The Difference Dads Make: Young Adult Men’s Experiences of their Fathers

Stefan Gruenert (sgruenert@odyssey.org.au)
Faculty of Life and Social Sciences
Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn VIC 3122 Australia

Roslyn Galligan (rgalligan@swin.edu.au)
Faculty of Life and Social Sciences
Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn VIC 3122 Australia

Abstract

Few studies have examined the role that fathers play in the development and wellbeing of their sons. This paper examines the relationships, father memories and wellbeing of 194 young, heterosexual men who completed self-report questionnaires as part of a broader study of men’s relationships. Five groups of men with different patterns of relationships Secure, Anxious, Resilient, Foreclosed or Fearful were identified on the basis of a cluster analysis of their relationships with their mothers and fathers, their best male friend, their approach to romantic relationships with women, and their masculinity ideologies. Differences between the groups of men suggest that close relationships with fathers are associated with higher levels of wellbeing, with lower depression and social anxiety, with the ability to experience intimacy in non-verbal ways, and to have closer relationships with male friends. An analysis of men’s father memories indicated that positive and intimate fathering generally involved both verbal and non-verbal components, and included recreation and sport, emotional and practical availability and support, consistency and reliability, approval and guidance, and appropriate boundary setting.

Keywords: Fathers; Men; Relationships; Child Development; Intimacy; Wellbeing.

Introduction

While the benefits of a positive mother-child relationship have been well established in the psychological literature, research examining the role that fathers play in normative child development is only beginning to emerge (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). For example, in a recent update on the inclusion of fathers in empirical investigations of child psychopathology, Cassano, Adrian, Veits, and Zeman (2006) found that the role of fathers continues to be neglected in reported research. They found, however, that this is gradually improving as more fathers were involved as research participants between 1999 and 2005 than between 1992 and 1998.

Despite reports that Australian teenagers spend less than 15 minutes a day with their fathers (Colman, 1996), a body of evidence is steadily growing to support the importance of fathers as co-parents who share some responsibility for the wellbeing of their offspring, even into adulthood. For example, Rohner and Veneziano (2001) noted that many studies examining the influence of parental love on young adult offspring’s social, emotional, and cognitive functioning have found the effect of paternal love to be as great, and occasionally greater, than the effect of maternal love. Furthermore, they also suggest that father love is often the only other predictor of an adult child’s social, emotional, and cognitive outcomes, after mother’s love is controlled for. Videon (2005) found that fathers had a unique, direct and equally strong impact on adolescent wellbeing as mothers. Close relationships with fathers have also been found by others to act as a protective factor that reduces symptoms of maladjustment in adolescents living with inter-parental conflict (Grych, Rayno, & Fosco, 2004).

A large body of work has focused on the negative impact that father absence or negative fathering can have on children, especially boys, including academic performance and school drop out (Jones, 2004; Menning, 2006), violence (Mackey & Immerman, 2004a), and incarceration, drug and alcohol abuse (Blankenhorn, 1995; Popone, 1996; Thomas, Farrell, & Barnes, 1996). Fatherless boys are also more likely to be sexually active at an early age, have marriages or relationships which fail, and leave high school prematurely (Glen & Kramer, 1987; Lykken, 1997; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Living away from biological fathers has been associated with a host of negative outcomes for children, which is mediated by the degree of father involvement for both boys and girls (Carlson, 2006). This literature has also highlighted that many fathers are not staying in family homes. For example, by the late 1990’s only 45% of all men were living in a house with children, compared to 60% in the mid-1960’s (Eggebeen, 2001).

Support for a strong father influence on child outcomes is not unequivocal, however, as several studies have found that fathers, both biological and social, only play a peripheral role in the psychological and intellectual development of children (Hawkins & Eggebeen, 1991; Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987). Others note that single-mothers, especially those

with good resources, can raise well-adjusted children (Crockett, Eggebeen, & Hawkins, 1993). Yet Amato (1993) found that father absence was still related to the risk of child problems even when economic factors were controlled for. Moreover, in a meta-analysis of studies with non-residential fathers, Amato (1999) found that authoritative parenting, that was warm and supportive and provided guidance was associated with children's well-being and negatively associated with internalising and externalising problems.

In intact families, Bronte-Tinkew, Moore and Carrano (2006) found that positive father-child relationships predicted less engagement in delinquency and early substance use in adolescents, especially when fathers had neither an authoritarian or permissive parenting style. This effect was stronger for boys than girls in their study. Among African American adolescents, a positive father-child relationship was a strong protective factor for alcohol use whether fathers resided at home or not (Jordan & Lewis, 2005). Such studies highlight how our understanding of families and child outcomes is greatly reduced if we continue to ignore the nature and effect of the father-child bond and the experiences of children in our research (Mackey & Immerman, 2004b).

