10-1979

The Impact of Father-Absence on Adolescent Sons' Personality Development and Its Implications for Therapy

Richard B. Dicker

The Impact of Father-Absence on Adolescent Sons' Personality Development and Its Implications for Therapy

Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts, Lindenwood Colleges

by

Richard B. Dicker

For review and evaluation by:

Paul Van Ness, PhD., Faculty Sponsor
Craig Eisendrath, PhD., Faculty Administrator

Washington, D.C.
October 1979

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study will examine certain key aspects affecting the therapeutic process between adu lt male therapists and adolescent male clients who are experiencing emotional disturbances associated with the physical and emotional absence of their father. There will be two foci for this investigation: (1) a theoretical explication of how cultural, interpersonal and intrapsychic factors affect the adolescent's perception of himself and how that perception may aggravate or ameliorate the developmental disturbances resulting from that absence; and (2) a presentation of a case study involving this writer's ongoing psychotherapy with a fatherless adolescent male client. The case study presentation will develop the application of the material presentation will develop the application of the material presented in the theoretical section of the paper and compare two therapeutic approaches with such clients.

Significance of the Study

In past decades, those interested in developmental psychology have devoted considerable time and attention to exploring the relationship of the role of the mother to the developmental process of the child (cf. Nash, 1965; Sullivan, 1953; Turk & Bell, 1972). These theorists generally agree that the mother's intimate involvement with the child from infancy through early childhood creates an emotional and psychological bond from which the child must struggle to

gradually gain independence and differentiation. The early learning experiences with the mother represent the first, albeit primitive model through which the child comes to recognize the outside world. These early influences arising from the mother-child relationship are unquestionably profound; however, such experiences do not form a complete basis for understanding the emotional and psychological development of the child. Increasingly, there is a growing awareness of the "mother-centeredness" (Roll & Millen, 1978) of the literature in personality development. With such an awareness has come the recognition of the importance of the father in the development of the child's personality. This recognition does not dispute the enormous influence of the mother upon the development of the child's personality but, rather, brings into focus the fact that both parents play a significant role in personality development.

The focus of this investigation is on the impact of the father's absence on the personality development of the male child. The relevant body of literature is not large. Moreover, some of factors which have been studied have produced contradictory or inconclusive findings. For example, Smith and Walters (1978) found juvenile delinquency among male adolescents to be associated with the lack of a warm, loving, supportive relationship with the father, while Kagel, White and Coyne (1978) found no support for the hypothesis that the absence of the father or negative portrayal of the father by the mother, in itself, accounts for delinquent

behavior among adolescent males. Certain other factors are clear; specifically, there is a definite correlation between the absence of the father and detrimental effects on the offspring's cognitive development (Shinn, 1978). Also, there is a consensus that a son's perception of being understood by his father is positively associated with emotional and psychological growth (Millen and Roll, 1977, 1978; Rachman, 1969). Lastly, there is general agreement among theorists in the psychoanalytic school regarding the importance of having a father who can represent an effective male figure in aiding the adolescent son in resolving the oedipal struggle (Erickson, 1968; Slavin, 1978). The detailed findings regarding the impact of the father on the personality development of the male offspring will be reported in greater detail in chapter two.

This study is especially significant for me by virtue of my personal experience in working with adolescents in a practicum setting for the past year. That experience has left me with a deep appreciation for the complexity of relating to adolescents who are neither fully adult nor fully child; who need, at times, the support and nurturing expected of a parent and, at other times, the empathetic understanding and non-interfering support of a good friend. My experience with adolescent males has been especially difficult in that their ambivalent attitude toward an adult male who is neither parent nor peer can produce feelings of frustration one moment and satisfaction the next. The

frustration is created by the sense of helplessness which I have experienced at times when either I have not been successful in creating a trusting enough relationship, or the young man in emotional turmoil has not been able to perceive me as being able to help him break through his distress. Many of the adolescents that I worked with in a high school setting were either isolated, drug dependent, or had a record of juvenile offenses. All of them badly needed a sense of direction; a few were willing to reach out to me for help. The latter group of individuals provided me with a sense of satisfaction as a helper and the former group taught me more about living with my limitations and developing a greater capacity for patience, understanding and objectivity.

The review of recent literature concerning the impact of the father on the personality development of the male offspring and on the nature of the therapeutic process between an adult male therapist and an adolescent male client is my attempt to distill into a theoretical discussion one important aspect of my practicum experience. The presentation of a case study involving my work with a fatherless adolescent male and his mother is a demonstration of the application of the body of theoretical material to the professional practice of psychotherapy which I have acquired during my program of graduate study.

Statement of the Problem

The foci of this paper are: (1) to examine and identify

variables which affect the course of an adolescent male's emotional and psychological development as it relates to the presence or absence emotionally and/or physically of the father; (2) to describe the impact of that presence or absence on the capacity of the adolescent male offspring to manage his continued development; and (3) to describe a model of therapeutic intervention with this population which has value assisting those adolescents in experiencing and working through the emotional and psychological impairment associated with the absence of the father.

Research Questions

The following questions have evolved during the course of investigating the problem stated above:

(1) What are the factors which constitute the psychological impact of the presence of a father on the adolescent?

(2) What are the factors which constitute the psychological impact of the absence of the father on the adolescent?

(3) Is ther a workable model or framework for expressing these variables?

(4) What factors must be considered as significantly influencing the therapy process between an adult male therapist and adolescent male client?

(5) Is there any therapeutic approach which is especially useful in working with this population?

Chapter 2: Review of the Related Literature

This chapter will explicate the factors which affect the developmental course of an adolescent male offspring who experiences some disturbance created by the physical and/or emotional absence of the father. Additionally, specific factors which must be considered by therapists working with this population will be presented as they relate to the conduct of effective psychotherapy with these individuals. This study is supported by research from the disciplines of cognitive developmental theory, social psychology, developmental psychology and psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

This review of the literature will be presented in four sections; three represent different levels of understanding of the impact of father presence/absence on the offspring, the fourth section deals with theoretical considerations for adult male therapists who work with this population.

Conceptual and Theoretical Bases for the Study

Many authors in recent years have become increasingly aware of the heavy focus upon the mother in understanding the process of personality development of children. This awareness of the focus on the mother has led authors in developmental psychology to turn their attention toward the impact of the father on the personality development of the offspring. There have been published within the last five

years a number of articles each dealing with some aspect of fathering as it affects the developmental process; for example, De Fillipis (1977) explored the role of the father in cross gender identity in childhood, Flora (1978) examined the effect of the communication pattern of the father and its impact on the self-concept of the son, and Shinn (1978) investigated the impact of father-absence on the offspring's cognitive development. In my review of the journal literature published during the past three years, however, I did not locate any article which examined this subject area from a multi-disciplinary perspective.

The conceptual framework for reporting the review of the literature will be multi-disciplinary in that the inquiry will be undertaken first from a broad cultural-mythological perspective, second, from a more specifically interpersonal perspective and, third, from the perspective the intrapsychic process of the adolescent. The basis for such a framework is the understanding that the individual psyche is basically imbedded in the three worlds of the relationship to the society or nation, the relationships with others and the relationship to oneself. From each perspective different insights may be gained.

The Cultural-mythological Perspective

Edith Wyschogrod (1978) examines the role of the father from the perspective of cultural mythology. She looks at Western society and traces current attitudes toward paternity over the last two thousand years. She understands that any

prevailing cultural myth may be viewed either literally as a mere fable or fairy tale without particular significance in the psychic lives of individuals, or, symbolically as a framework for meaningful structures within the culture which have profound implications for the way the individuals who make up that culture live their lives.

The author finds that, on the societal level, "Western culture, in killing the father at this stage in its history, has reverted to a long forgotten paradigm for the understanding of human origins." Wyschogrod states that "Paradigms act as generative forces on the culture. In much the same way that Platonic forms transcend and are reflected in objects, these cultural paradigms appear, seem to die and reappear later to generate new meanings." The reappearance of a paradigm in the culture is not merely a repetition of the previous cultural manifestation of that paradigm but, rather, the pattern may be considerably altered, making the new manifestation difficult to recognize. By examining the formal structures of the society, however, one can determine the myths upon which they rest.

Cultural myths influence the psychic life of its members in that "the myth functions paradigmatically for the culture as a whole generating specific attributes and . . . these attributes operate in the socialization of the individual." The cultural expression of the myth is then translated into an individual expression in that the "individual('s) psychic life is a response to a given myth as it impinges culturally.

Thus the individual does not live the myth but is socialized through its expressions, [the] manifestations whose meaning is generated by the myth."

In the twentieth century, Western culture continues to express its myths in the formal structures of the society. However, in this century there is a significant difference in this relationship. "In the past, myths were regenerated by discovering unexplored registers of sensitivity that they concealed or by adding new motifs from later strata of the culture." The author very appropriately cites Freud's oedipal myth as an example in which "an ancient etiological myth is recast in the setting of the family and interpreted as a universal drama of personal history." Today, however, unlike the use of myths in previous eras, there is no longer a cultural foundation for integrating the meaning patterns of the myth into a culture's self-understanding.

Myths are used in contemporary Western culture as a guide for literal actions rather than a symbolic formulation. For instance, in the past, the myths of heaven and hell were used within the culture to transfer to an afterlife the consequences for one's actions while living in this world. The myth had a powerful unconscious effect on the daily activities of individuals. In the twentieth century, however, these same mythological structures serve not symbolically but, instead, literally as a blueprint for action. The hellish reality of the genocide of the 1940's and the threat of nuclear annihilation are literal expressions of the myth

of hell. The twentieth century "acts out its myths."

The particular myth which Wyschogrod understands contemporary Western society to be acting out is one which has been long repressed; it concerns the manner of human origin. Within the context of this discussion, it is important to recognize the meaning of this myth and its consequent impact on the structure of the society and the lives of its individual members. The myth is based on the assumption that "our present society [is] without fathers." This is the myth of the "autochthonous origin of human life; the generation of men and women not from the union of opposite sexes but from the earth itself." In this myth, human life is viewed as originating analogously to that of plants; from the earth itself, "coming up from the soil without parentage. Man is not descended from his own kind."

The myth of autochthony can be traced back to ancient Rome and is present in cultural structures today. The notion of the fatherland which gives rise to the children of succeeding generations is a structure which is a dominating feature of many totalitarian societies of the day and is present, in a more subtle form, in most contemporary cultures, especially where the inhabitants view themselves as being distinctly different from previous generations. In this myth, "the Earth is the autochthon mother and father of the race; the children of the earth are all related to one another in a great chain of peers." Mass cultural movements such as the flower children of the 1960's embody much of the

mythical structure presented here. Such movements are characterized by a distinct split in values and attitudes from the previous generation, a prominent peer value system and a strong sense of relatedness and solidarity stemming from a common cause.

