own expectations of fatherhood by spending time with his son and that is verified by his enjoyment of the role. However, Bob feels that as he hasn't had the Australian role modelling himself, he will begin to struggle with providing his son with such modelling. The repetitive theme of struggling to be a good Aussie dad' appears to be related to his lack of older male role models and being caught between two cultures.

"The other thing with my boy is...like he's a real little boys boy. And I'm good with him in the sense that I give him a lot of time, probably too much than (the others). That's the lion's share. But I enjoy it, so that's ok. But I think later there are many things that he will want, like a good Aussie dad, and I will struggle with that cos I haven't had it myself. So there's probably some issues there. They're not immediate now, but might come up as the kids get older."

The symbolism he describes is that he is in a different 'place' to his son which is hard to get to. He sees the need to try and be all things to his son yet falls short, however knowing his limitations appears not to indicate a sense of failure. Striving to be better means striving for his ideal of a good dad. In both sport and fishing, Bob does what he can himself, and may enlist other supports for his son. There is a tone of sacrifice here. He does what his son likes whether he is good at it or not.

"You know, showing the kids how to play footy. I'm not up with it anymore the rules of cricket, or that stuff, I'm not there. Practical how to fix things. Bloody hopeless. I've never learnt that. So there's a few things I know I'll be weak at. But I guess my job there is, if I can't do it, that's ok."

"I do that with him. I'm bloody hopeless at it but I know where to go and get the little fish and that's all that interests him, so we go and do that. So there's a bit of that stuff but the rest might be going to find a good mentor for him."

Bob realises at this point that he has not talked about his partner much. He switches to what practical steps he needs to take in order to ensure this relationship improves.

Constant effort and thought are required in maintaining relationships. Bob is aware of the need to invest in the relationship with his partner by taking more responsibility.

Being more proactive like his wife

During the discussion, Bob is aware that his partner is proactive, and he is reactive and begins to question the equality and morality of this in the relationship. This indicates the value of the interview as consciousness raising.

"Now, ah, that's going to be taking a bit more responsibility, managing the family business, the housework that stuff. Like I do that but I slip out of it. A constant saga of good works and then forgetting it and falling into a hole. That's a key thing there." "And the other thing there with my partner for me would be to get my act together and do stuff for myself. It's also about consciously, rather than reacting too fast, of being proactive in investing in the relationship in terms of where we are now, where do we need to go. So I'm not always...my partner's generally at the forefront of that than I am. Maybe that's ok. I don't know. I haven't thought about it. It's just a description of where we're at. She'll be the one that puts the questions and initiates those things, whereas if it's cruising along ok, I'm happy... to go along. So I'm posing that question of the relationship myself. So, is that something I should do? I don't know. Is it right or wrong?"

Expectation from structural advantage

Due to men's structural advantage, the expectation for certain roles has been implicit. The main responsibility to Bob of men and fathers is the traditional role of breadwinner that has been his own experience.

"Well, I described it before as a bit of the breadwinner syndrome. There's no doubt in my mind that a part of that has been to secure the income. That's been our pattern, and I still have that fairly strong within me." "I mean I'm happy to change that too, now that my partner's got some work, but there's a huge income disparity between us, so by and large that's still up to me to manage and do that sort of stuff. So that's a key responsibility I have."

Being relationally present

Men's responsibility of supporting their families has often been thought of in financial terms. However, while Bob is the main breadwinner, support to him equates to being relationally present with his children and his partner by spending time and listening to them.

"The other one is really just to be there, for your partner and to listen to them and support them in what they're doing. That's what I think is pretty important as a role and responsibility. In terms of kids, I guess maybe trying to instil the right values whatever you think they are. And the other one, I really see for the kids is just being there with them. On the weekend I spend a fair bit of time. In terms of financial management... In fact with that one I probably err too much, not too much, but I'm sharing that much that I think it drives my wife crazy. At times she doesn't want to know. But pretty much we discuss all that stuff and work it all through."

What supports Bob considers men need most today in order to achieve good relationships

Men don't appear to be accessing available supports. Are existing supports appropriate to men's needs or are their barriers to accessibility? Andy addresses these additional questions as he discusses what supports men need to help them to achieve or maintain a good relationship. Bob is able to articulate numerous mediating factors that help and hinder men in achieving good relationships.

The greatest support Bob thought men needed most today in order to achieve their responsibilities and ideal were, from his personal experience, relational.

Male peers

Dislocation can sever relational supports. The peer support from other males like Bob had during university is still a need today.

"I guess its what I was alluding to before and maybe because I just miss that. It's just the good support of peers would be really useful for me. So if I had...(Some other guys....). "Yeah, that I could really relate to and get on with and that I valued and thought similar, yeah. I think generally would be enough for me. Or I imagine it would be. I can't think of much more that I'd need."

Knowledge

Knowledge provides power to overcome ignorance and difficulties through increased problem solving ability. In Bob's circumstance, his wife was proactive in making use of supports and Bob became involved after he received feedback. This may indicate that while Bob's wife was been willing to seek out and try anything that might help to meet their need,

Bob needed to wait for proof of its value before committing to it. This may speak to some men's reluctance to utilise supports even when relational needs are apparent. Whatever Bob's reason for not participating with his wife initially, he is now open to such supports.

"I took a parenting course once. That was quite okay, quite useful. But I don't always keep up with things. I slip out of some of those things. I don't know if that's every ones cup of tea by any means. I found that quite good actually, and probably should do it again at one stage. So that was a big support at a particular stage when we really needed it."

"Well actually, my wife heard about it. Where she went to one and I thought, 'oh that sounds really good.' So, I went to one later and got onto another course at another time. Because we just wanted to deal with our daughter basically. And so I'm open to doing that stuff, not a problem."

Informal avenues for obtaining knowledge

The mode of communicating knowledge must be in a form that is applicable to the recipient. While Bob valued courses "where it's a sort of sharing set-up", he did not think 'formal courses' were worth attending. The perception is that formal courses are too rigid. For a support to be able to meet his own practical needs, it needs to be, in Bob's symbolism, 'fluid'. He however needs a 'picture' in his mind of what the structures are.

"Well, I'm thinking of formal in my head. I'm thinking of a TAFE type thing. That's what I'm thinking of there. So if it was like a Relationship Australia type one that's okay too. I need a picture of what a formal and informal one is. But I guess I'm looking at something that can be fluid and meet my needs."

Books and book clubs

Men are stereotypically portrayed as not being avid readers when issues of the family or improving their relationships are concerned. However, Bob has valued gaining knowledge

and changed awareness through reading. Bob first indicates that discussing books with other men in a group setting would be of benefit, and then as he discusses the topic, sees value in both genders discussing such material. In this way knowledge is shared and is more socially enjoyable.

"And the other sort of support - I've just finished reading 'Male Mateship and Myths' by Don Edgar. So he talks about the role of men in modern society and how that's changed and how our whole notion of marriage is a negotiated partnership ...so that was really interesting. And I guess even reading things like that can be useful for certain types of guys that are into that sort of stuff. And I am. And it reminds you of what's happening in the world and gets the grey matter thinking about .. okay it's not how I perceive things about how it was, and the world is different. And it's not that traditional family how I've painted it. To set up negotiation is a big part of the deal . So it's things like that that remind you of what you need to do. So for me perhaps the ideal support would be someone to discuss things with, to bounce stuff off, 'cos having a book on your own is no good, so for me it's maybe going through something like that and bouncing that off mates. Or doing something like that in a network of blokes that are discussing it. Or it could even be males and females. I don't know. For me it doesn't have to be a male discussing it."

(Like couples discussing it?)

"Yeah, it can be couples. Or it might just like be a mixed gender. So, it might be one person from a couple and another person from another couple." "I'm very comfortable sharing a lot of things with women. I guess there's some things, you know that I think, like sexual matters, I'd talk with maybe blokes about. But anything else I'm pretty okay. I've got more female friends than males."

As Bob appears to value relational qualities, this comment may indicate that he unconsciously sees relational qualities in women that meet these needs whereas other men may not be as relationally inclined. There is however a need for male communication on deep and sensitive issues.

Bob was then asked where he thought men go for help with family issues

Human Service agencies

"Well, there are times where I've wondered that myself. And I guess I know of the places you can go to. You'd go to Relationships Australia. I know they've had some courses on, and things like that. I remember seeing them advertised a year or so ago. That's the first place I'd think of, and then I guess there's possibly an array of other supports. Other connections. Like men's health groups. So, I'd find out either through Family & Children's Services or probably RA or something like that. That's where I would go to find out."

"I've seen them in the newspaper. I'm aware of those types of services."

Bob appears to know what supports are available and where to access them if required. What does he consider would prevent him, or men in general from seeking help?

Lack of anonymity in rural communities

Rural and regional populations experience different issues than city populations when accessing services. Bob highlights what prevents him from accessing services: the issue of anonymity in a small community.

"There's times when I've felt like, oh shit I wouldn't mind talking to someone - it might be good to do something like that. I haven't been quite game enough to sort it out. Maybe it wasn't a big enough issue. But also...there's a little bit like...for me that would be really different if I lived in "name of capital city". But here, there's this little town like "name of Bob's town". So there's this mixed bag about where to go. It's a nice size town but it's still a little bit close."

Male ego

Another perception of Bob's that he believes would prevent him and other men in general from seeking help is male pride. There appears to be a large step cognitively between recognising one is not coping, and then admitting that oneself is not sufficient to meet the need, and therefore needing outside help.

"I think a lot of it is perhaps just having to admit you need it. That's part of it. That's the first part."

(Why is that though?)

"Well I don't know. I'm not sure. Like I can admit sometimes when I'm having big issues. Do that quite easily. Perhaps to take it up to the next stage and say that I need some formal help from somewhere else is a different matter. That's just part of that. The other part might be just be, you know the small town thing, other people know... You don't really want them to know ???So I don't mind if I tell friends, but I don't want Joe Blow down the street to know. So maybe that's part of it. Maybe that's the stigma that it sits with. I mean that would sit with me a bit and would probably sit with other men too."

Bob discusses that seeking supports concerning relationships is personal and private. The combination of living in a 'close' community and male pride are preventing him and other men from more willingly seeking support.

Perceived value

Pragmatically, seeking support when needed is a financial consideration. Bob considers balancing the costs of not seeking help versus seeking help. Getting value from counselling is also important and largely dependent on individual personalities and abilities. The 'trial and error' process that therefore can deter men from making the first step. The perception that counsellors tend to 'side with wives' may be either that women are putting more effort into

relationships, or be due to the predominance of female counsellors, such that men feel outnumbered and misunderstood. These are normal considerations for men and their partners when seeking help.

"The other thing would be how much money. If you're under financial difficulty."

"If it's a save or break the marriage, then you don't mind so much, but if it's not, do you do it or do you say, well shit I need some counselling honey, now I know you think we're okay but I don't and I'm, you know, going to spend '400' to work it out. Now that raises other issues that you may not want to deal with as well. So there's a range of things like that."

"Where's the guideline between over reacting and getting the balance?"