**Men’s Close Relationships**

Recent studies of close relationships have relied heavily on frameworks such as attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988; Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998) and on verbal indicators of intimacy such as emotional self-disclosure. Our understanding of the mother-child bond, romantic closeness, and ‘traditionally female’ aspects of intimacy has been enhanced by such research. However, men’s same-sex relationships and the diversity of ways in which intimacy can be experienced and expressed have largely been ignored by this approach (Twohey & Ewing, 1995; Wood & Inman, 1993).

Weingarten (1991, p.291) has proposed that, “watching a sporting event, listening to music, going fishing, cooking a meal, reading a story aloud, driving in a car, discussing a problem, building a desk, or talking about a relationship can all be intimate or non-intimate depending on how two people think about the experience.” This view supposes that the subjective, cognitive evaluations formed during a potentially vast array of experiences are central to the examination of intimacy. This is especially so when examining young men’s relationships which have traditionally revolved around physical activities and events rather than verbal communication. Nevertheless, many previous investigations of relationship closeness have only assessed intimacy in narrow ways. In particular, many assessments have been overly reliant on verbal and expressive domains and have not considered the subjective feelings of intimacy experienced while engaging in instrumental or practical tasks or while playing sport or socialising.

Furthermore, some researchers have stressed the need to examine both within- and between-gender differences (Duck & Wright, 1993; Nardi, 1992). They propose that the importance of gender may have been over exaggerated in intimacy research. They reason that the similarities between men’s and women’s intimate relationships are probably more important than any differences, and that significant variation probably exists within each gender.

This paper presents aspects of a broader study that aimed to enhance our understanding of the diversity in men’s experiences of intimate relationships and the associated levels of psychological wellbeing. While men’s approach to romantic relationships, their best male friends, and their overall experience of both parents while growing up was examined, particular attention was given to the under-researched nature of the relationships men have with their fathers. The study aimed to portray the diversity amongst men by identifying groups of men who had distinctive profiles and varied in how they conducted their intimate relationships. This person centred approach, aimed to capture the holistic patterning of men’s intimate relationship functioning and then trace the links to fathering as well as to young adult men’s current psychological wellbeing.

**Method**

**Procedure**

To ensure an adequate range of relationship types and wellbeing was examined, men from several different communities within the city of Melbourne, Australia were recruited using different strategies. In addition to the author’s personal network, respondents were recruited from universities, a general counselling centre, an alternative lifestyles conference, a centre for relationship and personal growth, a men’s group, a men’s accommodation refuge, a football club, a circus, a catering company, a fire brigade station, shopping malls, and from several launderettes in the metropolitan area. Some participants, who were recruited at a conference and at two city locations during trading hours, received $10, or gifts of similar value for their participation. Other men were given a raffle ticket for a book voucher for participating. All other men participated on a voluntary basis or for course credit. Data was collected between November 1998 and May 2000 using questionnaires returned anonymously, generally by post.

**Measures**

The measures were contained in four, counter-balanced versions of a larger 22-page questionnaire. Self reported measures included: demographics (age, marital status, employment, student status); depression using the Beck Depression Inventory II (Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996)
with a total score based on all 21-items ($\alpha = .91$); anxiety using Watson and Friend’s (1969) Social Avoidance and Distress Scale (SADS, 28-items, KR-20=.92) and Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (FNES, 30-items, KR-20=.93); adult romantic attachment styles using Brennan, Clark, and Shaver’s (1998) Experiences In Close Relationships Scale with two 18-item sub-scales (avoidance $\alpha=.91$ and anxiety $\alpha=.92$); personal growth using a 6-item short form of Personal Growth (\(\alpha=.72\)) from Ryff’s (1989) Scales of Psychological Wellbeing; masculinity ideology using two purpose built scales of Traditional Male Values and Homophobia (7 items, \(\alpha=.74\)) and Need for Respect (4-items, \(\alpha=.59\)); life satisfaction using Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffen’s (1985) 5-item Satisfaction With Life Scale (\(\alpha=.88\)); alcohol and drug use with an adapted version of Weinberger and Bartholomew’s (1996) Problems Associated with Alcohol Use Scale (8-items, \(\alpha=.90\)), and purpose built scales of relationship with mother while growing up (3-items, \(\alpha=.85\)) and father while growing up (3-items, \(\alpha=.87\)). Current intimacy with father and intimacy with a best male friend were examined using total scores from two purpose built scales (47-items each) addressing six domains of intimacy (satisfaction, emotional self-disclosure, social activity, instrumental activity, deep understanding, affection and lack of negative experiences, \(\alpha=.73-.94\)). For further information on scales see Gruenert (2003).