Wyschogrod assumes that the myth of autochthony represents a break with Western man's understanding of himself as a historical being, upon whose continuity the future of the culture depends. Most myths return man in some way to his primordial origins by virtue of the time dimension in which the myths occur. However, "in the case of the myth of autochthony, this general tendency is reinforced by the content of the myth" by virtue of the fact that the concept of autochthony "breaks the links between each generation and its ancestors: since there is no father there is no chain of filiation that takes one back to ancestral times." All past time is the time of the ancestors, since to each generation the earth is the only ancestor. The culture thereby represses the sexual role of the father and, in the process, creates a society without relation to the past or the future. The individual's temporal orientation is toward the present, since the future and the past have little significance. Wyschogrod holds that "the individuals in such a society must either experience themselves without roots in a permanent state of identity crisis or seek direction through imposing upon themselves the identity of some external feature such as the state, the region, the subculture or the like."

There are several implications of the autochthonous myth for contemporary culture which pertain to the thesis of this research paper. The most pertinent implications will be described here. First, in contemporary society, human lives, more and more, exist in a world in which values are without an absolute foundation and must be defended on intrinsic grounds. The culture provides very few absolute moral codes. The loss of the notion of God as the divine creator removes from humanity the image of a paternal creation which implied both a biological procreation and the vision of a great father bestowing abundance upon his children. It is as though "man is abandoned to a world without fathers, where all are orphaned siblings engaged in rivalry for whatever seems good at the moment, prestige, commodities, social mobility . . . ."

Second, the peer consciousness aspect of the autochonous society is manifest in the creation of the illusion of the new beginning. In American life, this aspect is based in the foundation of the country, first, as an escape from seventeenth century European religious persecution, through eighteenth century political oppression, and nineteenth century frontier expansion, up to the twentieth century industrial-technological backlash. In each era, the belief that the individual, by virtue of one's own power can "break the links with the personal and cultural past and start afresh" served to motivate large masses of people. This structure, present in the culture for centuries, is now

"systemized through the view of the transcience of goods, people, and ideals; assigning worth through determining its value in action; and in emphasizing the emotional value of novelty." In the contemporary structure of the autochthonous myth, human life may be expressed through a series of widely divergent roles which are then dropped as their pleasureable value has been exploited. To begin again in a new role means being reborn. "One's old self is the progenitor of the new."

In contemporary society, only the actually young can provide paradigms for the culture, because age symbolizes not wisdom but decay. In this model, the child is, in effect, father to the man. Culturally, this structure is seen, oftentimes, in the emotional and psychological dependence of the parents in their old age upon the children--"the biological father becomes the psychological offspring of his child." The values of the father are diminished and seen as having no relevant meaning for the present.

The manifestations of the mythical structure of the society are seen in the conduct of psychotherapy through the statements and presenting attitudes of clients. Inherent in the autochthonous myth is "the necessity of the self's primary interest in itself, narcissism in all its manifestations characterizes autochthonous man." A phenomenological account of the manifestations of this myth as found in the narcissistic personality includes the individual's inability to sustain relationships over the long run, to assume

responsibility or to tolerate frustration." Since the self does not seek models for behavior from the previous generation, it must search about its peers for appropriate behavior patterns. The self cannot accommodate itself to the otherness of the opposite sex or to those who are significantly different in their beliefs or appearance. Corollary to this belief is the diminished attractiveness of childbearing and its replacement with the notion of progeny consisting of new roles for the old self. Since the self is father to itself, it is perenially reborn. The self then imagines itself as being revitalized and the body being renewed.

A realistic therapeutic goal in contemporary culture is not to attempt to alter the cultural-mythological perspective but, rather, to recognize the effects of autochthony and hope to facilitate within the client a fuller conception of paternity. According to Wyschogrod,

> Acceptance of sexual origin as opposed to autochthony means bringing into sonscious awareness the intentional structures, the meanings that the father's life has had. Such meanings include the links to his past. But the patient must be free to choose or reject the values of the father; his must be a relationship of elective affinity. The life of the child must be lived in a relationship to the values of the father rather than in a repression of them or in slavish imitation.

Erik Erikson presents a cultural interpretation of human personality development which corroborates many of the points

described by Wyschogrod. Erikson (1968) in his book Identity Youth and Crisis presents an epigenetic developmental model which describes the several major life stages associated with the individual's struggle for individuation and emotional maturity. His model of the several age-appropriate developmental tasks which all individuals must either successfully complete or stagnate within is as interpreted on a cultural scale as on an individual basis. The unique applicability of Erikson's model to the discussion of the role of the father in society warrants its inclusion in this portion of the research paper.

Erikson views the primary struggle of the adolescent to be one which involves the evolution of a unique identity apart from the parents and other significant adult authority figures. Erikson states, "the adolescent looks most fervently for men and ideas to have faith in, which also means men and ideas in whose service it would seem worthwhile to prove oneself trustworthy." Without such figures from the preceding generation, the proper formation of a distinct identity cannot occur. A son must have had a father and a mother or their adult equivalent substitutes in order to evolve an identity of his own and take his place in society. The prime danger inherent in this developmental stage is that of identity confusion; a prolonged moratoria from choosing a life role or "repeated impulsive attempts to end the moratorium with sudden choices--and then deny that some

irreversible comitment has already taken place."

The adolescent rebellion or withdrawal from parental involvement is an expression of an historical perspective which the human being comes to recognize during this period. It is a sense of the irreversibility of significant events and "the urgent need to understand fully and quickly what kind of happenings in reality determine others, and why." Youth is sensitive to any suggestion that it may be hopelessly determined by what went before in the life histories of others. For this reason, youth often rejects parents and authorities and wishes to belittle them as being inconsequential. Adolescents are in search of movements or individuals who claim, or seem to claim that they can predict those things which are irreversible and cannot be altered. In doing so, adolescents can, in effect, get ahead of their own future, and in doing so, reverse it.

Erikson's framework suggests that individuals who are fatherless, either through their own denial or through actual circumstance, lack an appropriate opportunity to discover themselves; historically, culturally and familialy. It is more difficult to achieve an identity formation without a complete set of parents from whom to differentiate. Individuals failing to achieve an enduring, stable identity, cannot decide who they are to be through an expression in life work, family formation and play. This incomplete identity will be experienced through a sense of futility in life, self-doubt and isolation. For such individuals,

existence is characterized by a sense of confusion in which there is no past or future because there is no perceived belonging to a personal or cultural history. Everything exists in the present--in the now. There is little opportunity to mature through the remainder of life's developmental stages because confusion has occurred which precludes the opportunity for continued growth. Such an individual, within Erikson's model, is confined to leading the balance of his life without attaining full emotional and intellectual maturity. By implication, then, such people would not be capable of passing along to succeeding generations, the cultural and psychological factors necessary for the proper growth and maturity of his progeny. The succeeding generation must then search among its peers for the values it needs for its own development.

The Interpersonal Perspective

The impact of the father on the developmental process of the adolescent may be gleaned from research conducted on the psychology of interpersonal relations, especially within the context of the family and the father role.

The family structure is a uniquely appropriate framework for examining the interpersonal processes of the adolescent male, for it is within the family that a model derived from the total history of the adolescent's interpersonal relations inside the family comes to bear upon the nature of each human contact outside the family, as well. The family is the framework of individuals in which the adolescent has

lived his entire life and from whom he now seeks individuation and differentiation. There is a large body of knowledge accumulated under the rubric of family therapy and family systems. Much of it bears some relevance to the examination of this paper, however, based on the review of recent journal articles undertaken as research for this study, one article is especially appropriate for presentation in this section, Zinner's theory (1978) in which he describes an approach to "specific elements of borderline adolescent psychopathology . . . particular [to certain] kinds of interactions which occurs in [these] families . . .". Unconscious family assumptions and fantasies have the effect of interfering with the normal process of psychosexual development in the offspring. Zinner states,

> These assumptions interfere, in particular, with the realistic family task of providing a holding environment for the developing child and impair his integration of loving and hostile attitudes, his achievement of individuction, separation and mature self-esteem. The influence of these unconscious assumptions is felt from infancy onward, but the overt expression of their impact may not become evident until the separation-individuation processes of adolescence create tensions for the developing child which are insurmountable and lead to symptom formation.

A struggle between parent and child ensues "in which the outcome may be intrapsychic and interpersonal conflict or the adolescent's regression to a more dependent condition." The considerable amount of energy bound up in this conflict within all the members of the family may be positively utilized by the therapist by helping the entire family increase its awareness of how their unconscious assumptions about life, may be interfering with the developmental needs of certain of its members.

The significance of this study lies in its perspective that the etiology of adolescent developmental problems is rooted in family communications and interactions; that is, the seeds of adolescent emotional disturbance are planted within the family dynamics during infancy and flower into full bloom under the stress of adolescence. Resolution of the unconscious assumptions which are incompatable with normal development lead to a resumption of the adolescent growth process. The several studies to be reported in the remainder of this section build upon the theme of the family interpersonal patterns are the source of adolescent disturbance or nurturance
Smith and Walters (1978) focus upon the interactions between father and son in their investigation of the differences in delinquent and non-delinquent male adolescent's perceptions of their fathers and the relationship between those perceptions and certain family background variables.

The authors state, ". . . fathers are more likely to contribute to the delinquency of their children than are mothers. Young males need an adequate father figure with whom to identify and from whom to learn appropriate patterns of social and sexual behavior." Confirming the findings of Zinner (1978) cited previously, these authors hold that through the father-son identification process, the young male "learns how to temper and express his feelings of love and aggression".

Smith and Walters cite a number of previous studies conducted in this area which show that, in cases where there are non-functioning fathers, that is, fathers who are physically present in the home but fail to function as the head of the household, there is a higher rate of delinquency than in those cases where there was a functioning father in the family. Families without a father or with a non-functioning father also tend to produce a higher proportion of delinquents, more cases of psychosomatic illness and drug addiction and greater behavioral problems among adolescent male offspring than do families with fathers present and functioning. The authors stated that the most critical period for the son's development and identification with his father or father figure is between the ages of three to six. They assert that permanent deficiencies may result if the father (or surrogate) is not present and functioning in the home during this period in the child's life.

To determine the perceptions which delinquent and non-delinquent male adolescents have of their fathers and determine which, if any, of these perceptions are related to delinquency, they administered a test instrument questionnaire. The results of that questionnaire show that both delinquents and non-delinquents perceptions of their fathers are significantly related to:

(1) the masculinity of the father;

(2) the type of physical punishment administered;

(3) the closeness of their father;

(4) the love received from the father; and,

(5) the time spent with the father.

The most positive attitudes with regard to the parent of greatest influence were in families where both parents were equally influential and the least positive were from families where the mother carried the greatest influence. In addition, more positive attitudes were expressed by sons from families where the father and mother equally guided the family and less positive attitudes were expressed by sons from families which were primarily guided by the mother.