Counsellor's siding with wives

"But I'm also thinking of a guy I knew who, um, who had a pretty nasty sort of break-up with his partner, and went and saw a counsellor a couple of times. And it's just common cos I've had other friends who've said ...there not bloody helping me. I'm not getting the help I need. And where that comes to, cos I know counsellors can be quite good, it's about what sort of counsellor you get. And certainly the impression of some blokes, (is that) the counsellor's basically siding with their wives. So they very much had that impression. And I think a lot of blokes would hear those types of stories as well. So I guess wanting to know 'will I go there or not, and who's really going to listen to me' is going to shape the outcome."

"It's a trial and error thing, absolutely I would say."

Getting answers versus doing the hard work themselves

Men appear to either want to give answers or get them quickly. Relationship counselling to Bob is more a process of putting in effort together to achieve self-awareness.

"I think that's a difficulty for guys to work through and also I suspect, and I'm generalising, but I think guys generally try to pick an outcome like that problem solving thing when your partner has to talk - yeah this is it, I'm not the bloody answer. I'm just talking in general here about other blokes whereas I'm a bit happier to go through the process of working that out."

Bob's relationships are very important to him. Although some men are not willing to put in some hard work at resolving issues, Bob is 'happy to go through the process'. This is because he considers his relationship above his image or what others think of his masculinity.

"Yeah, I don't care. Like I don't really have a lot of big macho image stuff to worry about... what other blokes might think...So obviously what I need to do is to make my relationship better."

Bob has accessed supports when required as he values his family relationships above other's perceptions and expectations of him. He values informal supports such as male peers and groups where information can be shared. In a small community however, lack of anonymity and the stigma associated with needing help in the private arena of relationships goes against male ego. For men the practical 'value for money' equation must be positive before services are utilised.

Summary of "Bob"

Bob is a man who was keen to discuss his family relationships and his part in them. While his partner appears proactive in initiating family dynamics, Bob has clearly invested in being a

father and as a partner relationally. He is 'being present' by spending time and listening as well as fulfilling the traditional role of breadwinner.

Bob described the family like Andy in relational terms and also structurally. The conceptual framework he uses for the family is a strong bond between members where there is a balance between 'space' for self and the other and putting collective needs above individual ones. Bob considers the quality of the relationships as important.

His ideal relationship is one that overcomes barriers and this is achieved by moving together. His idea of a good relationship is one that realistically manages and is 'ok' rather than something idealistic or near perfect. A main factor that shaped Bob's descriptions and framework was, similar to Andy, the experience of living in a migrant family. The experience of travel opened up reconnection with extended family, however this and the absence of male role models brought a sense of not being totally able to be an Aussie' role model for his son.

Bob believes that informal supports are best suited to help men achieve good relationships such as male peers and information sharing groups. Men are pragmatic when thinking of utilising supports. Supports must be cost effective, have clear value. Shopping around by trial and error will result in men coping by their own problem solving methods.

Participant C - "Colin"

Colin is a 52 year old 'blue-collar' worker who achieved schooling to year 10. He immigrated with his parents from a northern European country at the age of 15 to settle locally. He had moved from the area 6 years later at the age of 21 and returned at the age of 35. He is married, is the father of two adult children, and has been in his present relationship for 31 years. Both of Colin's parents live locally.

Colin was the third man interviewed, and like Bob, works during the day. The interview was therefore conducted in the evening in Colin's home over a coffee while sitting at the dining room table.

How Colin defines the concept of family

The family has symbolic and practical meaning for everyone. Colin's concept of family was related to both the quality of the relationships and structure. Members involving each other in common activities and doing things together fostered being close. Like Bob Colin's immediate family came to mind first, then his extended one.

Togetherness

"I suppose....our family. We've always been a close family. We've always done things together. Right from when the kids were young, we always involved them in things we've done. If we went somewhere, they always went with us. And even up to the late stages when they were in their teens, and even now if we go somewhere, they enjoy coming with us"

Extended family support

The effect of fewer family members can alter roles. Like Alan and Bob, with the disconnection from extended family due to migration, the structure of Colin's family is now smaller. With less family here, his parents have a more intensive support role.

"I suppose here in Australia our family's quite small, whereas in "name of country" it was quite large. Our family's made up of my mum and dad, my brother, his wife, which we don't have a lot to do with, but they're there. Whenever there was a problem and we need help or whatever, they're there and we're there for them. And ourselves. "wife's name", myself and the 2 kids."

"Extended family. Oh, yes definitely. The grandparents if you like, my mum and dad are definitely a part of it. And "wife's name's" mum and dad when they were alive and when the kids were young, the kids spent a lot of time with their grandparents."

Family different from friends

Even though close friends have important value in reconnecting and extending Colin's social network, the concept of family for him has deeper connection and symbolism than that of friends.

"No I'd say family would be family. Yeah, friends are friends. I mean you've got good friends and you've got family, and there is a difference I think, yeah."

The most significant experiences for Colin growing up

While Colin is conscious of important aspects of the family for him now, there was no thought of how important it was as he was growing up. Like Andy, the value of family is often taken for granted in childhood and appreciated later on reflection. Although not consciously thinking of family when young, on reflection the perception of family when growing up is similar to the present.

Geographical closeness fosters relational closeness

"Not really, no. I didn't think anything of family I suppose when I was growing up. But I grew up on a farm, and I had a lot of auntie's and uncles around. And where we lived on the farm, basically nearly every day, or pretty much every other day, somebody would be visiting us, whether it was my family, close friends, and we'd go visit aunties. Of course, coming from "name of country", you're not spread out as much, you're very close and there was always a lot of involvement with family."

The effect of migration

Like Alan and Bob, Colin's disconnection from extended family due to immigrating shaped his concept of family structure. The effect on Colin due to migration was significant. It represented isolation and undelivered hopes.

"We don't have as many relatives out here. I was 15 when we came out to Australia, and the biggest thing I found when I got here was we had nobody. We had ourselves and that was it. And you've really got to experience that to... It never come into...you know, oh yeah, let's go out to Australia, it's gonna be great. And then we arrived here and yeah, it's us."

Reconnection

The loss of family connection appears to have been replaced by others. Friends and a sense of community gradually replaced the disconnection of the extended family.

"Cause, now it's different. We know a lot of people. but when you first arrive you don't know anybody. I mean we were well known in the little town. We'd walk downtown 'hello, hello' and you'd go into shops and people would know you whereas here, there was nothing."

While Colin had just related something of life growing up on the farm surrounded by extended family, and the effect of emigrating, he could not readily and consciously name what was significant to him that shaped his concept of family when asked.

"No, no. Nothing at all I think."

The intrinsic power of culture and socialisation may be apparent. Alternatively, Colin may have simply taken for granted what has been his experience without the need for reflection. In

later discussion however, Colin compared experiences from his upbringing with issues of importance to him today concerning societal changes in parenting.

Explicit versus implicit learning

"In some families I see, it's the way that people are saying it's the way you should bring up your kids. People now are telling people how they should bring their kids up. This is how you should do it, and that's how you should do it. Whereas back when our kids...nobody said anything, you just done it."

Education

While Colin received his ideas of family from his parents, does he believe that people rely too much today on other sources like education?

"In fact, well today yes. Like books and going to little classes and this is how you do it. Whereas I suppose I learnt from my family. As people today rely too much on um. Yeah what people say and maybe books, you know like this is how you should bring kids up."

Societal change in raising families

Colin is not sure why this change in society has occurred, but he perceives that being told how to parent is not as good as being left to do things your own way. As he discusses the issue, he suggests that the change is a lack of discipline.

"Um. I don't know. But I don't think it's a good change to be perfectly honest."

"And I can't see how people can go to uni come out with a degree and then go and tell people how they should bring up their family when they're not married themselves and haven't got any kids."

Discipline

"And they say you shouldn't smack your kids. You shouldn't do this. You know if you go to the shops now and the kid's misbehaving and you give em a smack, you can get reported. I myself wasn't smacked but it was just the voice, my father just had to say something and that was enough. We always had a bit of a smack off my mother. I got the cane in school, not a lot. I honestly don't think that hurts people. I think discipline is quite important. And the trouble with things today is that the kids have no respect for their elders. And there's no discipline. You look at most of the people in my age group or even back in getting close to your age group was brought up with discipline. There was no problem with that. The problem is now with the young kids talking back..."

Pluralistic Society

With no one guiding 'lifestyle' in society, the multitude of different values in society to Colin results in family dysfunction.

"There's a lot of different lifestyles people believe in. You know you bring your kids up letting them do whatever they want. There's different ways now, yeah."

(And it might be confusing?)

"Mmm, yeah. You only need to go down the shops now and find kids running riot, they run through the toy department ...calling out, and you see the mums don't do anything about it."

The main experiences for Colin that shaped his idea of how to be as a husband and father were learnt unconsciously within his extended family of origin, and after migration within his smaller family in Australia. According to Colin, our pluralistic society has resulted in a lack of discipline within families with detrimental effect on both children and parental rights. Colin observes that his experience of family is vastly different to family norms today and believes the change in society is not positive.

Role models that helped shape Colin's ability to be a husband and father

The effect of few extended family members can result in a dearth of significant others who act as role models. For Colin, his father and mother were his main role models who shaped how he is supposed to be as a husband and father. As was Alan's experience, the influence of Colin's father shapes him, however he does not reflect his father's character. Colin valued his father's opinion but also valued breaking free and making his own decisions.

Parents

"Well I suppose it would have to be my mum and dad I suppose. My father I suppose is quite a strong person and has got quite definite ways, if he thinks that's the right way to do it, I mean that's the right way to do it. He'll ask your opinion, I mean if he thinks that's the right way, he won't change anyway. And my mother's always been, in the home. And she's always there for you I suppose whenever we come home. I mean we go there now, and my mother's a home person - she likes people going to visit her but she doesn't do a lot of visiting herself. And living on a farm you do things together I suppose. I mean everything we done together, we worked together, and if we went anywhere we always went together."

Father

"Oh, well he's definitely been the stronger one, the main one I'd say yeah. But I wouldn't say I'm like him. I would be a totally different father to what he was, so I would say that he was, and he still is, someone that was always givin' you advice. This is why we should do it, that's how you should do it, you know."

"I'd always ask his opinion. Yeah and because I shifted away, I think was the best thing because it allowed me to make my own decisions. He was the one that 'd always give the advice if you like, or we

were not sure we would ask and he'd say now this is the way you do it, or whatever. Now with my kids, I try and let them make their own decisions, I don't try and push my ideas onto them you know you should buy this car not that car... or whatever."

In reflecting back in time, Colin's father was a strong role model. Although there were differences, Colin's personality was shaped by him.

"Well, exactly. That I suppose because I was brought up that way, ...and I look back now and a lot of things when I was 15 or so I would have done diff...or I wanted to do this or I wanted to do that he would've talked me out of. He was always very cautious, and safe when money goes, and he still is, and you know. And now when I look back at the young kids today, they chuck a knapsack on their back and a few thousand dollars and they travel around the world. And not that I would have done that but there's a lot of little things I would have done, probably if he hadn't of discouraged me."

After prompting, Colin agreed that this was an issue of needing more 'space.' Whereas Bob was given independence, Colin found it when he left home.