Participants

Respondents comprised a self-selecting sample of 194 males who identified as heterosexual and who had not fathered any children. Respondents were restricted to those aged between 18 and 35 years with the mean age being 24.8 years (SD=5.1). Full-time students made up 49.5% of the sample. Approximately 23% of these students were participating in an undergraduate psychology research experience program for course credit, with the other 77% enrolled in a variety of other courses across several different universities. Over 60% of the students were also employed on a part-time or casual basis. Respondents who were employed full-time made up 36.1% of the sample. The remaining 14.4% of participants were neither studying nor employed on a full time basis.

Approximately 25% of the sample lived with their partners, 27% were dating but not living together, 23% were currently single but had previously been in a long term relationship, while 25% were single and had not previously been in a long term relationship. The vast majority (84.5%) of respondents were born in Australia.

Results

Relationship Patterns (Clusters)

Sub-groups of men with similar patterns of relationships experiences were statistically identified using the clustering procedure of SPSS-PC. Eight variables were used to classify the men; current Intimacy with Fathers, current Intimacy with a Best Male Friend, Perceptions of Mothers whilst growing up, Perceptions of Fathers whilst growing up, Traditional Male Values and Homophobia, Need for Respect, and Romantic Anxiety and Romantic Avoidance. Clustering was done in a two step process, which has been shown to give stable solutions, with high validity and recovery of known structure (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006). A hierarchical procedure was first used to determine the most appropriate number of clusters and their centres. Cases were then re-clustered around these centres. All cases with complete data were assigned membership of a cluster and no multivariate extremes were identified. Further details of the clustering procedure can be found in Gruenert (2003). The five clusters have unique profiles which are partially captured by their cluster names.

Secure The men in this cluster are characterised by reporting good relationships with both parents whilst growing up and by high levels of intimacy with their father. In addition they experience the highest levels of intimacy with their best friend, relative to the other clusters. These men express little anxiety or avoidance in their romantic relationships, leading to a secure style of romantic attachment. They express views that are non-traditional for males, without homophobia, and they have the lowest need for the respect of others.

This cluster was the second largest with 23.5% of the respondents. It is composed of the oldest participants (mean age of 27.8 years), a good proportion of whom are living with their partners or are married (45%). Many other men in this group have a current partner or have had a previous long term relationship (43%), while a small proportion are single and have never had a long term romantic relationship (12%). By the age of 16, following parental separation, 10% of these men no longer lived with their fathers, while 2% no longer lived with their mothers.

Anxious The men in this group are characterised by reporting the highest levels of anxiety in their romantic relationships, relative to the other groups. They also report some degree of avoidance leading to preoccupied and fearful romantic attachment styles. Despite this, they report good relationships with their mothers and moderate relationships with their fathers whilst growing up. They subscribe to traditional masculine views encompassing some homophobia, and have a fairly high need for the respect of others. In addition, they have only moderate levels of intimacy with their fathers and
with their best male friends, relative to the men in the secure group.

This cluster is the largest with 33.5% of the respondents. It is composed of the youngest men (mean age of 22.9 years), of whom only a few are living with their partners or married (13%). Most of the men in this group have a current, or have had a previous long term partner (65%), but many are single and have never had a long term romantic relationship (22%). By the age of 16, following parental separation, 30% of these men no longer lived with their fathers, while 10% no longer lived with their mothers.

Resilient The men in this cluster are characterised by reporting very low levels of intimacy with their fathers, the lowest of all groups. While their relationships with their fathers were poor whilst growing up, their relationships with their mothers were moderate, relative to other groups. Despite this, they report very high levels of intimacy with their best male friends. They also experience low levels of anxiety and moderate to low levels of avoidance in their romantic relationships, tending to have mostly secure with some dismissing styles of romantic attachment. In addition, they display very non-traditional masculine views, very little homophobia, and have little need for respect from others.

This cluster is the smallest with only 10.6% of the respondents. The men in this group are somewhat older (mean age of 27.1 years), with a high proportion living with their partners or being married (32%), many others have a current partner or have had a previous long term relationship (58%), while very few are single, having never had a long term romantic relationship (10%). By the age of 16, following parental separation, 55% of these men no longer lived with their fathers, while 5% no longer lived with their mothers.