In general, the investigators report that a greater proportion of delinquents that non-delinquents (1) live in homes headed by the mother; (2) experienced a childhood of below average happiness; (3) were very close to their mothers; (4) were disciplined by their mothers; (5) considered their fathers to be very highly masculine; (6)

had parents who were either divorced or separated; and (7) experienced more anomie than did the non-delinquents.

Based on the findings in the questionnaire, the investigators conclude that the factors which distinguish delinquent from non-delinquent adolescent males are: (1) the lack of a warm, supportive relationship with the father; (2) minimal paternal involvement with the children; (3) high maternal involvement in the lives of the youth; and, (4) broken homes. The factors which may serve to insulate the adolescent male from chosing delinquency are: (1) a stable, unbroken home: (2) a father who has a high degree of high degree of positive involvement with his son; and, (3) a father who provides a stable role model for his male offspring.

The results of this study tend to support the conclusions of other investigators previously reported who believe that fathers appear to be significant contributors to the social adjustment in male offspring who are capable of adjusting to society and, that fathers who are involved with their offspring in "a warm, friendly, and cordial relationship" are important in the child's life for the prevention of delinquent behavior.

In a study of intact and father-absent families, Kagel, White and Coyne, (1978) find that male adolescent disturbance is related to less warm, supportive and expressive intrafamilial relations; less of a family orientation toward personal growth; and less successful participation in involvements with others ouside of the family.

The investigators present certain hypotheses regarding interpersonal family beahviors. The tests of these hypotheses serve as the focal point of their study.

In the authors' review of the literature, the article reveals an hypothesis that negative attitudes toward the father held by the mother generalize to other family members and affect her attitudes toward masculine behavior, in general. These attitudes subsequently affect her attitude toward the son's development of "male gender-appropriate behaviors." Her "maternal negative father-typing" may contribute to a sex-role conflict in the son in which he displays an ambivalent attitude of aggreesion-affection toward the father. In comparison to mothers from intact families and the mothers of non-disturbed adolescents in father-absent families, the authors hypothesize that the mothers of disturbed adolescents would be expected to exhibit more "negative father typing." This is the "father-typing hypothesis".

A second hypothesis of the authors' is that maternal encouragement of masculinity, as perceived by the son, is related to the sex-role concept of adolescent males with absent fathers. This assumption is based on the notion that, in broken, fatherless homes, the mother cannot compensate for the absent father by displaying appropriate masculine behaviors thereby creating an adolescent disturbance. On the other hand, in homes where the father

is present, the adolescent son has little need to be encouraged for masculine, independent behaviors by the mother. Therefore non-disturbed adolescents from homes without a father would be expected to view their mothers as being more encouraging of their independence that would disturbed adolescent males from either father-absent or father-present homes. This is the "independence hypothesis".

The third typothesis is that the son's perception of the mother's attitude and characterization of the father constitutes a vital factor in the development of adolescent disturbance. Accurate interpersonal communication in homes without a father is essential for the successful psychological development of the son. The structural organization of the family in ther father-present home is conducive to accurate mother-son communication. A highly delineated family organization provides a structural facilitative to mother-son communications. This assumption is based on the notion that the organization within families of disturbed adolescents from both broken and intact homes is insufficiently delineated to permit effective communication and parental instruction. Further, families with fathers present in the home do not face as great a level of intra-familial stress and, therefore, do not need a delineated family organization as required in homes without fathers. Accordingly, the families of non-disturbed adolescents who have no father would be expected to be perceived as more

organized than intact families or the families of disturbed adolescents. This is the "organization hypothesis".

Lastly, the authors' hypothesize the families of non-disturbed adolescents without fathers may be expected to exhibit positive intrafamial relationships and a climate which fosters individual expressiveness. These positive relationships reflect the bond between mother and son. The quality of individual expressiveness must be present in order to have effective interpersonal communication. By comparison, the mother-son relationship is not as essential a resource for the adolescent male in homes where the father is present. Theoretically, the families of disturbed adolescents need not realize the possible resource of the mother-son relationship, whereas, the families of non-disturbed adolescents without fathers should need more intrafamilial cohesion and greater emphasis on the encouragement of expressiveness. This is the "cohesion and expressiveness hypothesis".

The subjectsin the Kagel, White and Coyne study consisted of a non-disturbed group of adolescent males who had all achieved satisfactory academic performance, had never sought psychotherapy and had never been involved with the police. The subjects comprising group of disturbed adolescent males were participating in family therapy and were identified by their therapists as being disturbed. Subjects included in the father-absent group came from families in which the father had been away from the home for a minimum of one year. In each of these cases, the

father's absence from the family was attributable either to divorce or separation; however, in these cases, the father had lived with the mother for at least the first two years of the adolescent's life. This minimum time requirement was necessary in this study to insure that the mother was provided with sufficient information to adequately evaluate the father's fulfillment of the spouse and parent roles.

The analysis of findings from three test instruments administered to the subjects in this study did not support any of the initial hypotheses. The results of the questionnaires did reveal, however, that in both father-absent and father-present homes, the family members of the non-disturbed adolescents viewed themselves as being more committed to a warm, supportive and expressive intra-famial home atmosphere. Compared to the families of the disturbed adolescent males, these families showed a greater emphasis on personal growth and active involvement outside of the family.

Kagel, et al. state, "the results of the study offer only marginal support for the family conflict theories of adolescent disturbance". The investigators were also unable to find the mother-son relationship to be a key factor in reducing the likelihood of delinquency in those homes without a father. Further, non-disturbed adolescents from families without fathers did not perceive their mothers to

be more encouraging of their independence than did either the disturbed adolescents or the adolescents from intact homes.

These findings suggest that research in the psychopathology of disturbed adolescent males may be more profitible if shifted away from the focus on the negative factors which potentially contribute to developmental disturbances. The investigators feel that "pathognomic variables fail to explain psychological disfunction and do not reliably distinguish between disturbance and non-disturbance". The study suggests that the occurrence of personal misfortune, hurt and other negative influences do not contribute to disturbance in adolescent males. Rather, they suggest that it is the omission of positive factors which may contribute to such disturbance and indicate that examining how an individual uses what resources are available to him in order to survive and mature should be the focus for future study. A recent study by Millen and Roll, (1977) tends to confirm the findings of Kagel, White and Coyne. This study also affirms the role of positive interpersonal factors in the relationship between father and adolescent son as being significant contributors to the proper personality development of the offspring. These investigators explored the hypothesis that "the subjective feeling of being understood is a critical component contributing to one's mental health". These investigators

assert, "a son's feeling of being understood by his father is positively related to the offspring's sense of self-esteem".

The research findings indicate "the feeling of being understood by the son result in a subjective experience of relief, satisfaction, security and communion with humanity, in general". In addition, "feelings of closeness with the person who understands and acceptance by that person are experienced along with a perception that the person who understands has done so through genuine effort." The results of this study tend to confirm the hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between the son's feeling of being understood by his father and positive subjective feelings relating to a high self-concept.

In a more recent study by the same investigators (Roll and Millen, 1978), an examination of the positive factors in the father-son relationship were further refined to "include a fine focus on the son's phenomenological feeling of being understood by his father as revealed through a clinical interview". The investigators administered a questionnaire to elicit from forty male introductory psychology students their feelings of being understood by their fathers. The administration of the

test instrument was followed up with an unstructured clinical interview which lasted between twenty and fifty minutes. These interviews were "subject-oriented in that each subject was encouraged to describe fully his own experience." The results of these interviews disclose the following themes emerging from the students:

(1) There is an intrapersonal dimension to the feeling of being understood in which an experience of security and safety appeared; a comfort in knowing that the father would be there in times of crisis.

(2) There is an interpersonal dimension to the feeling of being understood in which the experience of being accepted by the father arising from the perception, by the son, that the father was listening and was genuinely interested in what they had to say and took them seriously.

(3) There is a feeling of shared common interests between father and son which, in many cases, was experienced by the son as a 'treasured moment.'

(4) There is an expression of reassurance that the reasonableness of the father's discipline was an indication that he explained things and took their feelings into consideration and that this reinforced their feeling of being able to go to their father with their problems.

(5) An acknowledgment by the son that the appropriateness of the response and recognition by the father of

the son's actions as a separate individual encourages his feelings of independence.

(6) A desire on the part of the son to model himself after his father because they had come to love and respect him as well as because he is their father.

The authors report that the essential intrapersonal theme associated with the experience of feeling misunderstood is the experience of loneliness and frustration. Interpersonally, this theme is manifest by the "son's feeling non-essential to his father associated with his long-term failure to show any interest in the son's activities." Interpersonal conflicts between the father and mother were experienced by the son as feelings of being misunderstood, as well. The son handled such feelings by placing greater distance between himself and his parents.

A significant distinction between the sons who experience themselves as being understood by their fathers and those who felt misunderstood is the difference in the nature of the experience itself. Those who felt understood report significant changes in the quality of their attitudes toward their fathers over a period of time. When quite young, the sons who felt understood report that they idolized their fathers; however, as they grew older their experience in the relationship shifted toward competition, conflict, and increasing differentiation. By the onset of adult maturity, the conflicts became resolved and the experience transformed into one of equalitarianism and mutual respect. By contrast,

the sons who report that they felt misunderstood, when quite young, feel that the attitude and experience of their relationship with their fathers are pretty much the same now as they were then.

The study findings suggest that there are certain aspects of the experience of feeling understood which are central to understanding the son's attitude toward his father. These aspects have implications for the understanding of personality development. The time spent with the father was experienced by the son as being pleasurable when they shared common interests and were experienced as being painful and conflicting when the son felt coerced into unwanted activities with the father. The following studies further elaborate this theme.

Grando and Ginsberg (1976) examine the nature of the father-son relationship and find "the father-son dyad is important both because the father significantly influences his son's social development, adjustment and identification throughout childhood and adolescence, and because the quality and communication in the relationship appears most crucial for the outcome of the father's influence." The authors developed a program of basic communications skills for fathers and sons which involve "openness (genuineness, congruence and self-disclosure) and empathy (warmth and concreteness)." Their technique embodies many of the positive relating factors described by the previous investigators as

essential to proper adolescent development through the father-son relationship.

Phillip and Orr (1978) author a study which further corroborates the significance of the positive features of the father-son relationship in the proper personality development of the son. Their study of how family relations are perceived by emotionally disturbed and normal boys disclose that "a high incidence of emotionally disturbed boys who receive clinical treatment have no fathers, have infrequent contact with their fathers who live elsewhere, or have emotionally uninvolved fathers or a succession of father figures who live with their mothers." They conclude that "the need for a male [role] model who would foster a strong relationship with the boy cannot be readily duplicated by the mother."