Space and independence

"Yeah, I suppose because we were brought up on the farm, over there in a close-knit community we valued, you know if he said, "no that's not the right thing to do, that's the right thing to do" well fair enough that's what we'd do. And as I got older and when I moved away, and starting to make your own decision, then all of a sudden I found, yeah, well, if he says to do it that way but I want to do it that way, I think my way is better and I would do it so as time went on..."

Generativity

Generativity is passing on the social skills and values to the next generation. What Colin missed out on from his models, he modelled himself to his own children.

"Yeah. Whereas if I forced them to do it that way, they'd never've learnt, that's the way I look at it. Its' better for them to make a mistake when they're young, and they learn from that mistake. Whereas if they get older and all of a sudden you're too scared to make a decision, without asking for advice. That's the way I try to bring them up, for them to make their own decisions, And I think they've learnt a lot better that way."

Modelling of family norms

Role models are not only significant people. Significant family behavioural norms are also learnt and modelled. Families have their own characteristic way of acting, which to outsiders seems strange or harsh. Colin's family have their own way of resolving issues, which to others may appear as conflict.

"Yeah, it didn't cause any conflict. I suppose it was a family...we have always argued, but not serious."

"But that's the way we are. People outside would look and say 'aw what's going on there but there would be nothing in it at all. But I suppose he used to be quite strong in trying to push his viewpoint, in trying to get us to go a certain way."

Where else Colin got his definitions of how to be a man, husband and father.

Colin was asked, as was the other participants, where he thought he and men generally get their definitions of manhood, and what defines them as husbands and fathers. After rephrasing the questions, Colin was unsure. The socialising forces on, and in, the family can be powerfully and subtly implicit

"Where do they...I wouldn't have a clue. No I couldn't answer that."

"We just did it. It was just natural. I mean there was never any thought "I never spent any time with *"name of son"* last week so I'll spend all with him on Saturday. There was never anything like that. We were always there and the kids always had their friends around."

In close families, functioning is not questioned as it might be in dysfunctional families. To Colin, there were no other apparent ways in which he learnt how to be a husband or father. There was never any conscious decision to do things a certain way. It was 'natural.'

What Colin considers to be a good family

The term 'good' has different meanings for individuals. For some it is an ideal to aim at, to others a moral value, and to others a realistically achievable quality. For Colin, good has the same meaning as his concept of family; closeness and togetherness doing natural' familiar activities with each other like playing games and reading bedtime stories. Colin considers this important for building relationship. But again, it is something one just does without thinking. A good family relationship then doesn't have to do special activities.

Togetherness

"A good family? A family that does things together I suppose. That includes the kids in what they're doing." "And the kids get used to going shopping or going out for the weekend, around the place to see different things. Doing things together I think is very important. And spending time with the kids playing with them just doing natural things. If you're home, um you know they're outside kicking a ball, you go out and kick it with them."

Relationship building

"Well, it's just...they get to know you and you getting to know them, I suppose. It's just building a relationship I suppose. I've never really thought of it that way but it just come naturally. I've just done what I think." "Yeah. Reading stories at night."

A good family is the antithesis of a 'bad' one. To Colin, a 'bad' family is one where there is no close relationship, where members are doing their own thing and there is no care or parental control. This is dysfunctional.

"...Well, a bad family is the absolute opposite where the parents let their kids do what they want. Don't know where they are at night. Once they get into, or not even teenagers, kids are roaming the streets and the parents are down the pub."

Colin has talked almost totally about his role as a parent. Is Colin's perception of a husband-wife relationship that is not a good relationship, similar to that above? While Colin agrees, his answer is more aligned to the effect on the children than with his wife.

"Yeah. Um, a divorced family. I wouldn't think that would be good for kids. Like the parents split up and then you'd find in a lot of cases where the mother has got another relationship and the father has got another relationship and there's other kids involved. Yeah, I suppose bad family relationship would be that. Some do survive through that ok, but I think for the kids it would be ahhh, long lasting."

Colin's ideals for his family relationships

Men's expectations of what is appropriate in their relationships influences their roles and parts they play by shaping how they think, feel and act about their functioning. There appears to be a strong match between Colin's ideal for his relationship as a husband and father and his current actual functioning. What he aspires to is what he is currently doing. His ideal

therefore appears to come from a realistic assessment of what he is capable of doing. As he was doing the best he could, there was no thought of goals.

What is

"My ideal? What I'm doing now. I don't think I could've done anything better than what I've already done. If I look back now at how I brought my kids up, I couldn't have done it any different."

"Yeah. And really I didn't aspire or set any goals, it just come natural. We just done it. Just done what come natural, if you like."

Modelling: love in action

Children are observant and model parental behaviour. It is important to Colin that love is seen. An important ideal for him is one where parents are affectionate to each other so that children observe positive behaviours.

"I think too it's very important that the mother and father show love and affection to each other, and that's very important for the kids to see, and between a good family and a bad family, so the parents are always arguing and fighting or whatever."

"Yeah, I think if the parents have got a good relationship, your kids will go forward and if the parents haven't got a good relationship, your kids tend to be dragged down and grow up that way."

Colin's symbolism is that open displays of love where children will move 'ahead' define a good family, whereas obvious discord and conflict that 'drag' them down define a 'bad' one.

In practice, what Colin considers is necessary in order to achieve his ideal of a good husband and father

What has this involved for Colin in practical terms to make sure that his ideal happens?

Colin's answer relates to the differences in roles between his wife and himself. While most roles are shared, his role as father involves more play and activities with the children than his wife.

Doing activities together

"Yeah, yeah, enjoy doing things together." "I went out and played, run around with them a bit more, and football and things like that. And played cricket with them a bit more."

"Activity style things, yeah. And I'd be out digging in the garden, or out working in the shed and they'd be around me and they'd be helping me to build things and building the house and garage." "More practical things with me I'd say, yeah."

Patience

Colin believes that inner qualities such as patience are important for him in achieving his ideal.

"Yeah, things like patience, I suppose. You know going out there and if you got the kids helping you, as you know you've got to be very patient with them and they are breaking their neck to help you. And they're more of a hindrance than help but...It'd have to be patience wouldn't it?"

"No. Patience. Take a bit of time and try and teach them how to do it, whatever you're doing ...and try and show 'em the right way."

Colin is talking about his role as a father. After prompting, he also believes that the same quality of patience is required by each person in the husband and wife relationship.

"Yeah. Both ways..."

Mutual decision-making

Colin's relationship with his wife appeared egalitarian. He considered that he had no particular responsibilities as a husband that were solely his. Responsibilities were mutually agreed and discussed.

"No. Well we've always worked fairly together. And decisions have been made together. I mean I don't go along and say, you know, this is what we would do. It's always discussed between the two of us."

"Yeah, we've both done things what we both agree on."

"..everything was fairly much mutual."

Traditional unspoken roles: work, domestic duties

While some roles are negotiated between husband and wife, others that are the social norm are taken for granted and quietly assumed. When questioned about work, Colin realised traditional roles enacted were not discussed between Colin and his wife.

Work

"We both work now, but um , that's another important thing I suppose. When the kids were growing up, "name of wife" didn't work. When the kids came home from school, she was there."

(Was that discussed?)

"Ah, no. Once the kids went to school, she thought about trying to get a job, but she needed something so that she was always home when the kids got home. Yeah, the kids were in high school when she got a part time job then. And she was home then around the time they got home."

Shared domestic roles.

"Shared, well. I suppose Loraine basically looks after the house, inside. Organising the shopping and cooking and that. And I would organise the outside. Well the garden would be sort of jointly. But other things, maintenance, I suppose different things like that, I'd have that sort of role. ... Actually since she has been working I've always done a lot inside as well, like doing the dishes. Yeah, well she'll come home and she'll cook the meal, and after the meal she'll sit down and watch the TV, and I'll come and wash the dishes. And on the weekend, she does the washing, and I'll quite regularly do the vacuuming of the house. And other things around."

Adjusting to change

The change in roles between generations affected Colin's relationship due to different expectations between his wife and himself. Similar to Bob, Colin's wife was the proactive change agent.

"No. You see, we were on a farm and it was a 7-day a week job, and my mother done everything in the house. Plus she done a fair bit outside. She'd come down and help us milk and different times when we were busy. But everything in the house, she done the cooking, the washing up, everything. Whereas my father, I suppose, and us as kids didn't have to lift a finger. She done everything for us."

"Yeah, yeah. Big change, yeah. And I suppose that was the hardest thing when we first got married. So I was used to not doing anything and sitting down. And then when we got married I was expected to help and do things."

"Well I suppose because "*name of wife*" wasn't going to walk around and tend to me hand and foot. She said, "I need a hand here", or, "can you help me with this?" or, "can you help me with that?"
"Different generations yeah."

While Colin's role expectation derived subconsciously from his parent's roles, he perceived that the adjustment and requirement for him to change was due to his wife's expectations and needs.

What supports Colin considers men need most today in order to achieve good relationships

As Colin stated earlier, his ideal relationship was very much his lived experience. If an individual does not experience need, and have no need to search out support, then they may not be aware of supports, even on behalf of friends. As a consequence, Colin could not think of any supports men needed most today in order to successfully achieve their responsibilities as a father or husband.

"Ahh, no I don't because I've never needed that sort of help. And I wouldn't know what would be available or what...because it came, sort of, we just done what we done without thinking about it, if you like."

"Asked for help? No, never."

"If I had a problem and I had to go somewhere, I really wouldn't know where to go. I know there's help groups and support groups, and well, off the top of my head I wouldn't, but I'm sure with either looking in the phone book or somewhere I would find, or asking around I would find."

Friends and family

After some discussion, Colin became aware of existing supports around him if needed.

With a small issue, he would confide in friends and family. Conscientisation again!

"Well, I'd probably talk to some friends, or maybe someone in the family."

"Yeah, yeah. I think I would do that before going to a stranger."

As a final comment, the issue of parental discipline and shaping values in children were of again mentioned as of importance to Colin. He stated that;

"If you haven't taught you kids discipline and respect by the age of five, it's too late!"

Summary of "Colin"

Colin is a 'family man'. His concept of family has been shaped by early experiences on the farm in close proximity to extended family. Family to him is the close relationships fostered by time spent doing activities together. While friends helped reconnect him socially after the sense of loss at migrating, friends don't have the close bonds that family do. Family is family!

While influenced by his father, his generativity ensures he gives social skills and qualities that he missed out on. Colin's sense of how to be as a father and husband comes 'naturally'. He does not think how to act, in these roles. A good family has closeness and does natural, usual activities to ring relational togetherness. As his actions have come naturally, he has been doing what he considers a good father and husband should. His ideal family relationship is therefore what he already has. It consists of doing things together, patience, mutual husband-wife decision making, and shared roles. Colin interestingly though, talks more about his role as a father which appears more defined than his role as a husband.

The difference between his parents roles and his expectations were a "big change". Like Bob, Colin's actual functioning has been more influenced by his wife's expectations than his own. As Colin is enacting close to his ideal of a good relationship, he has not had need of supports. With this lack of need, he was at first unaware of what supports exist should the need arise. Friends however would be called on if he ever required help with relationships. With society today having a multitude of values and declining standards, especially discipline, the parent's ability to cope is undermined. Formally educating parents to parent is not a valid solution.