Foreclosed The men in this cluster are characterised by their reports of very good relationships with their parents whilst growing up and equal highest levels of intimacy with their fathers, when compared to men in the other groups. Despite these positive relationships, they report equal lowest levels of intimacy with their best male friends, when compared with the men in other clusters. Furthermore, Foreclosed men report moderate levels of anxiety and some avoidance in their romantic relationships with women, having a range of romantic attachment styles. They also express views that are homophobic and very traditional for males, and they have a high need for the respect of others.

This group contains 15.1% of the respondents whose ages are average for the sample (mean age of 24.5 years). Very few of these men are living with their partners or are married (7%). Some of the men in this group have a current partner or have had a previous long term relationship (41%), but most are single having never had a long term romantic relationship (52%). By the age of 16, following parental separation, 18% of these men no longer lived with their fathers and 18% no longer lived with their mothers.

Wellbeing Differences

In order to examine whether members of the five relationship clusters differed in their psychological wellbeing, a one-way between groups MANCOVA was conducted to control for possible influences of age. After controlling for age, there was a significant difference between cluster members on the combined wellbeing measures $F(56,169) = 2.17, p < 0.001$; Wilk’s Lambda $= .481$. A partial eta squared $\eta^2 = .17$ suggests a large effect size.

Subsequent between-subject tests indicated that age was not related to any wellbeing measure presented here. As a result, cluster scores on the individual wellbeing measures were then compared using follow up one-way ANOVA’s without adjusting for age differences. Mean ratings for age and wellbeing measures for each relationship cluster, along with $F$ values, significance levels, and effect sizes (partial eta squared) are presented in Table 1. All comparisons were significant at the $p<0.004$ level with moderate to large effect sizes.

Members of the Secure, Resilient and Foreclosed clusters reported significantly greater satisfaction with their lives than those in the Fearful cluster, while members of the Secure and Foreclosed clusters also reported significantly greater life satisfaction than those in the Anxious cluster. Depression was significantly greater in members of the Fearful and Anxious clusters than those in the Foreclosed and Secure clusters, with members of the Fearful cluster reporting more depression than those of the Resilient cluster, and those of the Resilient cluster reporting more depression than those in the Secure cluster. In addition, members of the Resilient and Secure clusters placed a significantly
higher value on personal growth than those in the Fearful cluster. The members of the Resilient cluster also placed a higher value on personal growth than those in the Anxious and Foreclosed clusters.

On measures of anxiety, members of the Fearful cluster reported significantly more social anxiety and distress in social situations than members of the Secure, Resilient and Foreclosed clusters. Similarly, members of the Fearful and Anxious clusters reported significantly more fear of the negative evaluation of others in social situations than those in the Secure, Resilient and Foreclosed clusters. Lastly, members of the Fearful and Resilient clusters had significantly more social and emotional problems associated with their drug or alcohol use than members of Secure and Foreclosed clusters.

Memories of Fathers
Participants were asked two open questions about their fathers adapted from Bruhn’s (1992) Early Memories Procedure. One question related to a clear and important memory and the other related to a time when they felt close to their father. These questions aimed to elicit participants’ autobiographical memories and provide some insight into their working models of intimacy. Themes identified within these memories serve to illustrate differences between the five relationship patterns and provide examples of positive and destructive fathering. An independent coder rated approximately 10% of the memories revealing a high level of congruence with the author (average inter-rater agreement 95%, Cohen’s Kappa = 0.82 for Clear or Important memories; average inter-rater agreement 92%, Cohen’s Kappa = 0.81 for Close memories). Only main themes, identified by at least 30% of participants in any one group, are presented in Table 2.

Clear or Important Memories
Themes identified in men’s Clear or Important memories reveal a great deal of diversity between the five relationship patterns. Those with a Secure or Foreclosed pattern of relationships were more likely to report positive experiences, Resilient respondents generally reported negative experiences, while respondents with an Anxious or Fearful pattern of relationships reported both positive and negative memories of their fathers, but with fathers remembered as being unpredictable. Where punishment or conflict was mentioned for wrong doing, members of the Secure cluster reported that it had been sensitively handled by their fathers, unlike other groups.

Secure “I remember when I moved out of a share house when I was 18, and my father drove up from the country, for 4 hours, and picked up all my possessions that I had left behind, because I didn’t want to go back there. It made me feel loved as my dad took the responsibility to look after my affairs, no questions asked, and helped me out. I never forgot what he did then, and have tried hard to let him know that I appreciated it.”

“I remember when I lied to my father and he told me he knew I was lying. He didn’t punish me but left me with a feeling of regret for having disappointed him in this way and for a break of trust. From then on I decided and have kept as honest as possible.”