Shinn (1978) conducted a study of the cognitive development of adolescent males in which she identifies certain aspects of the father's absence which detrimentally affect the development of the offspring. She finds that father-absence is not a "unitary variable"; that is, "the cause, onset, duration and degree of father absence and the availability of a suitable father substitute influence the degree of detrimental effects." For example, surrounding the onset of the absence there are socially sanctioned and socially non-sanctioned reasons which may cause the social environment to react either with support or neglect. An untimely death is a socially sanctioned reason for a boy to have no

father. In these cases, members of the larger family, neighbors, friends and community services may be available to provide positive emotional support and substitute fathering. On the other hand, divorce, although commonplace, is not a sanctioned reason for father-absence and, oftentimes, means little alternative fathering will be available to the boy.

Other significant factors which determine the degree of detrimental effects from father-absence on cognitive development of male offspring are the length of the absence, the child's age at the onset of the absence, and the cumulative amount of time of the absence. As an example, if the father were a night-shift worker, his absence would likely be felt less keenly by the son than if he were in the military and stationed away from the family for four years. Such factors influencing the detrimental impact of the father's absence on the cognitive development of the male offspring strongly suggest that this feature should be considered not as a dichotomy but, rather, as a variable whose impact on the offspring's development falls along a continuum. Accordingly, Shinn states, "early, long and complete [father] absence may be particularly detrimental to the child's cognitive growth, but later, short, and partial absence can also be seen as having harmful (but possibly less severe) effects."

The author identifies several possible reasons for the detrimental impact of father-absence. "Financial hardship,

high levels of anxiety, and, especially, low-levels of parent-child interaction are important causes of poor performance among children in single-parent families." She cites certain other studies which have found that the father's absence from the home creates a great deal of stress and accompanying tension interfere with proper cognitive development. Further support for the author's assertions come from the fact that mother-headed homes are oftentimes in lower income categories and that diminished economic standing tends to result in diminished educational and social opportunities for the child. Also, in many homes without a father, the mother must work to maintain the household resulting in much fewer opportunities and lower quality contacts between the son and the mother. The investigators find that children from fatherless homes receive less parental attention than do children from intact homes. In addition, the detrimental effects created by the father's absence are further compounded by the increased absence of the mother necessitated by her need to now support the household.

Shinn examines the possibility that the detrimental effect of the father's absence on the offspring's cognitive capabilities may be at least partially offset by attention given by other substitute caregivers. Her study suggests that while additional attention afforded by the mother can help, a single parent cannot be both mother and father to the child. She cites the results of other studies which

report on the effects of father surrogates and stepfathers on the offspring's psychological development which demonstrate that some amelioration of the detrimental effects resulting from the parental loss.

The Intrapsychic Perspective

This examination of the recent literature concerning the impact of the loss of the father on the continued psychological development of the male offspring cannot be considered complete without an examination of the question of the intrapsychic manifestations of such a profound loss. This section of the review will explore the nature of the intrapsychic processes which are peculiar to the adolescent male and how such processes may serve to either ameliorate or exacerbate the emotional impact of this event.

In his examination of the psychology and psychopathology of early adolescence Miller (1978) describes the intrapsychic world of the adolescent in the following way.

> Frequently, an early adolescent may be described as self-centered, with little or no capacity for empathy, eager to obtain admiration and approval from others, unable to tolerate loss or separation, but filled with anger and resentment and having strong conscious feelings of insecurity and inferiority. . . . [H]e may also display a capacity for altruism, love, creativity, and imagination."

Based on such a description, this developmental period can be seen as a time of great vulnerability in which the

adolescent's developmental needs are so great that his continued growth and maturity can be brought to a halt through inadequate nurturing.

Miller believes that the wish for environmental mastery is a major issue of puberty. He states, "The early adolescent seeks to control the world and be controlled by it. If mastery of and by others cannot be achieved, then withdrawal may take place." Further, adolescents are not yet very capable of tolerating ambiguity. Theirs is largely a dichotomous world of good and bad, beautiful and ugly. Much of the adolescent's capacity to deal with the reality of the external world depends upon previous learning experiences and the psychological maturity passed along by his parents. For example, in the circumstance where the father has been lost through an untimely death, the adolescent, when confronted by a caring adult, may perceive the well-intentioned individual as persecuting him or threatening him with unsolicited advances and, thereby, shut off an opportunity for emotional nurturing. Ironically, adolescence is a time in which regressive tendencies are oftentimes highly valued and it is, therefore, a period in which severe emotional stress and trauma exert a disproportionately adverse intrapsychic effect. During this developmental period, emotional pain or trauma coupled with the normal aggressive drives associated with the emerging sexuality of the individual work together to create responses which oftentimes result in

destructive and aggressive behavior instead of behaviors which invite the emotional nurturing. Miller states,

> Adolescents may gain perverse power by eneraging adults. When adolescents act out in ways that stimulate adult conflicts, they are then persecuted by the adult who retaliates. This does not lead just to a perverted adolescent sense of environmental mastery; it also creates an internalization of persecutory objects. Thus, the infantile, regressive, narcissistic position of helpless impotence is reinforced and may become a permanent personality constellation. The early adolescent who is unable to pass successfully through a second separation-individuation phase of growth blames individuals in the outer world for his personal suffering and demands that the world change. Chronic pain and anxiety secondary to frustration are then experienced, eventually leading to retributive responses from the environment.

It is clear that the emotional demands of this developmental stage upon the adolescent are severe, that the additional stress resulting from the absence of the father coupled with the unpredictable nature of the adolescent's responses creates a situation in which external emotional supports from caring adults, even if available, may not be accepted by the adolescent and, possibly, may be met with a highly aggressive and negative reaction.

Anderson (1978) conducted a study which supports the interpretation cited above. The author worked with adolescents whose lives had been marked by the emotional and/or physical unavailability of the father after the age of four up through adolescence. He found, among this group of individuals, a high degree of correlation between such absence and the occurrence of delinquency stemming from the family constellations of the adolescents.

The author finds that adolescents who have not had the benefit of the emotional availability of the father manifest a continuing binding tie with the mother which strongly affects, in some instances to the point of precluding, separation from the family and normal socialization. These "borderline adolescents" appear clinically as "impulse-dominated individuals" who avoid contacts with others which require that they control their impulsiveness. Consequently, these adolescents have little involvement in sports, chores, homework and other activities which "require a careful build up of increasingly complex behaviors." These people are "primarily interested in pursuing risky adventures or daring feats either alone or with their companions."

Adolescents are commonly upset at various authority figures, especially parents, with anger oftentimes comprising a majority of the affect. Along with the anger there may also be depression, an existential despair of isolation, loneliness, and a pervasive sense of hopelessness and futility. The individuals also exhibit anxiety, anhedoina: a lack

of pleasure, lack of empathy, and self-glorifying fantasies accompanied by omnipotent thoughts and feelings. The family history of disturbed adolescents is usually dramatic; the adolescent's parents are still quite involved with their own parents and the grandparents frequently live nearby. These disturbed families may be distinguished by a history of psychosis, business failure or emotional collapse. An adolescent growing up in such an environment has great (and well-founded) cause for a sense of insecurity about the ability of the family to provide a secure world in which to grow up. Such adolescents have strong disappointments about their fathers' ability to care for them and great ambivalence about their relationship with their mother.

In yet another study, Slavin (1978) explores the intrapsychic process of the adolescent and focusses on a phenomenon he calls "oedipal grief." This feeling state is "a type of developmental mourning in which the adolescent's subjective experience is marked by a melancholy accompanied by a morbid conscience; an inner tyrant which censors any move toward giving up the ideal loved parent and thereby blocks normal developmental process." This state is viewed within the psychoanalytic framework as "arising from a difficult choice which the adolescent must make; either separate from the parent and grieve the loss of becoming that hoped for perfect and powerful person or hold onto the notion of the parental ideal through the development of an idealized parental figure through developing a 'morbid conscience.'" In "the

morbid conscience either a loving or cruel parent is hidden away inside the adolescent's inner world and, because this parent must be protected from the changes of the external world, the adolescent must avoid going through the developmental changes appropriate for this time of life."

One of the points which Slavin explores in his study is why these individuals have developed such a self-punitive and limiting process as a substitute for normal developmental mourning. The author distinguishes between the psychopathological and the developmental aspects of the adolescent's struggle to distance himself from his inner tie to his parents and to those aspects of his needs which concurrently work to prolong and perpetuate this tie. In the developmental sense, the adolescent's attempts to gain distance from the parents and to remove himself from the past are typically progressive, but irregular, steps toward individuation in that he is gradually better able to experience both the "exhilaration and the sadness" of finding ways of filling his needs. However, if the threat and its accompanying anxiety which attend the individuation process are too intense and the ability of the ego is insufficient to tolerate the feelings and master the conflict, then a pathological substitute for the normal developmental process develops. The pathological purpose of this substitute is to detour the ego from pursuing the normal developmental tasks and, thereby, lead a more regressed and less adult adaptation to life.

Relevant Considerations in Conducting Therapy with Adolescent Males

Thus far, a substantial amount of information from cultural mythology, interpersonal psychology and intrapsychic interpretation of the impact of father-absence on the personality development of adolescent males has been presented. In this section, research will be cited which focusses on how psychotherapy may be conducted with this population and which identifies certain factors which can favorably affect the therapeutic process.

Rachman (1969) examines the conduct of group psychotherapy with adolescent delinquent males. He finds that "the male adolescent's developmental task is to crystallize a masculine identity, a well-integrated sense of being a man". He refers in his paper to a quote by Deutsch who characterizes adolescents as "being in a peer society--but without any goals other than the search for identity". The author's interest in this paper lies in his determining the role of fathering in conducting group therapy with this population. He states that "delinquent males practice father-elimination and act as if their father doesn't exist or has no meaning . . .". Rachman sees the adolescent population "behaving as if it were a peer society without parentage and emotionally behaving as if to deny the basic reality that each person must have had a father", as stated in another context by Wyschograd.

The author asserts that in a non-delinquent father-son relationship, the father's role can be viewed as helping the adolescent son make the final separation from the mother by being a model for the son's identification as a male and, thereby, aid him in resolving his lingering sexual desires for the mother. He feels that with the accomplishment of this developmental struggle, the adolescent male's identity is crystallized at a more adult level. In the development of the adolescent delinquent, however, there are severe problems in the oedipal area. These problems take the form of "negative relationships with the father and other adult male authority figures, inadequate masculine identity, feelings of impotence and inferiority and the lack of a successful area of functioning [in life]". The relationship between father and son in adolescent delinquent males oftentimes involve intensely negative factors which become intensified during this developmental period. This, in turn, aggravates the relationship with the father who perceives the physical maturity of the son as an increasing threat, thereby fostering negativity and alienation on his side.