Participant D - "David"

David is 57 years old and was born in Australia. He achieved a postgraduate Masters qualification and has resided in the area for 5 years. David is separated from his partner, having been in the relationship for 12 years. He was in mid-life when he became a father, and though living separately from his ex-partner, has shared responsibility with her for their two primary age children.

How David defines the concept of family

The concept of family has different meaning for everyone. According to David, his concept of family was distinctive and included both structural and relational descriptions. As with Andy, Bob and Colin, extended family members are included.

"So very idiosyncratic sort of view really. Is people that I'm related to directly within 1 or 2 degrees as they say, um and that's related genetically to. And a person that I'm maybe in a relationship at a given time sort of thing. A partner, whatever. That's somebody either married to or if not married then in a relationship with. So there's both the genetic and there's the defacto, to use a term I don't like."

"I mean we talk about getting the family together for Christmas, I don't mean only me and my 2 children for example. It involves my father and when my mother was alive her as well, my brothers and sisters, their kids so you've got...that's the family in my context."

To David, many relational types exist. The relationship between members was more important than the structure.

"It is, yep. And I'd have to say that I don't believe a family necessarily has to live in the 1 residence. You get families like in Aboriginal Australia where kids live with their grandparents for most of the year, and only get to see their parents occasionally for some special reason...so huge number of types of family, each as good as the other, I reckon."

Changed perception over time

Perceptions are shaped by experiences and what we make of those experiences cognitively and affectively. Unlike Colin, whose concept of family was taken for granted while growing up, David's concept of family changed over time due to educational study that included family types, and two relationship breakdowns. The effect of the experiences changed his expectations of what a family is.

Study

"I suppose I'd also have to say that my views of family have changed over time... I'm influenced a lot by my anthropological studies of worldwide cultures.. And of course family there, you see all different sorts of patterns of families. Um so in a worldwide context I'd have to say I think a family is 2 or more people who are either genetically related to each other or are in an intimate relationship with each other. So I would include in that a couple, for example, I think can be a family in 1 sense. ...They are in an intimate relationship... And when I said 2 or more, they could be same sex couple, or

opposite sex or gender couple. You can have people who have fostered children so the kids are not related to the, quote, parents, unquote.

Relationship breakdowns

"Yeah, well I grew up with the view that ah family was mum, dad or husband and wife, um, married legally, and their children. And other close relatives at times, well they were always seen to be the family but they only get together now and then, sort of thing. But, I've been married twice, and in my first marriage, that was the concept in marriage, you know the one partner, the one spouse for life. So was very much my view and ideal...."

"Yeah. And as years went by and that marriage broke down, irremediably, I realised either I was going to be celibate then or enter another. I see the statistics recently that only 28% of Australia's children are living with both their parents." "a normal nuclear family situation with both their mother and the father in the house. So it means that 3 quarters of Australia's children are in some other form of family. And so that's just blown apart the theory that the nuclear family is the predominant or most common model of Australia's families.."

The most significant experiences for David growing up

The family provides a context where values are shaped and significant events can be experienced. The most significant and important events for David growing up in relation to the family were both positive and negative ones. Positive events were a feeling of being loved, nurtured and helped to develop. This is contrasted in the same family with conflict.

"Yeah, importance has both for me. Positive ones were very loving, er, a feeling of being loved, nurtured, cared for, um helped to develop etc was my experience as a child, in a family situation... It was my genetic mother and father who were legally married with 4 of their children, plus quite a few

other children from time to time who were fostered within the family as well. So quite a big family. Yeah so that was among my feelings."

"Some of the important things within the family that were somewhat negative were quite high levels of arguments and bordering on, ..yeah, quite severe arguments between my parents, and threats to separate and that sort of thing which I'd have to say we as children on hearing loud arguments and these threats from time to time, it was mainly in my teenage years, late primary and teenage years, and we were quite fearful of what might happen if mum and dad split. They didn't as it turned out and the level of arguments dropped off as they grew older so that was a fearful, very important to me that I had this ideal of not having a family in which arguments and high levels of conflict, bordering on the physical sometimes and so on would , yeah, I didn't want my children if I ever had them, and I now have 2, to live in a home where there's very high levels of ongoing conflict."

David's perception was that "most kids" have both positive and negative experiences of family as he did. However, while David remembered both positive experiences, such as love, nurture and care, as well as negative ones, such as fear due to arguments, in hindsight he relates the negative events as being significant to his ideal of family.

Role models that helped shape David's ability to be a husband and father

David is aware of role models that have helped him learn through life how he is supposed to be as a father and partner. Like Alan, Bob and Colin, David's father is mentioned as a key role model. David's model was of good character, integrity and gave him freedom, or 'space' just as Alan and Bob needed. His admiration and respect for his father was such that David wanted to be like him.

Father - integrity, honesty

"Well I've got a dad who I admire a great deal, and I've deliberately modelled myself a lot on my dad, from teenage years. He's a good man and has got lots of really good qualities and I want to develop those sort of qualities and minimise others that , er and so on. He's a man of a lot of integrity and good conscience and all that sort of thing, so I respect him a lot. So that's helped me."

Parents - freedom

"They left me fairly free to develop and I appreciated that and I felt that was good modelling. Now as a partner, I've somehow developed,...even though my parents had reasonably traditional roles, mum did most of the house stuff, shopping catering, you know organised cleaning the house and that sort of thing, dad was the breadwinner... Even though they had those roles I saw that times were changing and that men needed to participate more equally with women in the roles. And so for quite a bit of my adult life, I've ah, in relationships I have tried to pull my, well do what I thought was a reasonable share in negotiation with a partner."

Role change by negotiation

Though raised in a traditional nuclear family, David recognised societal changes and the impact on family roles. Perhaps the freedom David's parents gave him helped him adjust to the societal changes rather than struggling with maintaining traditional roles. By negotiating with his partner, roles are transferable and flexible depending on the context.

"Sharing yeah. There's been 1 or 2 times in life where in negotiation with a partner or wife, it has seemed better that we fall into more traditional roles, me doing physical work, hard because I was better at it, and my body was better and so on. And she doing more of the house type stuff. But I'd have to say that most of my life has been with...more equally shared. And particularly now, when I'm equally sharing the care of my 2 children with their mother, legally as well as practically, you know.

So I do all the care of the children, all the house stuff, cooking, catering, school stuff, friend's stuff, sport everything. I mean full responsibility of the children for 3 days 1 week, 4 days the next."

The 'good' qualities David saw in his father inspired him to model his own life on his father. This did not result in David modelling his father's traditional roles however. Societal changes, the freedom given by parents, his partners' views influenced them and ensured adjustments to roles depending on the context.

Where else David got his definitions of how to be a man, husband and father

As well as experiences and role models, where else did David learn how he is supposed to act? The greatest impact on David's functioning as a father appears to have been from other men sharing their regrets, and often with great emotion. Both the content and nature of this communication has influenced David's functioning. The regrets came from being too busy with work, study and other 'necessities'.

Other men's regrets

"By my study, talking to friends, and all that sort of thing. I'd have to say one of the biggest things as far as men's stuff that's influenced me in my life is most of my friends saying in middle age that the thing they regret, most of my male friends saying, often quite emotionally and one or two with almost tears in their eyes that the thing they regret most of all in their lives, and it seemed to be a common thread among many men that I have known, ...is not having been involved with their children while their children were young. And they lost contact with their kids to a certain extent."

"They were too busy with work, travel, study, sport... Those sort of things. Particularly work but also when you also add on recreation, study, you know locking themselves away at night, or being up at uni or whatever. Those sort of things, you know. And the ambition of getting ahead just took them away, they were just absent fathers a lot of the time and they really regretted it. And I thought, well if I get a chance to have children, which I hoped I would, and now have, I would make sure I...".

"So I vowed, really. Like in a sense, a bit analogous to me modelling some of myself on my father, a deliberate quite conscious thing."

Taking on one of his father's quality traits, determination, helps David avoid the trap other men have fallen into. This 'conscious thing' that he admired had fostered the quality of their relationship. This shapes David's determination to be significantly involved with his children. Compared with Colin who valued quantity of time as his means of quality attachment to his children, David aims to model a quality modelled by his father for the same ends.

Modelling to avoid other's mistakes

"But why I was saying it was analogous, it's a case of vowing to do or be something and in this case I could see that a lot of men were quite deeply troubled by their distance from their children. They missed out on their children's childhood and adolescence and were having trouble having a close enough relationship compared with the children's mother in each case, to have a close enough relationship with their kids in the kids growing up and adulthood. And so I vowed that if I had kids I would be fairly, or very significantly involved in their life from conception birth onwards."

Such was the importance of avoiding other's regrets that David achieved this through changing lifestyles and enacting non-traditional roles. In fact he saw a conflict between his idea of parenting and working full time as was his role."

"And so I gave up fulltime work when my son was born um, and only went back to full-time work during, what do you call it, accouchement leave, whatever. The second child, I went back for a couple of years just to give their mum time to be with them, breastfeeding them, late pregnancy and breastfeeding them. So fulltime work for me was...(of second importance to..)

"That's right. And in fact I saw almost a conflict between full-time work and good parenting. I was fortunate to be able to do it financially and been there done that with career and all that sort of thing so I'm a bit exceptional in that sense perhaps."

Significant men

David perceived that men generally, as well as him, get their definitions of manhood and what is supposed to be for a man from significant men in their life. The realisation of the contrast between

the traditional roles observed in a farmer and his upbringing with his current, more egalitarian role results in an awareness of how the transition may have resulted. Through other men, David observes what works and doesn't work in their relationships.

"Well, I suppose, from significant men in your life I guess. And it doesn't always have to be only your father. As I say I've got a lot of my qualities, I've deliberately cultivated certain qualities in my life from my father. Um, men I suppose, other relatives...."

"I can remember one guy , a farmer, I spent a lot of holidays on farm through very late primary through high school and that farmer was very significant. Just sort of seeing how that family operated and what his role in it was and everything. Very traditional role there. So I don't know where I've got, I'd have to think about that where I've got this more equally shared roles and that sort of thing. I think It's partly from anthropological, sociological reading, other reading of books. Talking, talking with people a lot. Talking with people whose relationships have broken down say before my first one, my marriage did and so on, seeing problems."

Women friends

Similar to Bob, David discovers that what women friends have shared regarding what they need in other men, has shaped his own functioning.

"I've had quite a few close women friends over the years, some still got them from almost 40 years ago, and I think what they want in a man has also influenced me. So perhaps when I said, only modelling from men, and learning from men, and that sort of thing, I suddenly realised there is an element to which when you relate to close women friends or partners or whatever and they share all sorts of ideas and aspects of your life and you learn from them what they want in a man. That also. So I suppose it comes from both men and women."

Family

To David, the connection of family is also important to him and his children, and particularly with a sense of loss at a significant part of that connection with one parent deceased.

"The family's very important to me. Both my connection with my parents, one now deceased, mum's now deceased, my brother's and sister's, some of my foster brothers and sisters that still keep in touch, um, my children, very, very important to me and my children."