Anxious “I remember when as kids dad used to be quite active in our lives, particularly in our games, taking us on adventures, etc. At this stage I really felt like dad was a god in my world along with my mother of course. However, I also remember how with increasing work pressure dad had less time for us and became more distant and grumpier.”

“T remember when we were eating dinner and I was 5 or 6 yrs old. I wasn’t eating over my plate, & was dropping food. My dad grabbed my head & forced it over the plate. It was very roughly done and it hurt me. Later, he changed & ceased being so angry & aggressive. But he stores up his anger and blows up every 3 or 4 months.”

Resilient “My father getting me to jerk him off while looking at a porno. As he “taught” me how to masturbate at 11 years. I felt disgusted, shamed, degraded, revolted.”

“I’m back in Ballarat, I’m 8, and I’m waiting for dad to come and pick me up so we can go and stay at his place (Melbourne). All fucking day I waited for the prick. Not the last time that’s for sure. I hate thinking back to that kid waiting for something that would never arrive. I guess I learnt that trusting people is a big ask for me.”

Foreclosed “At my 21st Birthday, dad made a great speech about me which really showed how good our relationship is which ended in a handshake.”

“As early as I can remember, he had already encouraged me to pursue my dream and live my own life to the fullest. He always thinks of others first before himself. He is always available for advice or to lend a helping hand when I need it.”

Fearful “I remember when we used to kick a football back and forth in the street. Nothing specific just the general good feeling I had as we did this.”

“T remember when as a child I was once beaten for releasing the handbrake in the family car; rolling downhill and smashing into a neighbour’s fence. I was never beaten as badly as I was for this accident. Even then I remember thinking that he went overboard with his discipline and felt it was uncalled for. I feel, however, that I have forgiven him for this.”
Table 1: Mean ratings, F values and effect sizes ($\eta^2$) for age and wellbeing variables for each relationship cluster.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secure</th>
<th>Anxious</th>
<th>Resilient</th>
<th>Foreclosed</th>
<th>Fearful</th>
<th>F-value</th>
<th>$\eta^2$</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>n</strong></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.28*</td>
<td>.20</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>4.2&lt;sub&gt;ab&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>4.7&lt;sub&gt;bc&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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<td>3.8&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>10.18*</td>
<td>.20</td>
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<td>10.7&lt;sub&gt;cd&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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<td>14.6&lt;sub&gt;d&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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<td>.19</td>
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<td>7.00*</td>
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<td>8.1&lt;sub&gt;bc&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>6.5&lt;sub&gt;ab&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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<td>7.83*</td>
<td>.17</td>
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<td>Fear of Negative Evaluation</td>
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<td>.10</td>
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Note: Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p<0.05$. Post hoc tests were Tukey’s HSD. * Significant at $p<0.004$.  

Table 2: Percentage of members within each relationship pattern that reported the main themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clear / Important Memory of Father</th>
<th>Secure</th>
<th>Anxious</th>
<th>Resilient</th>
<th>Foreclosed</th>
<th>Fearful</th>
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<tr>
<td>admire / value / respect</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>practical help / physical job</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>sport / games / time together</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>conflict / let down</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>effort made / altruistic</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>enjoyed company / had fun</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
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Close to Father Memory

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secure</th>
<th>Anxious</th>
<th>Resilient</th>
<th>Foreclosed</th>
<th>Fearful</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no incident /not close</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>admire / value / respect</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>openness / self disclosure</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>effort made / altruistic</td>
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<td>40</td>
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<td>warmth / love</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Only theme reported by at least 30% of participants in any one group are reported. Percentages greater than 30% are highlighted in bold.

Close Memories of Fathers Greater consensus in themes were reported across the relationship patterns within memories of closeness to fathers. For example, close experiences with fathers often occurred within the context of playing sport or games, or when spending time together doing an activity. Many respondents also expressed admiration, respect, warmth and love for their fathers during these close experiences. However, differences suggest that for the most part, Secure respondents gave general and detailed descriptions of positive experiences with their fathers.

While respondents with a Foreclosed pattern also described positive experiences, they were typically vague and described few themes other than admiration or respect. Many Resilient respondents could not recall instances of closeness with their fathers.

Despite having been let down at times by their fathers, Anxious respondents also reported respect for their fathers and felt close during times of openness and self disclosure. Fearful respondents felt close when their fathers acted out of character and made a special effort for them, boosting their self esteem. However, they lacked the admiration or respect for their fathers that was displayed in the other clusters.

Secure “I remember when my father taught me to sail in my first dinghy. I felt excited and safe in his judgment about what to do next. I have always loved sailing with him; and enjoyed knowing that he respected my abilities.”