In the conduct of therapy with adolescent delinquents, the author feels that the striving for an identity within a peer society and the natural desire to seek such development through group membership makes a group therapy situation an effective setting for taking advantage of the normal developmental inclinations of this period. The group

therapy setting serves two purposes; one, to create a situation where the adolescents can seek out others of the same life circumstance and form strong group ties, and, two, take on the symbolic significance of providing a new family in which to satisfy the unfilled needs from the family of origin.

The author believes that there is a need to match the intrapsychic needs of the adolescent male population with a treatment model and therapeutic approach which addresses itself to the young men's need to find an appropriate positive masculine model for identification. The concept of the therapist who provides fathering (in the sense of appropriate masculine role-modeling) is an approach which the author feels will promote the likelihood of successful therapeutic intervention with this population. Rachman states, "Delinquent adolescents need 'fathering': a positive male figure, who can provide warmth, empathetic caring, affection and support while also providing structure, organization, discipline, firmness and authority".

The treatment model used by this author is one in which therapeutic change is facilitated through the establishment of a specific father-like relationship between therapist and client. In this special relationship, the therapist must behave and experience himself in this father-like way and the client must perceive and experience the therapist similarly. "There must be a congruence of therapist-patient perception and experience." The thera-

pist must not only be empathetic, firm, caring, and so forth, he must also be able to successfully communicate there qualities to the client. In the relationship, the therapist "needs to establish a therapeutic relationship where the positive attitudes of the father transference predominate and are communicated to the adolescent". This therapeutic approach is in consonance with those authors reported in the previous section who hold that the primary agent of detrimental effects upon the life of the father-absent adolescent is not the incidence of negative factors, but, rather, the absence of positive factors inherent in a satisfactory father-son relationship. In using the positive transference therapeutic approach, Rachman identifies two distinct phases of the group therapeutic process which the therapist must adapt to. In the first phase, the therapist adopts a "brother transference" in which he functions like an older brother or peer with the group. In this stance, the therapist may "make jokes, use the adolescent's frame of reference, and make a few interpretations of group process". The brother transference stance is designed to keep the group's anxiety level at a minimum.

In the second phase, the therapeutic approach is tailored to permit the adolescent group members to encounter more directly the therapist as a caring adult. In this stance, the therapist's frame of reference shifts so that "he verbalizes emotional feelings more directly with the

group members, focusses on here and now aspects of his relationship with the others, and helps the adolescents explore the positive and negative aspects of their relationships with people, either from the past or the present". In this way, the therapist satisfies both the adolescent's need to have someone directly express caring and affectionate feelings and serve as a role model so that they, too, will be able to express their own feelings to others. The second phase of the group process is considerably more complex since the adolescent experiences a caring adult as being more threatening than a big brother or peer. In this phase where the therapist shifts toward a positive father transference with the group members, the group will respond by continually pushing the therapist back to a peer-oriented, big brother relationship.

Anderson (1978) states that the adolescent needs empathetic relatedness from the therapist and that it is this essential need which the adolescent has been lacking both paternally and maternally. Consequently, the individual has little of any empathy for himself or his fellow man. Such needs can be provided by a paternalistically motivated therapist who models a father as part of the therapeutic process.

Summary of the Literature Review

To summarize the literature reviewed concerning: (1) the role of the father's absence on the personality development of the adolescent son; and (2) the relationship of that process to the conduct of effective therapy with this

population, the examination of the individual's psyche was undertaken on three perspectives. The first, and broadest perspective, is to view each person as being a member of a culture which holds and transmits to its constituents certain unconscious assumptions or mythological attitudes. In regard to the nature of parenting, the Western culture according to Wyschograd has increasingly "killed the father in this stage of history"; that is, we have created and operate under the power of certain cultural myths regarding the father which affect the psychic existence of each of us through our socialization. With regard to fathering, our contempory culture has created social structures which reflect the unconscious attitude of the authochthonous society; a belief that man arises from the earth. The individual attitude spawned by this cultural myth is that mankind is abandoned in a world without fathers where one can, by virtue of his personal prowess, break with the past, create a new life by wishing it, and where one's personal history or roots can be overcome by adopting a new role.

In an autochthonous society, individuals do not seek out role models from previous generations but, rather, search for new patterns of behavior among peers. The individual's orientation is primarily narcissistic; long-term relationships cannot be maintained because of the extreme difficulty in one's accepting other people's differences, the inability to assume responsibility, or to tolerate frustration. In this framework, the perception of time is focused on the

present, childbearing is unattractive because of the limited intergenerational rewards, and gratification comes primarily from novel experiences. Therapeutic work on expanding the focus of such cultural beliefs must be geared toward helping the client become more aware of his own paternity.

Erikson presents an epigenetic model of adolescent personality development which is similar in many respects to Wyschogrod's cultural mythology interpretation. According to Erikson, the adolescent's developmental struggles center around differentiation from the parents. One of the primary means for attaining such differentiation in early adolescence is through denial of the parent's importance and emotional impact. Denial as a sole means of differentiation, however, robs the adolescent of the opportunity to mature beyond the narcissistic level and robs the society of the capability of creating individuals who can pass along to the next generation the cultural and psychological characteristics needed for their proper growth and development.

Interpersonally, many of the forces described on the cultural level can be seen operating interpersonally within the structure of the family. The absence of the father in the family creates many of the same negative developmental factors in the adolescent as the elimination of the father concept on the cultural level does to its members. A number of studies associate the incidence of delinquency,

impairment of cognitive capacity, problems in gender-role identity and adjustment to adult life with the physical and/or emotional absence of the father in the family. Other studies which focus on the positive aspects of father report that adolescent male offspring who have fathers who are involved with their sons in a cordial, warm, emotionally supportive and empathetic relationship contribute psychological qualities which are essential to the son's developmental processes. The various investigators do not conclusively agree, however, on whether adolescent male developmental disturbance is associated with the occurrence of negative events in one's life or from the absence of positive fathering factors. Intrapsychically, the essential theme of male adolescents who have absent fathers in the sense of being misunderstood and non-essential and the accompanying feelings of loneliness and frustration. These adolescents are oftentimes very angry and anger is frequently turned inward resulting in depression, existential despair, isolation and hopelessness. Such people have difficulty experiencing pleasure and oftentimes cannot successfully cope emotionally with the complexity of the adult world. These emotional reactions to the absent father are manifest in a varity of ways such as delinquent behavior, emotional withdrawal and a pathological process called oedipal grief. These symptoms have the common denominator of being negative in affect, non-adaptive socially, and self-insulating from the great emotional impact of rage, grief and loss.

In the conduct of therapy between adult male therapists and adolescent male clients, it is important that the therapeutic process be structured so that positive transference factors can be incorporated into the relationship. The presence of a caring, empathetic male adult is essential to provide the adolescent with the emotional support necessary to confront the feelings of loss and grief created by the father's absence of a caring adult, a buffer stage approach utilizing brother transference, a positive role figure akin to a wise or caring peer, is employed as an initial step toward the eventual encounter with the more adult, father transference model of support and caring.

Chapter 3: A Case Study

This chapter will utilize a case study to explicate the relevance of the theoretical material presented in the literature review for the process of psychotherapy with adolescent males who do not have a father present in the home. The interpretations presented in this chapter will bring together the cultural-mythological, interpersonal and intrapsychic dimensions of the clients' histories, the family relationships, and the client-therapist interactions.

Background Information

The family presented in this case study is currently being seen for both individual and family therapy. The names and other identifying information have been changed to insure their confidentiality. The family consists of a mother and her son who sought out assistance on their own initiative in order to "learn better ways of communicating with each other and fighting less". The mother, whom I will call Ginny indicated that there had been a three-year history of increasingly hostile and confrontive arguments between her and her son. She further indicated that, within the past year, she had made several overtures to him that they jointly seek out some kind of outside help to try and find a way of alleviating the difficulty. He had consistently refused the previous overtures because he strongly felt he did not need "psychiatric" help. The son, whom I will call Sam, did agree to one session with this agency, because it

was not affiliated with any psychiatric or mental health facility, and because the staff was composed of counselors rather than psychiatrists or psychologists.

Ginny is a moderately obese, white female. She is thirty-five years old, however, her facial appearance, style of dress, and posture create the impression of someone who is ten years older. She is highly talkative, however, her manner is apprehensive, her posture is slightly stooped and she conveys the impression of one who is burdened by the hardships of life and unable to cope with many of life's everyday demands. Ginny's hair is cropped short and her style of dress is quite conservative and "little-girlish". Her predominant affect is an ineffectual whining which varies in intensity. Occasionaly, she shows a lively spontaneity, with a sparkle of aliveness in her eyes and conveys a sense of warmth and affection.

No psychological tests were administered to Ginny to determine her intelligence or her psychological profile, however, based on impressions gained during the course of her treatment, she is of average or slightly above intellect. She is employed by an insurance firm as a claims adjuster. Outside of her work she has no hobbies. She is greatly involved with her son, occupies much of her limited free time watching television or sleeping and, at the outset of treatment, seemed quite content to settle for bemoaning her miserable lot in life and taking comfort in the belief that "other people must live like this too". She is remarkably able to articulate much of her life experience and seems

quite willing to share much of it in her sessions.

Her primary mode of avoiding actual contact with her emotional distress lies in her capacity to intellectualize feelings or project unacceptable ideas onto her son and her mother.

Sam is a slightly built, white, thirteen year-old male who appears highly verbal and intellectually gifted. He likes to make expansive gestures, however, there is so much tension present in his body that the resulting constriction gives one the sense of a coiled spring trying to unwind. Even when Sam slouches in his chair the high state of tension in his body and in his speech is strikingly evident. He is a handsome-looking young man who dresses appropriately, though somewhat "little boyish" for his age. Although very thin he is interested in baseball and jogging.

Sam has no close friends within his peer group. He tends to set himself apart from others his own age partly because of his great intellect and partly because he demands that they adopt his passionate political and religious views as a gesture of acceptance. Although he displays a contemptuous manner, he states that his isolation is of little concern to him. He seems very hungry for emotional relatedness with an adult male and is willing to adjust some of his familiar life patterns in order to insure the continuance of the therapeutic relationship.

Clinical Interpretation of the Counseling Process

Preliminary data. In order to comprehend the psychodynamics which have shaped the personality and behavior of Sam as a fatherless adolescent, it is necessary first to gain some understanding of Ginny's life history and lifestyle as a model for Sam's early development. Ginny was an only child who never knew her own father. She, too, was raised from infancy solely by her mother. When Ginny was nine years old, her mother was forced by the family financial circumstances to seek full-time employment. She was, therefore, required to wake-up, dress herself, make her own breakfast and go to school on her own. When she came home in the afternoon her mother did not arrive until two hours later.