The value of this connection with family to David is dependability. Family is 'always there'.

"Um, I suppose because family are always there. Friends can come and go. They can, friendships can end. Family doesn't end, even if someone pulls out of a family, because of some sort of dispute or difference, they pull out of a family, it's very unlikely that'll go on for life. They'll be back. Somehow or other some forms of connection will remain. Whereas with some of your close friends, and even partners you may never see them again in your whole life. You may or you may not. You can't be sure, whereas one thing about family is, they'll be there. Even if they're living on the other side of the world, even if, even if you're not as close to one than the other and that sort of thing, close emotionally etc, attachment you know, they're always there. Yeah"

Family symbolises connections stronger than any other relationship and that can't be severed by dispute, geography, depth of attachment. Family are always there for David. In a changing world where parental and spousal roles are in constant flux and family structure is flexible, the symbolic structure of family to David remains firm, secure and unchangeable.

What David considers to be a good family

David relates the concept of good to an ideal structure rather than ideal quality. To him there is no ideal family structure. His perception is that the structure should be flexible and will change over time. Having an ideal then, means he is too focussed and can't be flexible and open to change.

"I actually strongly disbelieve there is an ideal family, even for me. I can see that in my lifetime I could actually have several different sorts of family. Family I grew up in is different than one I'm going to have as a single person before having children, as a single or attached person. But with no children. Then my family when I have children and that can change depending on what relationship I'm in or not in. And possibly when I'm older still than I am now, there could be another form and so on."

"Yeah, I think life for me, life evolves a lot and it's very exciting. And can go off in different directions in your life. And so your family pattern can change significantly, I mean 5 years ago, 6 years ago say, I was married to a woman who, and I had 2 children with her, we were living in the 1 house on an isolated, somewhat isolated farm etc. A year later I'm living in "name of town", solo parent, 2 children half of each week to care for 3 days a week, child free time, In 12 months,.. there's 2, for me 2 different families." "So, yeah I'm quite happy with that."

In contrast, David sees that what wouldn't 'work' well in a family would be dysfunctional behaviours such as high levels of conflict, where children feel instability, unpredictability. The same negative attributes he experienced as a child.

"Work and function are almost synonyms. Dysfunctional ones are almost by definition are not functioning because there are high levels of conflict, unresolved, there's manipulation of children, by one or both parents, the children are not given the love, care, nurturing and feeling, well they feel unstable, they feel that life's very unpredictable for them."

"Things that I said that I appreciated in my growing up and I want my children to have, instead of that if there's conflict, fear, instability, unpredictability, anxiety, I think this can change, a dysfunctional family can actually change into a functional one as the anger and the hurt and all that dissipate, or if the person gets help with a long-term personality thing That can always change. A dysfunctional family at this point in time doesn't mean dysfunction at a time in the future necessarily."

David answered the question in structural terms, and did not consider there was a good or ideal family 'structure.' The changes that relationship breakdowns caused resulted in changed expectations. He has adjusted and is now flexible in his ideas of family functioning. However, 'good' to him may be what he had as a child; love, nurture, and also harmony as opposed to its opposite which is conflict.

David's ideals for his family relationships

Though David considered there was no ideal structure for a good family, he discussed what he considered was good about his own family. Specifically, the good aspects that David liked about his family were described as not structure or geography but quality of attachment. Though David's traditional family was different in structure to his present one, the provision of the same qualities of love, care and nurturing would be given. His ideal rests in the benefit of his children because if it is good for them, he will feel good as well. .

"Well, I suppose it comes back to what I liked about my family, the general things I liked about my family, not the specifics of where we lived or whatever, but this way there's a lot of care and love and nurturing and so on given to my children, the days they're with me, and the other half of the time. she's

an extremely good mum as well I reckon you know, both good parents are no problems. So the kids are getting really devoted and good care, love, and nurturing."

"What's good is that it's good for the children and it's good for me, I'm having a great life, yeah, where are the down sides I ask." "You know you can see I'm a multi model person. Whatever model works well, feels good, that's okay."

In practice, what David considers is necessary in order to achieve his ideal of a good husband and father

David considered that he provided certain qualities and actions to his family as a father and as a partner that were important to the positive functioning of his family. He provided positive parenting to meet his children's needs. This was what Andy also felt was important as he reflected on what he appreciated as a child. David considered emotional support was more important than providing basic necessities. Time and being physically present with his children was a priority, modelling masculine behaviours and ensuring know men can care and manage domestically as well as women.

Positive parenting equals meeting needs: affection and basic

"I suppose that of a positive parent. Giving them the things, the qualities and experiences in life that children need from a parent of nurturing, love, security, or, modelling, you know, how to cope with difficulties, how to make friends and keep friends, those sort of things."

"Somehow you've got to provide them with food, clothing shelter and the where-with-all to go off to school and that sort of thing. A bit of sporting gear so you provide that for them."

Emotional support

"But I think more importantly particularly when I've looked at cultures around the world, the actual style of house or the actual food you give them or the actual clothes they wear is not anywhere near as important as the emotional and relationship side of things for the children. People can be living in abject poverty and yet if they've got the care and love of a family which can be either parent or grandparents or uncles and aunts, or whoever, foster parents adopted parents whatever. As long as they've got that, they're on the way, whereas conversely, kids can have practically everything given to them, but if they lack that love and care and nurturing and stability and whatever and security they can be quite neurotic and their lives are somewhat dysfunctional."

Time

"Yeah, well, say mainly in the emotional type area, I've found that I need to allocate time, uninterrupted time to the children, being available. So when I gave up full time work, I made sure that my part time work is done when the kids are at school. And I'm available to take them to school... bring them home, sit around, have afternoon tea, work out who's playing with who today, that sort of thing...play ball with them or see what they want to do, play a board game or go to the oval. Go to the beach. Just be there with them I think is one of the biggest actions I can do. Another is to link them in with friends, just facilitate their need to play with friends a bit. Talking over things with them when I can see they're not their normal self at the moment.. is there anything that could be done. Etc so, just be there."

Negotiating amicably

Being a separated partner, negotiating for the children's benefit is a practical necessity. For the children to be 'happy with that', both parties must be amicable.

"With their mother? The pattern we have developed is that we really only have a connection now over arrangements for the benefits of the children. We've got, you know, basic agreement there and then we just negotiate little changes that suit any one of the four of us really."

"And I'd have to say that the kids seem relatively happy with that. I think it blurs boundaries and raises false hopes in children if there's an attempt to make a sort of happy family, happy single, happy one family thing. You do that at some risk. It's better the 2 families thing."

Varied experiences

David perceives that as his children's needs are being met, they are better off than in a traditional family.

"Very different sort of life experiences they get from each home and that's great. They've more than doubled their life experience. And I'd say, my children are much er, better developed and much happier because of their frequent contact and immersion in half the life of mum and half the life of dad."
"They've got the best of both worlds."

Domestic management, stability

David considers that rather than modelling to his children roles that are specific to men, it's important for them to observe traditionally feminine roles. He is providing domestic order, stability, nurture as women do.

"Well you could say one of the big things I can give them are things that their mum is also giving them. But they see that a man can run the house, do the washing, do the cooking, do the shopping. Not have chaos. It's not like living in a bachelor pad in...the stereotype of a bachelor pad. They're living in a nice home."

"And they see that dad cuts lunches and dad's here to cuddle you when you've fallen over and cut yourself. Where you see on people's back windscreens 'mum's taxi' well there's dad's taxi too, yeah. so that they're getting lots of signals everyday, many signals that dad's can care and so can mum's. ...also there's the stability that dad is going to be able to cope, you know."

Modelling masculinity

While David provides parenting qualities and carries out functions similar to the perceived role of mothers, he suggests that he does some of these in a different gendered way to how a woman would.

"And for me as a man it's very important that the children are getting, both children a boy and a girl, are getting modelling from the male, the man, and me as their dad equally with what they're getting from their mum."

"I suppose that masculine stuff um that I think children in a nuclear family are getting from a father anyway, albeit often a somewhat absent father, still pick up the masculine stuff, you know the fixing of the taps or banging nails in, or the digging heavy stuff in then garden or. They might see these things with their mum with gardening and so on, but men and women often do gardening a different way. One a bit more brutal and heavy."

"And that's very important that the boy learns and relates to dad as a man, not just watching him, but actually emotionally connecting to him as a man. And we talk boy things about our bodies, about our feelings about things and so on. And similarly, the daughter relates to the father and is picking up masculine stuff which is going to help her in relationships with other men, should she be heterosexual when she grows up. She's got that. But then equally each of them have the connection with the feminine with their mum too. Once again the advantage of sharing the parenting, sharing substantial parenting, not necessarily absolutely equally, but seeing substantial amounts with both."

What supports David considers men need most today in order to achieve good relationships

With his advanced age as a parent, David has experience, financial and social connections for support.

"Now with my children, I haven't actually needed a lot. Because we've been in very fortunate, I suppose financial, psychological, social circumstances that I could just set up home, this is after the marriage finished. ...a lot of experience to parent, good friends around to bounce things off and to make little observations...a very experienced partner who'd been a parent of 3 children. And...would make little observations about parenting. So I was in a very good situation. I don't think I needed much there."

"Now with my extended family, not a lot. They were very understanding about the marriage breakdown and me setting up again, setting up a home with the children. Very supportive of the shared parenting model. Didn't push for me to try to get the kids off their mum most of the time and just make her a bit of a visiting parent."

Friends

As is David's experience, he thought that men generally find supports primarily in friends and then other resources. However friends of both genders were the main support,. Although the strength of the family for David was in his words, 'always there' compared to friends that 'come and go', it is friends that are readily available for actually providing support.

"Well, friends more often 'cos I don't see my extended family more than once every few months probably. Whereas my friends I see every week, you know. So yeah, ah." ""Male and female friends. And I particularly found it very useful for people who are parents, reflecting, 'cos it helps me with the children."

"Yeah. um I think friends, primarily. Family, though...I've got none in this region even, not one relative apart from my children. So friends, family, books, videos, sound tapes, public information first." "But then if they feel a significant need or you can just see there's an aspect that one part of your life is not functioning at all well, then I'd say go and seek help, professional help somehow or another that you feel happy with either govt services or non govt ones or churches or whatever."

Togetherness of a partner and some space apart

For David, as with Alan, and Bob, space for finding oneself was important. David finds the 'space' when not in a relationship a positive experience and a time to re-establish his own identity. Rather than seeking another relationship too hastily, David appears to have a secure knowledge and sense of self.

"The support of a partner I personally find very significant, and when I'm in a relationship with someone, that adds another whole dimension to my life which, in a time when you're solo, say after one relationship breaks down, I find it good to be on your own for a while To re-establish your identity. Instead of in that emotional turmoil and the rebound effect, rebound time and you're not really sure where you're going. You realise later that that was a time of emotional ups and downs and whatever."

(So it's actually having a bit of space?)