Anxious “I remember how up until I was perhaps 11 or 12 years old dad used to tuck me in and sing our special ‘bed-time’ song before giving me a hug goodnight. I felt loved, safe and important in his life. Consequently I felt very close to my father.”

“I remember when my father decided to tell me a story about his life and compared it to the life I was having. He pointed out the little things his father never did for him. I felt so close to my father that day as I realised that the love we had between us was greater than the love he had for his father.”

Resilient “Quite frankly, I can’t think of one. Nope, Nothing, Zilch, Bugger All, empty Void. The guy is a selfish Git!”

“I avoid any situations like this but my father tries to get close (at the airport). Whenever he goes away overseas and perhaps thinks he’ll never come back. More self pity than emotion though. He’ll try other times, when drunk, to relate on a macho level, as in talking about ‘birds’ and ‘screwing’. This does not attract me at all.”

Foreclosed “I remember when dad told me how he felt about me when I made the State cricket team as a
person and a cricketer. It made me realise how special dad is to me.”

“I remember when I broke my arm playing soccer in the 10th grade. He was worried sick about me. He always is when I’m ill and that makes me feel cared for and loved even though he doesn’t express it verbally I know he does through his physical actions.”

Fearful “I remember when my father took me to a party meeting in down-town Sydney. He talked to me about the issues. Not that I cared. I just felt very special because he showed interest to me.”

“I remember a number of times when my father would take me shopping with him on Saturday mornings. When he did this I felt included and that he cared for me & wanted me with him.”

Discussion

The experiences of being fathered do not occur in isolation, hence the analysis of men’s fathering and current intimacy with fathers was simultaneously considered along with men’s other relationships in a holistic way. The five groups of men identified in this study reported many differences in the nature and degree of intimacy they experienced with their fathers. Experiences of closeness with fathers were associated with a diverse range of domains including sport and recreation, instrumental support, a lack of inappropriate negative events, and social aspects in addition to the ‘traditionally female’ expressive aspects such as emotional self-disclosures. Importantly, descriptions also included cognitive evaluations of the relationship such as mutual appreciation, care, respect, understanding, satisfaction, and enjoyment as noted by Weingarten (1991).

Close relationships with Fathers

Three of the five groups of men reported good to very good levels of intimacy with their fathers, in addition to closeness with their fathers while they were growing up. These were the Foreclosed and Secure men who reported excellent father-son relationships and Anxious men who reported moderately good, but somewhat unpredictable, father-son relationships.

As the multiple domains of intimacy and men’s memories highlighted, the fathering relationship can be expressed through a number of aspects including recreation and emotional and practical support, and may often contain giving guidance, setting boundaries, and some conflict. The memories of Secure men indicated that their fathers provided an involved, mentoring role and that closeness was experienced through a diversity of activities, characterised by mutual respect and understanding. Any punishment or conflicts that were recalled were generally mild and were handled fairly and sensitively by their fathers. These men are more than likely to maintain an admiration for their fathers and view them as role models who teach and support them throughout the lifespan (Popenoe, 1996). In this way, Secure men seem to have learnt that others can be relied upon for support, that one can be open about problems and mistakes, and that the consequences for wrong doing are fair, safe, and in proportion with any misbehaviour. These findings lend support to previous research that has found authoritative parenting, which includes reasonable disciplining behaviours, are among those most beneficial to children (Parke & Buriel, 1998). This is consistent with Peart, Pungello, Campbell and Richey (2006) who found that young African American men expect personal presence, material support, counsel, and guidance in ideal fathers.

In contrast, the memories of Foreclosed men contain predominantly glowing descriptions of their fathers that contain few indications of this guiding and mentoring role. They also contain very few expressive dialogues. It is therefore difficult to understand whether the fathers of Foreclosed men lead by example, modelling appropriate behaviour as found by Chen and Kaplan (2001), albeit in a non-verbal way, or whether they provided little guidance at all. Greenberger, O’Neil, and Nagel (1994) emphasised the mentoring role of fathers, whereby knowledge and problem solving strategies are modelled to children, particularly sons.

This modelling of a stable masculine identity by fathers may be the mechanism by which some men learn how to be intimate in their relationships with other men, shaping their internal working models (Bowby, 1973). Some fathers may talk to their sons through this modelling while others rely largely on identification to transmit behaviours. Paquette’s (2004) theorising that fathers expand children’s openness to the world through play and the provision of safe risk-taking opportunities, may be relevant especially for Foreclosed men. However, the over-idealised reports of fathers by Foreclosed men may also represent a defensive stance, whereby only positive experiences are reported to mask a lack of real connection.