Ginny calls herself a "latch-key kid," referring to the fact that the only sound she heard when she left home in the morning and arrived home in the afternoon was that of the key in the door. Her childhood experience has left Ginny with considerable unresolved anger and pain and a strong, ongoing emotional dependency on her own mother. This ongoing dependency is a significant factor in her son's upbringing in that, as a behavior model, Sam has learned his mother's style of interpersonal relating. She is passive around others' intrusions into family matters and emotionally ambivalent toward her mother and her son.

Ginny was married at age twenty-one and immediately became pregnant. During the third month of pregnancy, her

husband deserted her and, since that time, has had no contact with the family. She subsequently obtained a divorce.

When Sam was three years old, Ginny met another man to whom she became engaged. She remains engaged to this same man eleven years later. He too, like her husband before, is an absentee mate and father. Rob, the fiance is a traveling salesman who spends sixty to eighty hours per week working and usually out of town. He has only minimal involvement in the family despite their long-standing engagement.

At the time of the desertion by her husband, Ginny was required by her financial circumstances to seek part-time employment which she subsequently increased to full-time work the year after Sam was born. Wishing to avoid her son being raised like herself, namely a "latch-key kid", she undertook a year-long search for a suitable surrogate family for Sam with whom he could live during the week and, hopefully, receive the kind of upbringing which Ginny did not receive in her own childhood. After a lengthy search, Ginny was successful in locating a family which she felt would be suitable. The surrogate family with which Sam lived during the week contained a mother and her two sons who were three and five years older than Sam. Again, however, it was a family without a father. Sam has had ongoing involvement with his surrogate family from the time of his

infancy until shortly after the commencement of his counseling. Sam's surrogate mother has a personality similar to Ginny's mother and involves herself in the details of the family's affairs in much the same way that her mother maintains a similar ongoing involvement. The surrogate mother is a woman of strong fundamentalist religious convictions; these beliefs play a central role in Sam's life.

The case study. The nature of any therapeutic process is inherently complex. As a result, analytic interpretations of the therapist-client interactions and the client's psychodynamic process are essentially of limited explanatory value in that they cannot possibly address the enormous complexity of human dynamics. Such limitations may be viewed either as an impediment to understanding the affective and cognitive nature of humans or as unstructured territory awaiting suitable explanatory models. In this discussion, the latter view will be followed.

The clinical interpretation of Sam's counseling will focus on identifying the emotional and psychological factors which have influenced his personality development as an adolescent male who was raised without a father or other appropriate male father surrogate. The theoretical foundation for this interpretation has been described in the preceding chapter and the material presented in the section will be offered in the three-level format of cultural-mythological, interpersonal, and intrapsychic understandings. The explication of Sam's personality development is based on

a three-month long counseling period which encompasses the initial phase of the therapeutic process in which the overall themes of the personality structure have emerged in broad detail; however, because of the brief three-month period significant therapeutic personality changes have not yet occurred.

The first area of focus for this clinical discussion concerns the pattern of Ginny and Sam's family patterns of living and the influences on that lifestyle of the culture in which this family is imbedded. According to Wyschogrod (1978), the "unconscious mythological themes of the culture act as implicit models or paradigms for the psychic lives of the individuals of which it is composed." The family of Ginny and Sam embody many of the features which characterize the autochthonous mythological model. For at least three generations this has been a fatherless family; that is, Ginny's parents were divorced when she was a youth and her father died shortly thereafter. She was raised by her mother who, in turn, was raised without a father after the age of six. Upon reaching age twenty-one, Ginny married and was subsequently deserted by her husband. Sam, therefore, has been raised in a family in which the psychological features of the authocthonous society are well-ingrained. For example, Wyschogrod states, "The individuals in such a society must either experience themselves in a permanent state of crisis of identity or find themselves subject to the imposition of an identity conferred . . . by their

peculiar origin." In this family, the theme is expressed on some very fundamental levels of the personality. In working with both the mother and the son, one is struck by the "blandness" of each of them. This blandness embodies more than just the absence of a distinct personality or style. Rather, it is expressed through the flatness and mundaneness of the affect, the de-emphasized male and female gender qualities reflected in their manner of dress, physical appearance and personal perspectives. They each embrace a "sexless" world-view as manifest in their verbal statements. Their perspective is one of politics, religion and the presence or absence of pain. Their view of the world, the culture, is from the vantage of two individuals who somehow have not been allowed to mature. It is, of course, more strikingly apparent in Ginny who, physiologically, is mature. However, at the same time, the label of immaturity fails to adequately describe their manner because they are also very wise, knowing, and resentful about their personal state and sense a deep gulf between their inner, personal experience and a visceral understanding that "something is not the same with [them] as [they] believe it is with others."

This family may be accurately characterized as being relatively genderless and sexless not out of personal misfortune or some personality warp which has distorted the appropriate gender role model but, rather, because gender and sexual values, in the cultural sense, are of little significance to them. Their personal perspectives in this

area are entirely appropriate for a world where fathers and attendant maleness, and the opposed mothers and femaleness, have little value. This factor which I call gender ambiguity is expressed through the family's cultural structures in powerful symbolic ways. For example, Ginny has been engaged to a man for eleven years even though she has little interest in him and it is expressed in Sam by his disregard for girls and apparent disinterest in himself as a sexually maturing young man. This is not to say that each does not possess distinctive sexual qualities but it is a phenomenological assessment of their personal perspectives as manifest in their personalities and in the way they present themselves to the world.

The psychological manifestations of this autochthonous family can be seen in their incapacity to create or maintain long-term intimate relationships. Ginny, for instance, is almost totally insulated from contact with others outside the immediate family system. She has some exposure to acquaintances through her work but is apparently unable to achieve any openness with them. She constantly wonders aloud whether or not others live the same way she does, all the time knowing quite fully the answer to her question. Ginny's life is filled by a continual stream of demands placed upon her by others which must either be fulfilled or ignored with little sense of personal involvement or stake in the lives of others. Whether at work or at home, her life is filled with activities which have little connection

to any internal state of developmental need. She exemplifies Wyschogrod's appraisal of the autochthonous features of work: "While powerful emotional scenarios are frequently enacted in the world of work, such affective components of work are not acknowledged as the primary purpose of the job or profession. . . . [T]he practitioner experiences his role as 'cognitive' or 'pragmatic' rather than as participative." Reflecting this pragmatism, Ginny states that her work and her responsibilities of childrearing have prevented her from living her own life. When asked what kind of life she would be living without these responsibilities, she has no reply.

In Ginny's life there is no sense of history; that is, she has no idea of what she needs to do in order to fulfill the inner demands of her being. Her past and future are mere extensions of the present; there is nothing else to life but "keeping busy" and avoiding major collisions with the ongoing stream of catastrophic fears which fill her life. In the absence of any internal positive identity, Ginny has created a "mine-field" filled with fears involving her son being involved in an automobile accident, unreasonable demands placed upon her by mother, boss and child, demanding customers at work and eternal unrest. Her perceived task in life is to wind her way amid these various deadly obstacles and temporarily avert misfortune. There is no permanence in her life. Her temporal frame is timeless in that each of her days is filled with completing variations of the same

tasks from the day before. Ginny perceives herself going "nowhere." Her life is without roots. There are no formal structures in her life which reflect a sense of rootedness in time and space. Symbolically, she is without a father in that there is no perceived sense of family, personal origin or life purpose, and no sense of belonging to a family of humankind.

Sam manifests autochthonous themes in his life through his deep involvement in religion and politics. According to his religious and political beliefs, he has an obligation to participate in a master plan for crucial world events unfolding in the Middle East. As a true believer, he must dedicate his life to the attainment of certain goals which will foretell certain calamitous future occurrences affecting the lives of everyone on the planet within the next twenty-five years. This involvement will ultimately lead to his attaining eternal peace and the rewards of heaven in the next world.

Sam's interpretation of these occurrences is literal. Wyschogrod correctly assesses the contemporary manifestations of autochthony in the statement, ". . . myth no longer functions as the foundation for . . . self-understanding of the culture. Instead a myth is set in motion as it were and read literally as providing a prospectus for action rather than interpretation." Sam's literal belief in the biblical interpretation of future events and their attendant political consequences is so deep that he professes no interest in

pursuing the social and academic activities culturally approved for someone his age. Consequently, he has little interest in school or peer relations. He spends his time studying the bible, military tactics, learning the use of various armaments such as tanks and guns. He claims no fear of death for he believes that God will appear at the moment of a nuclear confrontation between the superpowers over events unfolding in the Middle East and, at the moment of the holocaust, will save all of the "true believers" by transporting them to heaven where they will live in eternal happiness, while those remaining on the earth will either be destroyed or relegated to a marginal existence on a burnt out planet. This literal interpretation of biblical thought is Sam's identity; it is his life purpose and everything else is irrelevant. In Sam's world there is no need for relatedness to others except as it may serve his ends. There is no need for family or the paternity which it implies, since God is the patriarchal figure who controls his destiny. In this literal drama which epitomizes autochthonous mythology, Sam is an agent of the scripture; he is the son of his own creation of the nature of God. His identity is fulfilled through the attainment of religious dogma. His life is expendable in service to his cause, and, since he is certain he will go to heaven, he has no concerns about his mortality.

There is little sense of inter-generational distinctions in this family. To them, society is a uniform mass to be

understood and viewed according to the individuals' political and religious beliefs, not by parentage. Both Sam and Ginny view other human beings as useful only in that they may aid them in achieving some measure of success with their narrow belief systems. Differentness is seen as a threat. Neither individual has any conscious sense or understanding of the developmental needs appropriate for the sex, age, or position in the society. Each is isolated yet dependent upon the other. Neither knows how to complement or fulfill the needs of the other. In Ginny's eyes, Sam is either able to demonstrate the mental and emotional competence of an adult, or he cannot. When Sam becomes demanding and assertive, Ginny treats him as though he were a superior. Hers is an attitude of loving submission. In those moments she is, in effect, like a little girl and becomes a daughter to her own son. Sam, assuming the complementary position, becomes the father to his own mother. The normal generational structures of the culture break down within this family and become transformed into an autochthonous model in which Sam becomes the father-son to Ginny, a mother-daughter. Each embodies a fusion of roles which is their attempt to bridge the generational vacuum created by the absent father.

Seen from the vantage of Erikson's (1968) epigentic schema, both mother and son are, ironically, fixated developmentally at the adolescent stage of identity versus identity confusion. Neither individual has any firm sense of their psychosocial "identity." As a result, neither can

develop beyond "infantilism and adolescence" until certain fundamental personality changes take place. These fundamental changes must occur if either is to successfully bridge the gulf between narcissism and adulthood. An important step in this direction can come in the therapeutic process by developing in them a sense of their history and their place in the culture. To accomplish this goal, the issue of paternity must be addressed and the absent father must be re-created. More on this point will appear in the sections regarding therapeutic considerations.