"Yeah, a bit of time to yourself. But when you have settled down emotionally, and you can see where you want your life to go then to be in a relationship is a very nice thing. And the partner gives you all sort of supports, emotional, companionship, sexual, tips about parenting, or just bouncing things off things, There's a whole lot that you get. The domestic, just enjoying cooking together and sitting on the veranda and having a glass of wine, or you know, going watching a sunset. There's many things a partner can do for your life that I find very beneficial."

David thought that what would prevent men from getting those supports was male pride and socialised behaviours learned from their family of origin.

Pride

"Probably the well documented (reasons that) men have to be self-sufficient, not cry, not show need of emotional things, not show need of help even much. I don't know whether some feel embarrassment at seeking help. I think some even don't open up much with friends let alone the more distant levels of family and well, some have family very close and near by so some would put maybe family first and then maybe friends. Then resources and then professional help if you want to have those 4 categories..."

Socialised behaviour within family of origin

David perceives that men's reluctance is due to a lack of attachment shown from their fathers who were socialised into stoic behaviours. David refers to male independence, which has been a hallmark of capitalist society, which was reflected structurally in a perceived lack of available supports.

"I think it's upbringing, and probably their absent fathers. Never showed any need to seek help. In those days there wasn't a lot of help available anyway. The society and culture that we grew up in, men were deemed not to need it and we picked those messages up. Um, maybe men were very independent and a lot of men up and off, you know. Yeah."

Did David think that there were any supports that men would appreciate that either didn't exist or were hard to access?

Men's and parenting groups

"I notice in some men that some get benefit from belonging to dads groups that are helping them with parenting sort of things. Or parenting groups where there are men and women, Parents Without Partners and so on. Some get benefit from that where there is an in built help with parenting, ideas for parenting etc. Some get help from men's groups which isn't so much focussed on parenting, just helping them as men, and that's great. I don't know whether it forms a very big percent of the male population belonging go to men's groups. I wouldn't think so."

Education and vigorous advertising

To encourage men to seek help, David saw comprehensive education and advertising as the key.

"And it'll be public education not only through schools, tapes, universities, adult education classes, getting stuff into the media, through advertisements, but also getting into...videos, films, computer stuff, just getting the messages across that if men are in difficult circumstances, they should look at these various avenues to go and seek help, to talk things over with more good friends to talk things over more with the family, to read more, to go and join groups or go and get general help, sorry professional not general."

(Advertising more?)

"Yeah, probably need to push that a lot more for men because it appears from what I've read it appears that women seek help a lot more than men do. Do they need it more or is it just that men need it about as much but are not seeking it as much I don't know."

When the bubble bursts

As a final comment, David explains what happens to a man when his ideal of the family breaks down. To him it is 'the biggest shattering of a man' that results in dysfunctional behaviours 'welling up'. David's answer, as he has found for himself, is to leave the ideal and find a functional family model that suits. Public education by the government and communities to advertise 'all...the supports they can offer' is required to address men's needs prior to the stage of needing (Family Court) lawyers.

"I think we need to advertise more and educate the public more about the um, the ... benefits perhaps rather than goodness, ...of a whole lot of different models of family. They're all okay as long as they function well and produce good results for the children and it feels good for the parent, even in a separated or divorced situation, solo parenting and that sort of thing. And if we get that across, men won't feel as shattered, as I think the biggest shattering of a man is if the nuclear family breaks down. And a lot of men just seem totally bereft, full of violence, anger, hurt, um, you know power stuff, and manipulation. Really some very dysfunctional things seem to well up in a man at the breakdown of that nuclear family... So you're going to have to go into some other different model. Go in a direction that feels good for you and the kids. Then you won't have all this shattering and bereftness and anger and you know, dysfunctional stuff going on. and making lawyers and judges wealthy. You know, I think it is just basically a much bigger public education role supporting groups that are offering things to add, perhaps the govt and the community helping advertise all the work and services they offer, the supports that they can offer."

Summary of "David"

The family has meaning for all of us and different meanings for each. Family to David symbolises connections stronger than any other relationship and that can't be severed by dispute, geography, and depth of attachment. In a changing world where roles are in constant flux, and family structure is flexible, the symbolic structure of family to David remains dependable, secure and unchangeable. This concept of family is shaped by his experiences. He

experienced the affirmation and fear from positive and negative behaviours within his family as he grew up, and was shaped in his conceptual understanding through his study, his relationship breakdowns and the role modelling of his father whose principled character he wishes to emulate.

Due to these experiences, his concept of family has changed over the years. From a nuclear family structure, his concept of family is whatever model ensures a feeling of being loved, nurtured and cared for, and an absence of conflict which had brought fear in his early experience. While David does not consider there is any one 'structure' that defines a good family, these characteristics are his ideal for family relationships.

Other men have influenced his definitions of manhood and family roles. Becoming a father in midlife, he has the advantage of avoiding the greatest regret of other men; the lack of time spent with their children.

David provided positive parenting to meet his children's needs. Like Andy David considered emotional support was more important than providing basic necessities. What this aspect of David's story highlighted for the researcher was his ability to adapt to change, such as a relationship, and 'move on.' Secondly, he has a caring, nurturing desire for his children. These characteristics are often attributed as feminine traits, however, given the opportunity, men like David show that to be a caring, nurturing, loving parent is gender neutral.

Chapter summary

In summary, it appears that each of the four participants have a conceptual framework for their understanding of 'family' that they can name articulately. The symbolic meaning that family has to all four men is positive and has strong relational as well as structural characteristics. While each participant's concept of family was articulated, their specific roles as a husband or partner were not as clear as their role as a father.

Interestingly, three of the four participants are either migrants or, like Bob, have migrant parents. This experience profoundly affected the concept of family for each. A sense of loss was realised by Andy and Bob on 'reconnecting' with extended family while Colin's experience of disappointed expectations on arrival in the new country was felt immediately. This sense of loss was diminished partially through 'marrying' into a partner's extended family.

Participant's fathers were influential role models in shaping definitions of behaviour, personal values and qualities. Modelling however was not always positive. For Colin, some qualities and social norms that were missed out on, became goals for his own modelling to his children. Positive role modelling by fathers, for example by David's father, resulted in a desire to emulate character qualities but not family or domestic roles. Societal changes appear far stronger than role modelling by significant others.

What defined men's goals and ideals for their family relationships was very much what they defined as their significant aspects of family, for example togetherness, coping with change and 'riding' the bumps. For Andy, his faith provided both his goal of a good relationship and the means to achieve it.

The supports each participant considered that men need most in order to achieve a good family relationship appeared to be significantly other men, preferably ones that had similar ideals and could provide positive models. Informal supports such as friends of both genders, and groups that shared knowledge were seen as important to help men. These groups could keep in touch with knowledge and social skills required to maintain good relationships. Important skills were considered to be effective communication, negotiating and discovering partner's strengths.

Chapter five will analyse the results of the study using the theoretical framework outlined in chapter two.

Chapter 5

Analysis and implications

"In fact I saw almost a conflict between full-time work and good parenting"
'David'

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse how the participants understood the concept of family, what their associated 'good' family is and how this understanding shapes their functioning within their family. The chapter will be divided into the following three sections: Analysis of results, implications and recommendations for practice, and, the extent to which the study met the research objectives outlined in Chapter 1

Analysis of results

Introduction

The theoretical framework discussed in Chapter two will be used to guide the analysis of the results. This framework constitutes the three concepts of family as a symbol, masculinity and cognition. The concept of family as a symbol illustrates the significance the family has for men as a structure of meaning as well as for its practical utility for them. This will allow for an analysis of how men construct the family and the value they place on it. The concept of masculinity will be used to analyse how society shapes gender roles and practices. This analysis illustrates how socialisation links men's identity and expectations of their roles within the family. The concept of cognition is used to understand how men think about the family and how their expectations and ideals shape their behaviour. This analysis of behaviour will give a theoretical perspective into understanding the reasons for men's behaviour within the family.

Using the three concepts of family as a symbol, masculinity and cognition, as the framework, participant's responses will be analysed by comparing responses with the theme questions that guided the interview. These theme questions: were:

- How participants defined the concept of family.
- The most significant experiences for participants growing up.
- Role models that helped shape participants' ability to be a husband/father.
- Where else participants got their definitions of how to be a man/husband/father.
- What participants consider to be a good family.
- Participant's ideals for their family relationships.
- In practice, what participants consider is necessary in order to achieve good relationships.
- What supports participants consider men need most today in order to achieve good relationships.

How participants defined the concept of family

The results of this study show that the family held unique symbolic value for each of the four participants and was important to them. Each participant had an ability to think about the family and their thinking had clarity that enabled them articulate their own conceptual framing of the symbolic meaning family had to them. The family was defined as a 'place' of nurture, love, acceptance and togetherness. The value was in terms of its strong and unique relationship bonds that were different than friendship bonds.

Defined as relationally more important than structurally.

While family was defined in terms of structure with extended family members being an important part, participants gave greater value to the nature and quality of the relationships between members. For David, this appeared to take prominence over expectations of what model or structure the family should be like. His concept of

'closeness' ensured that this was sought rather than trying to adhere to, or recreating the nuclear model after relationship breakdown. As Bob stated:

"I guess the structure part doesn't really worry me in terms of importance...."

"I'm thinking of a positive thing...nice, get on okayish."

The symbolic value

The family's symbolic value for some participants was defined conceptually as a 'place' related to self. For Andy, the family is:

"A loving place...that offers the greatest place for security...A place that also gives you a sense of belonging."

Similarly for David, the family has continuity, and predictability:

"Family are always there. Friends can come and go...friendships can end. Family doesn't end."

Congruence with conceptual framework

The concept of family as a symbol provides a valuable means to gain an understanding of how men think of the family and what is important to them. Participant's use of symbolic language such as a 'place' assisted both participants and the researcher to describe and understand what was of value to them. As Meemeduma (1994, p. 2) claims, it is not the types or structure of families that is important, but their ability to provide continuity, predictability and stability for children. It appears that the same three constituents are felt as needed by these adult men as well.

Participant's responses in this study did not include masculine descriptions or gender specific definitions of family. The validity of using the concept of masculinity with this finding is that it indicates that men do not see the value of family in masculine or genderised ways. This is contrary to much feminist literature which argues the power

imbalances within the family as a patriarchal structure (Orme, 1998). While these imbalances may exist, the finding shows that men view the family in positive non-genderised ways. There are conceptual variations within both feminine and masculine genders and men appear to be genuinely working out their primary relationships with their partner and children in relationally positive and individual ways.

The concept of cognition aided an understanding how men think of the family. The concept supported Goldstein's (1986b) theory that people, in this study men, are psychological persons who make different and individual meaning from the same symbolic concept and with different experiences of it. That participants articulated their thoughts of family with different clarity supports the view that external language (as compared to self talk) is not an important link between thinking and action. While Colin had difficulty knowing and articulating the thinking that shaped his descriptions, he still gave action to it. The finding shows that while men are varied, (some are very articulate while others are not), and while they do not always articulate what or why something is of value to them, the importance is demonstrated through action.

The most significant experiences for participants growing up

An important finding in the results is that for three of the four their concept of family was affected by the experience of migration. Whether immigrating with parents at an early age or growing up in a home with migrant parents, the result indicates their sense of self was negatively affected. This experience changed their perception of how the family should be for them and motivated future behaviour. Additionally participants related positive and negative experiences while growing up in the family that has shaped present functioning.