Anxious men, on the other hand, reported only moderate levels of intimacy, despite some closeness with both parents while growing up. As the Anxious men formed the largest group, this may be a common experience for men. It seems that the mild depression, and social anxiety experienced by Anxious men means that their less than ideal fathering, and their approach to current peer relationships, has not served them as well as that of Secure or Foreclosed men.

Their memories suggest they have shared many of the same positive father experiences as Secure men, but with some level of unpredictability regarding their father’s behaviour and approval. Anxious men describe episodes where fathers could not be relied on to be available, and were not consistently supportive or warm. Unusually, they were the only group to commonly report self-disclosure and openness within their father memories.
While the fathers of Secure men seemed to encourage their son’s autonomy, being there to help with problems, the unpredictability of the fathers of Anxious men seemed to foster dependency and some preoccupation with the views of others. Anxious men appeared reliant on others’ views to validate themselves and were also fearful of others’ negative evaluations in social situations. This fits well with previous research in which the lack of parenting structure and consistency, particularly for male children, has been linked to adult anxiety (Ramirez, 2001). Given that a third of anxious men no longer lived with their fathers by the time they were 16 years of age, the lack of household structure and consistency may also be related to this anxiety.

It seems that the doubt or lack of security is pervasive throughout all the relationships of Anxious men and individual factors such as temperament may also play a role (Prior, Sanson, Smart, & Oberklaid, 2001). One alternative explanation for their anxiety may therefore be that an innate anxious characteristic or anxiety-related personality factors such as neuroticism or emotional reactivity are responsible for these feelings and behaviours. As a result, Anxious men may be more inclined to clearly remember instances when they lacked control or were let down by fathers. Nevertheless, if the fathers of Anxious men were unreliable and did not encourage autonomy, then they may have contributed to the reassurance and respect needed by Anxious men in order to confirm their identity, as suggested by Orlofsky, Marcia, and Lesser (1973). Furthermore, the failure of Anxious men’s fathers to be a reliable or reassuring presence may have also led these men to be unsure of what it means to be a man and to experience anxiety about their masculinity and identity. This would explain their moderate levels of homophobia and anxiety about physical closeness with other males.

Such differences provide support for previous suggestions that positive fathering is able to enhance the wellbeing of sons through warmth and support (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). By being a constant presence that engenders a sense of security, fathers may also teach their sons that the support of other men can be relied upon. Fathers may thus contribute to the wellbeing of their sons by fostering the independence that grows from this security. Furthermore, by being involved with sons in a variety of activities, fathers expand the ways in which closeness can be expressed and experienced by sons. In this way, good fathering seems to be associated with enhanced positive wellbeing and the capacity to experience intimacy in a number of diverse ways, in addition to reduced psychological dysfunction.

The Father Wound
While Secure, Anxious and, Foreclosed men experienced good or “good enough” fathering, both Resilient and Fearful men typically reported very poor and often abusive relationships with their fathers. Despite this ‘father wound’ (Pease, 2000), the other relationships of Resilient men were positive and similar to those of Secure men. This was in strong contrast to Fearful men who had all-round poor relationships.

The moderate to good outcomes for Resilient men may relate to the close relationships they reported having with their mothers while growing up, which did not occur for Fearful men. This may have given Resilient men the capacity to form intimate relationships as adults. Nevertheless, the mild psychological problems that were reported by Resilient men, in addition to the restricted nature of their intimacy with other men, indicate that there were some negative consequences associated with this poor father-son relationship.

Resilient men were the only men whose clear or important memories with their fathers typically lacked experiences of time together in shared activities, games or sports, although a number of them reported isolated instances with their fathers where they had experienced closeness in this way. Instead, excessive punishment and abuse was frequently mentioned, and they commonly described being let down or disappointed by their fathers. Within all their other relationships, no quantitative significant differences were found between Resilient and Secure men, including their relationships with their mothers while growing up, their romantic anxiety or avoidance, and their relationships with their best male friends. There was also no difference in their masculinity ideology.

For the purpose of this study, it was less important whether or not Resilient men actually experienced more severe or frequent punishment from their fathers than men with other relationship patterns. Rather, as emphasised previously by Bruhn (1990), their subjective evaluations and commonly reported punishment experiences suggests that Resilient men have mental models of their fathers that are centred around punishment, dislike, and conflict. Although some could recall times when their fathers had made a special effort or acted in an altruistic way, especially when offering practical help, these events seemed to be framed as unusual or rare.