The second area of focus in this clinical interpretation is the interpersonal perspective. From this point onward in the clinical picture, Sam will become the primary focus for discussion. In this family, negative interpersonal factors play a central role in interpersonal relations. This family has, generally, been unable to provide a warm, supportive environment which encourages personal growth and development. For example, Ginny has verbally stressed the importance of a proper education, a peer group, and extracurricular activities, but non-verbally she repeatedly demonstrates her helplessness and ineffectuality in demonstrating effective interpersonal models for carrying out these goals. She is essentially unable to provide Sam with the socializing he needs. As a result, Sam evidences the male adolescent disturbance described by Kagel, White and Coyne (1978) in which he manifests the ambivalent aggression-affection toward adult male father figures through his

gender related behavior. This can be seen in his very masculine personal scenario involving military men, great destructive power and a lifestyle which would, if carried out, keep him in close contact with other men. Ironically, the nature of such associations is hardly conducive to vulnerability or interpersonal intimacy. On the everyday level, this ambivalence is manifest in his attitude toward his mother's fiance; one moment great anger is directed toward him, and the next moment he wishes they could go out on a fishing trip together.

The intrafamilial stress within this family is high. There exists a constant undercurrent of interpersonal struggles between the grandmother, mother and son. Sam has successfully managed to play each one off against the other. When he makes a demand upon one which is refused, he knows he can go to the other to have his need satisfied. He also gains the additional satisfaction of knowing that the one who grants his wish will, in turn, criticize the other for denying him his needs. The offending party is then caught in an interpersonal bind incurring both the son's wrath and the complying party's scorn. This powerful "one-two combination" creates a model for capitulation to his needs. Each member of the family is locked into an eternal struggle in which they must somehow fulfill their own emotional needs solely within the confines of the family structure, and because of their incapacity for dealing in a positive interpersonal fashion, must endure considerable amounts of painful

isolation. The result is much like Sam's intrapsychic politico-religious scenario, a kind of balance of negative power in which each of the individuals must gain by aggression, cunning, or obedience what is needed for survival.

Over the course of the counseling process, each family member has revealed their acute sense of loneliness and isolation in a variety of subtle and direct ways. Ginny acknowledges feelings of anger and resentment at being misunderstood by both her mother and her son. This acute absence of emotional support both from within and without the family has left her in a highly dependent position in which she must concede to the wishes of the others in order to gain any sense of emotional nurturing and connectedness. Such concessions, however, later result in her reinforcing her original feelings of anger, resentment and isolation and serve to further remove her, interpersonally, from the others. This vicious circle keeps the mother in perpetual pain.

From Sam's position in the family, the negative interpersonal styles of communicating have been made manageable through his politico-religious belief system. The anger, resentment, and isolation he experiences is channeled symbolically into his interest in the political events and warring factions in the Middle East.

Since Sam has no father figure to model himself after, he has conveniently appropriated the paternal features of the biblical representations of God and Christ as a

substitute. As a coping strategy, this has undoubtedly served him well as a means for dealing with the overwhelming sense of grief and loss which he is repressing. His belief system affords him an opportunity to symbolically act out his developmental struggles inside his own head rather than having to come face to face with the actual realities of his current life situation. Given the non-supportiveness of the interpersonal style which he has learned within his family, the likelihood of his attaining the emotional support and ego strength needed for confronting his developmental needs more directly without outside help is quite remote. His system affords Sam the comfort of a sense of being understood by an omnipotent father figure and a belief in his power to influence the world through his affiliation with the biblical prophecies.

The importance of feeling understood has been described repeatedly in the literature as a singularly important factor for personality development (cf. Millen and Roll, 1977; Roll and Millen, 1978; Grando and Ginsberg, 1976). The fact that Sam has survived emotionally within the family system even though it is only marginally supportive of his emotional needs attests to the usefulness of his politico-religious coping mechanism. Ironically, the utility of this coping mechanism in his home life up to this point leads one to suspect that there will be great reluctance at the prospect of his giving it up in the therapeutic process.

A number of the authors cited in the theoretical discussion (cf. Smith and Walters, 1978; Kagel, White, and Coyne, 1978; and Zinner, 1978) feel that the family environment, such as the one seen in this case study, with an absent-father and a pattern of negative interpersonal relating, tends to produce a male adolescent offspring who is prone to delinquent behavior. Although Sam does engage in some highly negative and destructive behavior in the home, he has no record of any juvenile offenses. Apparently, there is some factor in this family which tends to negate the psychological forces which produce the anti-social behaviors described by these authors. The answer to this discrepancy may lie in Sam's uniquely powerful position within his family. As described previously, he has managed to play off his mother and grandmother in such a fashion that he can get his infantile demands met by one or the other of them. He is, therefore, the least helpless, within the family system, of any of the members. His position in the family affords Sam some subjective experience of mastery over his world. His continued mastery over his mother as he grows and becomes more demanding is, undoubtedly, one of the primary factors which led her to seek out counseling assistance. It can be conjectured that as long as Sam's narcissistic demands are satisfied within the family, there is little likelihood that he will engage in delinquent behavior. However, this young man is repressing a great amount of hostility and anger and, as the family system

begins changing through therapeutic intervention, there is an increasing risk that he may, at some point, choose to ventilate some of the newly emerging pressures in delinquent behavior. Alternatively, if he actually travels to the Middle East to fight in a guerilla force there, he will have a socially sanctioned outlet for his angry impulses.

The interpersonal history of this family is marked by a number of detrimental factors which have had an unfortunate effect on Sam's developmental processes. The absence of Sam's father, the emotional non-involvement of Ginny's fiance, the unavailability of intimate peer relationships, and the deep-seated conviction that most other people do not understand or approve of his religious and political beliefs have seriously impaired Sam's normal adolescent developmental processes. However, one is struck by the fact that, despite all of these detrimental factors in his life, Sam does not present himself as callous, unreachable or incorrigibly hostile. He does appear to be lonely, hungry for relationships in which he can feel accepted on his own terms, and cautious. He is quite reachable emotionally and intellectually, in discussing issues congruent with his political and religious belief system. It is only when the therapist strays into the territory in which he has built up solid emotional defenses that his anger and hostility rapidly surface.

An interpretation of Sam's intrapsychic processes and personality development can readily be presented using the

classical model of the oedipal conflict. For a long time, Sam has been successful in driving an emotional wedge between his mother and her fiance. Ginny has clearly stated, even in the presence of her son, that she prefers her son's company to her fiance's. In those moments, Sam beams in the glow of his mother's admiration and approval. (This is one of the rare occasions where Ginny shows any spark of vitality and positive affect.) Given the current state of their relationship, it is unlikely that Sam will achieve a normal sense of individuation and separation from his mother. Their emotional interdependence runs deep; each has an internal system which depends upon the other for activation. There is little capacity, at this point, for them to initiate positive behaviors out of a sense of self-directedness. Unfortunately, Ginny's emotional development is only slightly ahead of her son's and any attempt on his part to move toward individuation is actively resisted by the mother, and vice versa. The high level of stress in this family and the history of traumatic emotional events has precluded the possibility for a subjective sense of personal security, and given the emotional vulnerability of adolescence, this factor will likely continue to interfere with a normal developmental process in Sam.

Sam's intrapsychic world is characterized by a number of the factors identified by Miller (1978) to describe "borderline adolescents." Sam has little involvement in outside activities, he is unable to experience pleasurable

feelings, believing that life in this world is not intended for such experiences. He expresses no empathy for others, preferring to voice his narcissistic demands upon the family. Also, his fantasy life is filled with omnipotent characters playing out a drama on a cosmic scale. Such intrapsychic features constitute the psyche's way of acting out, symbolically, the developmental struggles which the self would, under more favorable conditions, be actually struggling with in the real world. This symbolic substitution will not lead to any significant positive emotional change.

In a notable discrepancy with Miller's appraisal of the borderline adolescent, Sam has thus far voiced no conscious feelings of despair or hopelessness, although he does admit to occasional feelings of isolation which he quickly covers over with anger. The absence of conscious feelings of hopelessness and despair can only be traced to the themes of his personal coping system. Sam is deeply committed to travelling to the Middle East to fight for his cause once he completes his "preliminary training." This scenario which is essentially optimistic and powerful; without it, it is doubtful he would be able to emotionally withstand the deep loss in his life.

Other features of Sam's psychodynamic process correspond to certain features of the "oedipal grief" syndrome described by Slavin (1978). Sam's scenario is predominately repressive and morbid; his thoughts revolve around military destructiveness, mass annihilation and political strategy. This

scenario has effectively subverted the internal energy which would otherwise be directed toward differentiation from the family. Sam's intrapsychic processes may accurately be characterized by a statement from Slavin's appraisal of the oedipal grief state as being "a detour of the ego from the pursuit of its developmental tasks . . . to maintain a more regressive, less adult type of adaptation."

Other features of Sam's process are discrepant with Slavin's oedipal grief interpretation. He is able to enter into a positive, trusting relationship, with some reservations, in the therapeutic situation. He is eager to please, to demonstrate his intelligence and sense of personal integrity, and to try to excel in order to win the praises of the therapist. These positive expressions, which according to his mother are unimaginable, developed very quickly within an individual therapy context. This rapid turnabout in behavior leads one to suspect that many of the morbid features of his personality may be associated with the mutually negative relationship he maintains with his mother rather than being deeply ingrained features of his personality. This pattern of negativity and withholding Slavin characterizes as "punishing through the withholding of affection." However, the ready capacity of Sam to demonstrate positive affect in the counseling relationship suggests that the morbid features of his personality may not yet be so deeply embedded that they may be correctly labelled oedipal grief. Further, his receiving, in the therapeutic

relationship, the positive regard and emotional support he has needed from an adult male suggests the possibility of his eventually being able to more directly confront his developmental struggles in the future.

In appraising the current state of Sam's intrapsychic process, it can be said that he is currently able to cope marginally with his life situation. If one views the current stage of the therapy process as being a preparatory trust building and ego strengthening phrase, then the prospects for Sam eventually mourning his personal loss and getting on with living his life are hopeful. Such a shift could occur if he finds a way to replace the security and isolation of his current system with some strength and courage from the therapeutic alliance. Some patterns for describing how such a process may occur is the focus for the next section.

Considerations for Establishing a Therapeutic Alliance

The review of the literature indicates there is general agreement that in working with father-absent male adolescents, the male therapist must establish a specific type of relationship with the client in which the positive attitudes predominate. This is necessary in order for the adolescent to begin the difficult work of facing the defensive nature of the personality and character style which he has developed as a survival mechanism. This defensive posture protects the adolescent from experiencing the pain, rage and grief over the absence of the father and the loss of a valued

paternal figure. The positive therapeutic relationship helps to establish for the adolescent an adult model who is caring, concerning, just, and supportive. According to Rachman (1969), the therapist must communicate these qualities and the client must perceive them so that there is a congruence of perception upon which to build an effective alliance.