The experience of migration was like leaving home and disconnecting from all extended supports and relationships. The strength of language used to describe the experience of migration conveyed the significance of the experience. Andy and Colin summed up the experience:

"I was *torn away* from the place where I belonged" and, "It's a change that happens to a migrant, you *cut off* all these ties." (Andy).

"When I got here we had nobody. We had ourselves and that was it. And you've really got to experience that to..." (Colin).

Experience, as Colin alludes to, is individual and subjective. Migration discontinues important relationships. The awareness that something was missing was felt early in life, however not named as 'belonging, 'support' and 'closeness' by participants until adulthood. For Andy the realisation came in marrying into another family, and for Bob when the family visited relatives overseas. In both instances, what was lost (connection) was identified when the loss was replaced (reconnection). To understand loss there is a need to understand the importance of the attachment 'object' lost. These results support Marris' (1986) loss and change theory in that, "attachment...underlies all our understanding of how to survive in and manage the world we inhabit" (p. viii).

Another finding was the experience of participant's relationship with parents, when growing up indicating the importance of a nurturing family for providing stability. As Bob's parent's relationship 'wasn't the best' his place in the family as the oldest child shaped certain values of loyalty, and morality. David's contrasting experiences were of both feeling loved and nurtured by his parents and also feeling fearful during severe arguments. In both instances, the experiences shaped future behaviour. Bob's loyalty to friend's and family has been strong, and David stated that it is:

"Very important to me that I had this ideal of not having a family in which (there is) arguments and high levels of conflict":

In terms of family as a symbol and cognition, the results showed that when relating actual felt experience of their family, participants spoke at a practical level, whereas in defining the family they spoke at a higher, conceptual level. While some practical experiences were highlighted in the latter, the conceptual level appeared more an 'ideal' view of family where the experiential one was 'what is.' However, David's quote, above highlights that past experiences shape ideals and the future behaviour to achieve those ideals.

The concept of masculinity was only evident in Bob's response and therefore only partially useful in assisting to analyse responses. The sense that his caring role as the

oldest child was more a role of a daughter indicates expected masculine and feminine role stereotyping. Socialising forces here have only partly affected present role behaviour. Rather than socialisation, the expectation of significant others such as partners have shaped present action.

Whether negative or positive effects were experienced from events, the findings show that these men were able to adjust to change with positive results for their functioning.

For Colin the link between the effect of the experience and future behaviour was unconscious, although the discovery that he had no other supports on arrival in Australia may have affected actions semi-consciously. For Andy, there is a conscious attempt due to the constant shifting of men from work transfers etc. to ensure his relationship is not superficial but one of depth and active commitment.

Role models that helped shape participants' ability to be a husband/father

Results indicated that the concept of role models did exist for participants by way of fathers primarily, and friends. An unexpected result was that participants recognised partners as positive role models. There was awareness by the men that roles had changed compared to their parents roles in the family and results showed that the priority of roles has changed compared to their parents.

All men talked of their role as father in terms of generating income for family provision, nurture and well-being of children, practical support and encouragement. Simply 'being there' present and spending time with children was very important to the three participants with children. An interesting finding was that modelling was consciously undertaken and named as such by participants, such as David:

"I've got a dad who I admire a great deal, and I've deliberately modelled myself a lot on my dad. He's a good man...of integrity and good conscience."

Migration however can mean a lack of models, which resulted in Andy seeking his own, and Bob feeling a sense of alienation about himself and his family at not fitting in. Additionally, fathers can be both positive and negative models.

"Not many. I think I've been privileged to meet a few people which I'd regard as having a relationship worthwhile watching and modelling. My parents wouldn't be one of those" (Alan).

"So I'd want to be a little Aussie kid, but I couldn't do it cos I had no one to teach me" (Bob).

Results also showed that roles of husband/partner were not exclusive. Compared to traditional roles of 'sole breadwinner,' participants were jointly sharing that role with partners. In this regard partners showed role modelling and were more proactive in the relationship. As Bob states:

"She's sort of like a model for me of where I should go in terms of a reasonable character... and investing in the relationship. She's the one that puts the questions and initiates those things, whereas if it's cruising along okay, I'm happy."

The priority of roles has also shifted to what was expected by their father. All participants were undertaking, and putting priority to, other roles. Meeting other family members emotional needs over the traditional breadwinner role is now more important. This highlights that a shift in the meaning of the role as 'provider' has occurred from solely economic to a more wholistic meaning that encompasses emotional, psychological and social dynamics.

Participant's responses indicated the importance of family as the primary symbolic place for learning from significant others. The concept of cognition was also useful in highlighting their conscious thinking. That participants were aware of the modelling and could reflect on this learning, agrees with social learning theory (Kail & Cavanaugh, 1996, p. 16) in that "it views the learner as an active participant, not as a pawn at the mercy of external contingencies."

The use of the concept of masculinity and sub-concept of socialisation highlights the strong influence of character role modelling, family experiences and other socialising forces over specific gender role expectations. While David actively modelled his father's

character, he did not model his father's roles in the family. This finding indicates both the mediating effect of striving to provide his ideal of love and nurture for his children, his experience of relationship breakdown and the changing nature of family in society. Men's behaviours were thus influenced by their personal experiences. As Goldstein (1986, P. 37) states, "Individuals place meaning and structure to what they believe, know and can explain"

Where else participants got their definitions of how to be a man/husband/father

Results indicated that participants were largely aware and could name where their definitional sources came from. Most named these as fathers or significant men, friends, partners and peers. However, what assisted their definition of self was different in each case. For Alan, it was dad's and the media that gave him his sense of maleness:

"Nowadays it comes from the dad definitely"

"They watch it passively. You don't think about it, you just absorb it because there's a need without realising it."

While for David, it was friends who deeply impacted his definition of fatherhood:

" One of the biggest things as far as men's stuff that's influenced me ...is most of my male friends saying...with almost tears in their eyes that they regret most...not having been involved with their children when they were young."

Findings support Goldstein's (1986b) socio-cultural self as a needed frame of reference to discover when working with people. Results clearly showed that these men learnt from others to form their definitions of self. Participant's responses indicated that while the media was also thought to be influential in shaping men's lives, this was not a personal experience for participants themselves but a perception that others were affected due to the passive lack of critical appraisal by viewers.

The results give strong evidence for the influence of other men, (fathers and friends), in defining men's sense of self and how to be as a man, partner or father. Participants again showed an ability to actively discern, and then model friends' 'good' qualities in their relationships, and realising what was not going to be helpful to them in their relationships. As Bob said:

"But I wouldn't do everything he did, cos he would just drink too much and shit like that."

What participants consider to be a good family

Participant's responses indicated that a 'good' family is functional and positive. It can cope with, and adjust to change where there is commonality of activities (Colin), and provides opportunity for diversity and flexibility of roles (David). A good family is also enjoyable, has fun and gives members 'space' for self-actualisation (Bob).

For men, there is also emotional engagement in a good family through effective communication and encouraging the other's strengths, and holding the other in high regard and with respect (Alan). This finding is important in that it suggests that while men at times might not communicate effectively, there is clear willingness to do so. What hinders effective communication is further highlighted in the section 5.2.9 which discusses what supports men think they need

Responses support Goldstein's (1986b) moral-ethical premise that individuals are persons of principle. Amongst men's interpersonal dilemmas, they have an understanding of themselves in relation to their family within a moral context of right and wrong, good and bad, and obligations to self and to others. Goldstein's fifth frame of reference of the non-self also contributed to analysing how participants defined good family relationships. Good is perceived in comparison to something that is considered not good. The notion of what is beneficial or good in a relationship extends the notion of self by identifying the notion of the non-self. Who we wish to be brings an awareness of who we don't want to be. For example, Bob's construction of a good family was the 'good Aussie family'. This was in comparison to what he had missed out on growing up. Colin's definition of good was of 'doing things together', as opposed to a 'bad' family where everyone 'does their own

thing.' And for David, an ideal family needed to be flexible in view of the two households involved and the conflict that would otherwise happen.

These findings also supported the utility again of family as a symbol. Participants defined good in symbolic terms suggesting that if the parents have a good relationship, then:

"your kids will go forward" as opposed to "being dragged down." (Colin).

A good relationship was therefore seen as moving rather than static. All participants spoke of the need for relationships to be fluid and growing as opposed to stagnant. Bob had a mental picture to help him articulate clearly this comparison between a bad and good family:

"My picture of a good family is that we can *ride* through that stuff."

"A bad one is...where there's no growth, you're not moving together in any way so it's stale." And, "So a good one is where you can change and adapt and still stick together..."

The use of masculinity as a concept which influenced how men understood and responded to the family was not supported. Men's perception of a good family is not seen by them in gendered terms. By this the study seems to suggest that the men in the study do not define, and hence act upon, the family from a construction of themselves as socialised masculine males. Rather, they appear to be striving to define and respond to the family as individuals first and foremost. Perhaps this finding suggests that social workers need to work beyond the constructions of individual men, who are like all other men, to a view which sees the man as an individual.

Participant's ideals for their family relationships

There was strong correlation between participant's ideals and their definitions of family in symbolic terms as being 'close', and a 'place' of nurture, love, acceptance and togetherness. Participants perceived themselves in varying positions in relation to these ideal 'states' for their relationships: either being at, close to, or trying to reach their ideal.

While none of the participants appeared to be 'struggling' with reaching their ideals, Colin and David both articulated that their ideal was what currently is. For example:

"I'm having a great life, where are the down sides I ask." (David), and

"My ideal? What I'm doing now. I don't think I could've done any better than what I've already done." (Colin).

One finding was that participant's who were fathers spoke mostly about that role and needed prompting regarding their ideal for their relationship as a partner. The reason for this is not clear from the participant's responses. This may suggest that a societal change to men as partners has undergone much more change to that of fathers, resulting in clearer ideas and ideals for the latter that can be articulated. Alternatively, more time and energy may go into child rearing as a priority, giving less time, less reflection and less goal articulation for the relationship with their partner.

If men are not close to their ideals, what motivates them to press on? Another finding of this study supports Goldstein's (1986) notion that individuals have a spiritual frame of reference. In this study, men are persons of faith with deeply held symbols, beliefs and transcendent ideals. The 'core' of who Andy said he was is his Christian belief. Knowing the ideal also brought knowledge and tension of the 'shortfall'. Andy named what motivated him:

"My faith provides my ideal, it provides my inspiration, and it provides me with energy to attempt of implementing that ideal."

Additionally, having an ideal to Andy, has a useful purpose and additional motivation:

"If I didn't have that ideal, I would revolve into selfishness."

The suggestion by Higson (2001) that, "Perhaps 'happiness', in the final analysis, is simply a reflection of the fit between expectation and reality" would appear to be only partly supported by these responses. Happiness, to men of faith and conviction like Andy, appears to come with pursuing deeply held ideals and not just attaining them.