Given that Resilient men had similar profiles to Secure men on all relationships with the exception of fathers, and that this was the only quantitatively measured relationship difference separating the two groups, it seems reasonable to assume that comparing Resilient men with Secure men on the indicators of wellbeing, should highlight some of the differences uniquely associated with a poor father-son relationship. The overall strength of the Resilient men was indicated by their moderate to high levels of personal growth and life satisfaction. While they tended to score marginally lower than Secure men on life satisfaction, they rated themselves as significantly more depressed and as having significantly more social and emotional...
problems associated with their drug use than Secure men. These results closely match the studies reported by Lykken (2000) and Popenoe (1996) which have found depression, criminality and drug use to be associated with poor father-son relationships or father absence.

Despite these problems, average depression scores for Resilient men were within the clinically mild range, indicating that the effects of this poor father-son relationship were not as severe for Resilient men. However, those with levels of dysphoria considered to be clinically high or severe, whereas no Secure men scored in this range. Furthermore, no Resilient men had moderate levels of dysphoria on average, but up to 18% of Resilient men reported severe or high levels depression. The lack of relationship support to buffer Fearful men against any negative life events places them at high risk for suicide or drug related deaths. As noted from their memories, the internal working models of Fearful men may direct their attention to other individuals who make a special effort for them, or who show some care. Ironically, any approval seeking behaviour in this group may be perceived by others as dependency, and may threaten the maintenance of any relationships they have established. Rather than being preoccupied with seeking closeness, however, it seems that most Fearful men have become deeply mistrustful of close relationships and tend to be avoidant and self-reliant as previously found in those with fearful-insecure adult attachment styles (Cooper, Shaver & Collins, 1998; Mikulincer, 1998).

It seems then that at least one positive parental relationship is important for child outcomes. Less than ideal fathering can be offset by good relationships with mothers like those of Anxious and Resilient men, even if their adult relationships lack the breadth and depth of intimacy like the relationships of Secure men. Others have also found this pattern. While King and Sobolewski (2006) found the quality of the mother-child bond to be a stronger predictor of child wellbeing than the father-child bond, they did find that adolescents with weak mother bonds but strong father bonds had fewer internalizing and externalizing problems than those who had weak ties to both parents.

Limitations
Care must be taken not to assume causality in the father-son relationship. The observed associations may result from unmeasured variables, or relate to the current mood states of the participants. In addition, the sample does highlight the diversity among men, it is not a representative sample and hence other dominant relationship patterns may also exist, especially within other cultural or socio-economic groups. Furthermore, clusters were formed specifically to address the aims of this study and may have been different if other variables had been used to form them. Lastly, measures of intimacy developed for and used in this study should be further developed and validated in other populations.

Conclusions & Implications
The study adds to our understanding of men’s working models of relationships beyond attachment styles, by incorporating the role of fathers. It also adds further evidence to the association between close and positive fathering and wellbeing for men. The study suggests that positive fathering may include both verbal and non-
verbal components including recreation and sport, emotional and practical availability and support, consistency and reliability, approval and guidance, and appropriate discipline or boundary setting. It is important that researchers and clinicians alike recognize the diversity among men and not make gender-based assumptions about their relationships or experiences of being parented.

Future research examining relationships and wellbeing should therefore include the role of fathers and should continue to develop broader measures of intimacy which assess cognitive, instrumental, and social as well as expressive domains.

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Correspondence to: Dr Stefan Gruenert
Odyssey House Victoria
660 Bridge Rd, Richmond VIC 3121 Australia.
sgruenert@odyssey.org.au

Research Profiles
Dr. Stefan Gruenert is a registered psychologist with more than 7 years experience in the Drug and Alcohol sector as a clinician, supervisor, researcher, and manager. He is currently the Chief Executive Officer for Odyssey House Victoria. His clinical and research interests include intimacy and sexual coercion, community alcohol use and treatment interventions, parenting, especially the role of fathers, and the experiences and needs of children with substance dependent parents. Stefan has developed a number of resources for workers in the Drug and Alcohol field, provides advice to Government, and regularly presents his work at National and International conferences.

Dr. Roslyn Galligan is a lecturer in Psychology at Swinburne University where she coordinates Developmental Psychology. Her more recent research has centred on social and emotional development in children and adolescents, with a focus on how fathers as well as mothers contribute to the development of the child. Much of Roslyn’s research uses an attachment theory perspective to capture variation in working models of family relating and the expression/regulation of emotions. Roslyn is also interested in the longer term outcomes of these working models and how they lead to problems in emotional functioning, especially shame-proneness and its relation to family violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and depression.