A group therapeutic approach developed by Rachman in working with father-absent male adolescents is slanted toward the therapist producing behaviors which he calls "fathering" as the vehicle of effective therapeutic change. This approach is adopted by the therapist to provide the adolescent with new gratification for old unfilled emotional needs associated with the absent father. Such an approach, Rachman believes, "matches the treatment model with the adolescent's [intrapsychic] needs for an appropriate masculine model for identification." He continues,

> The group therapist is the only one in the group who has the emotional capacity to directly verbalize caring and affectionate feelings. The delinquent adolescent male cannot directly do this because of the homosexual threat this disclosure implies. They need to hear and feel affection for each one of them to satisfy this unresolved need. They also need the therapist to serve as a model in thie expression, so they eventually will be able to express it to each other.

By contrast, Slavin (1978) describes a therapeutic stance in working with father-absent adolescent males in which "the maintenance of a warm, but carefully neutral stance toward the patient and firm and continuous focus on the internal dimension of the conflict [predominate]." The therapeutic stance described by Slavin does not strive to provide the adolescent with the qualities of "fathering" as does Rachman's approach. Rather, he asserts that a warm, neutral focus on the adolescent's inner conflict will draw his attention toward "the inner ambivalent characteristics of the oedipal grief syndrome." This approach will "mobilize a therapeutically available level of intrapsychic conflict in a framework which facilitates its examination by the patient's own ego functions." Any impulsive action by the adolescent, especially on his powerful negative feelings, is effectively blocked from becoming an interpersonal struggle in therapy by virtue of the therapist's neutral stance--his "avoidance of becoming a gratifying adjunct to the conflict." In Slavin's approach, a differentiated relationship can develop within the client-therapist interactions. Through such emotional differentiation, the old, familiar conflicting feelings can be felt, seek expression, and be worked through "in a working alliance in which a very different set of norms and goals geared to objective understandings are encouraged."

The treatment approach advanced by Slavin allows the adolescent to intrapsychically move from viewing his

internal processes as being guided by unquestioned laws of nature woven into the fabric of the self toward a more detached, objective understanding of intrapsychic process as a personal creation which can be understood, experienced and transformed. With Sam, for example, he holds his politico-religious belief system to be an expression of absolute truth as revealed to him by God. Through an effective process of conflict resolution and increasing independence and differentiation, he could, in time, view such processes as mere mental constructs which can be changed when they no longer serve a useful purpose. This capacity of the self to create distance and objectively look at its own creations is an important experiential step which permits a shift away from symbolically expressed emotional conflicts and toward conscious direct expression where resolution can occur. Slavin states, "Concomitant with this differentiation . . . there seems to be a surfacing of a closely related set of caring protective feelings toward the self; it is as though the clearer recognition that one is hurting oneself virtually entails the dawning sense that one can be other than a hurt self. [This realization] frees up more affect of both positive, or libidinal, as well as aggressively instinctual origins."

In comparing the two therapeutic approaches for working with this population presented in this section, one is struck by Rachman's notion that by developing a therapeutic approach which provides the "fatherly factors" which were absent in

the adolescent's past, an essential therapeutic ingredient will be added to his injured psyche. The notion that the therapist's adoption of a positive father figure stance will serve the client as a needed role model is in clear distinction to Slavin's approach in which the therapist adopts a warm, supportive, but neutral stance. In Rachman's model, the adolescent need not acknowledge and work through the emotional impact of the absent father but, instead, may merely substitute the negative father image with a positive one. This can do no real harm; however, it lacks the therapeutic effectiveness of the client's being able to gain mastery over his own process. In Rachman's approach, the client remains in a dependent position needing nurturance from the therapist; the locus of emotional control remains external to the client's self. In Slavin's approach, the client is viewed as being competent to take mastery of his own process. The neutral therapeutic stance signals to the adolescent the therapist's belief that he can, with external support and guidance, gradually develop the strength and courage to struggle with the developmental issues of his own life and become independent in the process.

In the course of the therapeutic work with Sam, both stances have been utilized. During the early sessions, an emphasis was placed on establishing positive fathering factors in the relationship in an effort to quickly establish a bond of good feelings and a subjective sense of

relatedness in the client. This approach was employed, because a trust level needed to be quickly established, since Sam was only minimally interested in continuing with the therapy at the outset. The approach did quickly produce a positive interpersonal feeling which helped him overcome some powerful initial ambivalence. However, this stance was not useful in focussing on internal processes. As the interpersonal confidence level gradually increased, a subtle shift toward a more neutral stance has taken place. Accompanying this shift in therapist orientation, there has been a concurrent increase in Sam's anxiety level. This increase in anxiety signals his gradually dawning conscious awareness of his personal struggles. At the time of the writing of this paper, the therapeutic process has permitted Sam to gradually tolerate higher internal distress levels without submerging himself in his inner fantasy life. The eventual outcome is yet to be known.

Chapter 4: Summary and Opinion

This research paper has examined the process of psychotherapy between an adult male therapist and an adolescent male client who has experienced personality disturbance associated with the physical and emotional absence of his father. The nature of father-absence as it affects the emotional and psychological development of the male offspring was examined from three perspectives--the cultural-mythological, the interpersonal and the intrapsychic. Various studies have been cited, some of which indicate negative factors as being responsible for developmental personality deficiencies in the offspring. Other articles point to the absence of positive factors as leading to detrimental developmental consequences. The findings generally support the notion that fatherless adolescent males must be exposed to and experience some type of positive caring relationship with an adult male in order to stimulate the necessary positive psychological processes needed for separation and individuation, which is the developmental struggle of this stage of life.

A case study was presented which involved a therapeutic relationship with a mother and her adolescent son who had not had a father since infancy. This study illustrated the developmental impact of father absence on the male offspring.

Additionally, the considerations which contribute to effective therapeutic intervention in such cases were presented.

In conducting this research, two factors have emerged which I feel warrant attention. The first factor of concern is what I call "the assumption of psychological determinism" in the conduct of psychotherapy. There seems to be much emphasis placed in the literature on the importance of models for understanding human development. Erickson's epigenetic scheme, for example, is a valuable tool for organizing the enormous complexity of human development and maturation. When viewed simply as a useful tool for understanding, it is, in my opinion, a valuable asset to the therapeutic process. Too often, however, I detect in the literature an attitude which seeks to elevate such models to the level of standards for "normal" development. When an individual does not meet such standards an emotional deficiency or psychopathology exists. My concern is that such notions have a powerful biasing effect on the therapist in which he may, too easily, adopt the view that "Johnny has had so many warping influences in his life that he can only be helped up to a certain point". Such a paternalistically-oriented attitude can effectively pass along to the client, in subtle but effective ways, the idea that he cannot be expected to ever take charge of his own life. Well-intentioned therapeutic approaches which strive to provide the adolescent with the "good fathering feelings"

he did not receive in the family instill in the client an attitude of helplessness and emotional dependency and in the therapist an attitude of being a savior. The mutually shared notion that the therapist has the power to undo the misfortunes of the past by offering in the present what was needed earlier is an illusion which is detrimental to effective therapy.

The second factor is the illusion in which the client presenting himself for treatment is seen as a victim of unfortunate circumstance who must be handled with great care. This attitude destroys the essence of psychotherapy as an art which embodies hope and optimism. It is the therapist's job to impart a hopeful therapeutic model to the client. Any therapeutic stance which tends to perpetuate client dependency represents a pervasive influence first on the client, in extinguishing his capacity to adopt and embrace the hope needed to marshall the courage and will-power required in effective therapy, and second the therapist, who would believe that he needs to perpetuate dependency to obtain a feeling of being needed and useful. Without the qualities of hope, optimism and independence, psychotherapy is not a healing art but rather a paternalistic exercise.

References

1. Anderson, R. Thoughts on fathering: Its relationship to the borderline condition in adolescence and to transitional phenomena. Adolescent Psychiatry, 1978, 6, 377-395.

2. De Fillipis, N. Cross gender identity in Childhood. Paper presented at "Toward the compentent parent: An interdisciplinary conference on parenting". Atlanta, Georgia, 1977. (ERIC document reproduction service no. ED 142316).

3. Erickson, E. Identity youth and crisis. New York: W. W. Norton, 1968.

4. Flora, R. The effect of self concept upon adolescents' communication with parents. Journal of School Health, 1978, 48 (2), 100-102.

5. Grando, R. & Ginsberg, B. Communication in the father relationship: The parent-adolescent relationship development program. Family Coordinator, 1976, 25 (4), 465-472.

6. Kagel, S., White, R., § Coyne, J. Father-absent and father-present families of disturbed and nondisturbed adolescents. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 1978, 48 (2), 342-352.

7. Millen, L. & Roll, S. Relationships between sons' feelings of being understood by their fathers and measures of the sons' psychological functioning. The Journal of Genetic Psychology, 1977, 130 (1), 19-25.

8. Miller, D. Early adolescent: Its psychology, psychochopathology, and implications for therapy. Adolescent Psychiatry, 1978, 6, 434-437.

9. Nash, J. The father in contemporary culture and current psychological literature. Child Development, 1965, 36, 261-297.

10. Phillip, R & Orr, R. Family relations as perceived by emotionally disturbed and normal boys. Journal of Personality Assessment, 1978, 42 (2), 121-127.

11. Rachman, A. The role of fathering in group psychotherapy with adolescent delinquent males. Paper presented at the American Group Psychotherapy Association convention, New York, N.Y., 1968. (ERIC document reproduction service no. ED034267).

12. Roll, S. & Millen, L. Adolescent males' feeling of being understood by their fathers as revealed through clinical interviews. Adolescence, 1978, 13 (49) 83-93.

13. Shinn, M. Father absence and children's cognitive development. Psychological Bulletin, 1978, 85 (2), 295-324.

14. Slavin, M. Oedipal grief: Mourning or melancholia? International Journal of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy, 1979, 7, 405-436.

15. Smith, R. & Walters, J. Delinquent and non-delinquent males' perceptions of their fathers. Adolescence, 1978, 13 (49), 21-28.

16. Sullivan, H. S. Interpersonal theory of psychiatry. New York: Norton, 1953.

17. Turk, J. & Bell, N. Measuring power in families. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1972, 34, 215-222.

18. Wyschogrod, E. Sons without fathers: A study in identity and culture. Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis, 1978, 6 (2), 249-262.

19. Zinner, J. Combined individual and family therapy of borderline adolescents: Rationale and management of the early phase. Adolescent Psychiatry, 1978, 6, 420-427.