In practice, what participants consider is necessary in order to achieve good relationships

Participant's responses suggest that communication, being emotionally 'present' with children and partners as well as physically spending time with them was important in achieving their ideal relationships. Men like Andy reflect on their relationships and act accordingly, while men such as Colin appear to just act out what comes naturally. Andy saw the ideal difficult to attain as men and women communicate differently. It appears that for men generally, especially working class men, the societal changes in roles and family functioning have generally not been well understood, resulting in conflict in their relationships. Achieving one's ideals in the family can also mean drastic changes for men in today's unfriendly work environment, as David highlights:

"In fact I saw almost a conflict between full-time work and good parenting"

While David has made the change, it is conceivable from the literature that many don't, thus struggling with what might be. A feasible, though not substantiated hypothesis from participant's responses in this study is that as men's symbolic concept of family is one of stability and continuity, to change one's known roles is incongruent with their concept. The tension of living in an unideal state is therefore persisted with.

"I didn't aspire or set any goals, it just come natural. We just done it" (Colin).

"It's difficult to come up with a specifically man types of thing." (Andy).

What supports participants consider men need most today in order to achieve good relationships

The findings supported a premise of the study that men believe existing supports for men were not addressing their needs, due to inappropriate supports or barriers to access. Barriers were considered to be due to:

- Services not being designed to reach men in general, and working class men in particular.

- Women delivering services to men, with the perception that counsellors side with female partners, and
- The lack of anonymity when accessing services in rural and regional communities.

As Andy highlighted:

“A lot of social services don't address the needs. They're not getting to them to encourage them to rethink, to make them a bit more sensitive to their women. I don't think any of the social services are actually getting to those men.”

While literature or popular stereotypes would suggest that the problem lies with men themselves in their reluctance to access supports, the results suggest otherwise. Bob accessed parenting courses and has the need to 'bush up' again. Men however are pragmatic. Services must be worthwhile and have an obvious and positive cost-benefit ratio. To achieve good relationships, participants not only had need of services but named informal courses and peer networks as being suitable for their need.

As well as other men, as Andy, Bob and David suggested, mixed gender groups were considered as appropriate:

“I think other men who share the same ideals and try to implement those things in their lives.”
(Andy).

“For me the ideal support would be someone to discuss things with...or doing something in a network of blokes...or it could be males and females”

This response highlighted that as the need for relational support is not being met by other men, Bob's female friends meet that need:

“I'm very comfortable sharing a lot of things with women. I guess there's some things, you know that I think, like sexual matters I'd talk with maybe blokes about, But anything else I'm pretty okay. I've got more female friends than males.”

Summary and conclusion

The results of the study show that men have positive constructions of their family and place relational, symbolical value on the family. Men are diverse in their understandings and the value they place on the family and have ideals and notions of what is good. What they understand as a good family relationship are those which are relationally close, enable growing, are adaptable to change, encourage commonality and provide emotional supports such as love, security and belonging. Ideals are shaped by past history, significant others, and to a lesser extent socialised gender expectations, which in turn shape actions and roles to achieve those ideals.

The study also showed that while men have clarity of thought and a conceptual framework of how they value the family, what is good and how it should function, some men do not know what to do to 'get there.' While in contrast women appear to know what they want and what to do about it. Men thus appear to 'let it happen.'

Implications and recommendations for practice

The Social Work profession is committed to the pursuit and maintenance of human well-being (AASW Code of Ethics, 1999, p.1). This is endeavoured by providing the best possible standards of service provision (clause 4.4.1 b), and demonstrating respect for clients, and seeking to preserve their dignity and individuality (clause 4.1.1). However, while acknowledging and supporting the provision of services to ensure equity for women in the public and private domains, this thesis has shown that a change is needed in the way the human services consider men if men's well-being is to be taken seriously.

Men are largely thought of in stereotypical terms of deficits, statistics and creators of family dysfunction through domestic violence. Frameworks for practice presently follow deficit and feminist models, which arguably do not 'fit.' It is apparent that social work and other professions work with a minority of men. The men in this study arguably represent men who think and act positively in their families, however would need and value supports in achieving improved relationships.

This study has shown the need for a new, appropriate and appropriate framework for working with men, and one that acknowledges individual uniqueness, strengths and needs. Solomon's (1976), and Saleeby's (1992) Empowerment and Strengths perspectives is a relevant starting point for social work to be part of a development process in partnership with men to contribute to a more specific conceptual framing.

As the interview process in this study showed, men are not as easy to access as women due to work commitments during the day and due to means and methods of communication. Services to men need to be flexible to enable access to men 'after hours' There is also a need (stated by Andy and Bob) for more men to work with men, though not exclusively. The need is for choice in gender service provision to meet need. As the AASW (1999, cl. 4.2.4) states services must take into account individual and family needs.

Finally, and most importantly, there is a need for the social work profession to contribute to the development of new conceptual frameworks and language which appropriately and effectively responds to the lived experiences and qualities of men. With these new frameworks and language, proactive social work intervention can be actively developed and implemented.

Fulfilment of research objectives

This section of the chapter will discuss how the study met the objectives outlined in Chapter one. These were:

To contribute knowledge to the social work profession concerning men's *individual* understanding of family issues. The aim of this is to improve conceptual framing for practitioners and hence better delivery of, and more appropriate services for men.

This study has increased knowledge available to the social work profession concerning how men understand and value their primary relationships. It has done this by exploring men's own subjective concepts of family, their ideals and how their

understandings shape their actions within their family. The findings have highlighted the need to work with men to develop better conceptual frameworks for meeting men's needs based on strengths and empowerment perspectives rather than the existing deficit models. Barriers to access and suggestions for services delivery models have been recommended.

To provide men themselves with an opportunity, and a sense of the contribution that they can make, toward self-empowerment

This objective was met by undertaking the process chosen for the study. The informal ethnographic exploratory method enabled participants to discuss areas of importance within the research topic. The process enabled conscientisation for participants during discussion as reflection brought to mind aspects of experiences such as migration, and ideals for their relationships that had not been articulated. Additionally, feedback to participants on their individual views included in the study has given them an indication of the contribution they have made to the findings.

To add to my knowledge and understanding of what shapes my own role and functioning in *my* family, with the aim of being a better husband; father to my own four boys soon to be young men themselves; and as an effective social work practitioner when working with other men.

Undertaking this study has been personally worthwhile as both a social worker and as a husband and father. The interactive interview process enabled me to add my own 'flavour' within the study topic and was a conscientising experience for me as well as for participants. My own role and functioning has similarities to that of participants. Relocating from interstate and leaving extended family networks was a similar experience to participant migrants. Ideals for my family were similar to participants but the process provided some opportunity for exchange and 'sharpening' of thoughts. The findings offered insight for my professional career. To modify Goldstein's (Goldstein, 1986, p. 6) quote, I am intent of ensuring "a more accurate understanding of our clients and their problems is achieved when *I* comprehend their subjective worlds"

The study has provided the researcher with knowledge which in fact, showed that the way in which the men in the study cognitively perceive the family acts to inform and direct men's behaviour. Of great importance is the finding that cognitive perceptions are made up of idealised ('good') visions and aspirations relating to the family which powerfully informed the practices of the men in the study.

In conclusion, the findings show the importance of the way that gaining knowledge, through research, can be used to inform practice.

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Appendix A

Interview theme questions

Themes and theme questions were related to the objectives.

How do men describe the family?

Theme: What meanings do men make and what symbols do men use to shape their understanding of their family relationships? The rationale for this theme is to better understand the nature and importance that the concept of 'family' has for men.

Questions:

- How would you define the concept of family?
- What aspects of the family are important to you?

What conceptual framework do they use to make sense of the family?

Theme: How do men think through their relationships? What cognitive framework do men utilise to understand the utility of the family for them? The rationale for this theme is to provide a cognitive 'scaffolding' or categories that men use to make sense of their relational world.

Questions:

- What were the most significant events for you growing up?
- Where did you get your ideas of how you as a man in a family are supposed to be?
- What defines you as a father or husband?
- Where do men generally get their definitions of manhood?

How do men think life ought to be?

Theme: What is men's understanding of their ideal, (or 'good') family?

What are men's ideal relationships? The rationale for this theme is based on the assumption that men's perceptions of how life ought to be shapes and influences their actual functioning.

Questions:

- What makes an ideal/good family?
- What decides a 'good' one from a 'bad' one?
- What is your ideal for your relationships?
- What value do men have in the family today?

How does this framing act to shape, influence their actions and roles?

Theme: That is, what is the relationship between how men think about the family and how men think life ought to be and the roles they enact? The rationale for this theme is to discover what effect if any does a match or mismatch between men's ideal and their actual lived experience have on their functioning?

Questions:

- What do you aspire to as a husband/father? What does this involve in practical terms?
- What qualities do you think you need in order to achieve this aspiration/goal?
- What are the main responsibilities you have as a husband/father?

What helps and hinders men from achieving their relationship goals and enacting their roles

Theme: What factors do men see as important in aiding their positive functioning? The rationale for this theme is the assumption that men's relational needs are not

being met adequately, and to hear from their own experiences, what supports are needed to achieve their positive wellbeing.

Questions:

- If an issue arises, how do you go about resolving it?
- What supports do men need most in order to successfully achieve their goals and responsibilities/roles?
- Where would you go for help with family issues?
- What would prevent you from seeking help?

The final questions asked were:

- Is there any thing further you would like to raise or mention?
- Do you have any questions you would like to ask about the interview?

Appendix B

Disclosure form

RESEARCH TOPIC **Exploring Men's Perception of a 'Good' Family.**

As part of a Social Work Honours course, research is being undertaken which questions "What men's perception of a 'good' family is, and how this understanding shapes men's roles and functioning within their family."

Existing literature suggests that men's roles in the family are undergoing rapid change in our society. While incidences of divorce and domestic violence in relationships are high, this research takes the position that, in general, men want the best for themselves and their families. There is some suggestion that our perception of what a family is supposed to be (that is, our ideals and expectations) shapes the way men carry out their roles within their family relationships.

The potential benefits of the research lie in improving service delivery to men in need of supports and in providing some men the opportunity to tell what works, or doesn't work for them. It is proposed to informally interview participants separately for a duration of no more than an hour to discuss questions broadly around what their expectations of a 'good' family are, what roles within their family this may involve, and how these are carried out.

Participant's identity will at all times remain anonymous and anything discussed will be kept in strict confidence. Participants can also choose not to answer or discuss any questions if they wish and will also have full say in what data is included in publication of the research findings. After consenting to be involved in the research interview, participants may withdraw at any time if so desired for whatever reason. Contact details of two reputable counselling agencies will be provided to participants if sensitive issues are discussed that participants feel warrant further discussion by them.

Any questions concerning any aspect of this research including the participant's role can be directed to the Head of the Social Work Department, Edith Cowan University, Pauline Meemeduma on telephone 9780 7777, or to the researcher Grahame Paull on 9791 1879. If you would like to be a participant, please complete the following consent form and return

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CONSENT FORM Project: Men's Perception of a 'Good' Family..

I have read the information and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this activity, realising I may withdraw at any time.
I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published provided I am not identifiable.

Participant's signature:..... Date:.....

Researcher's signature:..... Date:.....