

The Paternal Imperative

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I used to be a rebellious son; but now, following David Blankenhorn's (1995) lead, here I am, trying to mount a plausible defense of what he has termed "the Old Father." To get on with it, this is my essential argument: strong fathers can be a real pain, oppressors of their wives and children, but they do get the job done. Routinely, they oversee the evolution of little boys - every man-Jack of them a potential sociopath - into productive men and responsible, even caring fathers. They accomplish this miracle by sponsoring a crucial transition in their son's development. I refer to an evolution that their wives, unaided by fathers, cannot bring about: the psychological separation of the son from the mother. The old father enforces a major rule of masculine development - one recognized, in ritual and in common practice by all successful human societies: at some culturally designated point boys have to separate, in the psychological sense, from their mothers. Unlike girls, who share a common biological destiny with their mothers, most boys will become fathers; and like their fathers, their work will engage them - whether as hunters, soldiers or traveling salesmen - on the communal periphery with other men, rather than close to home, with their mothers or wives. Men exemplify the principle of closeness through distance: they sustain the home by their readiness, when called upon, to leave the home.

And I intend to compound my sin, of defending patriarchy, by citing suspect Freudian (and I mean Old Freudian, not Neo-Freudian) ideas: conflict theory, the Oedipal complex, the superego, *und so weiter*.

The *Zeitgeist* is more accepting of Anthropologists than of Psychoanalysts, so I will preface my argument - and try to redeem it - by first quoting the great ethnographer, Ralph Linton (1945): "In some ways, each man is like all other men; in some ways, each man is like some other men; and in some ways, each man is like no other man."

Linton was referring to the major orders of human experience. His first level - "each man like all other men"- refers to our common, universal ways of underwriting individual and species survival. The psychology that pertains to this level comes from psychodynamic conflict theory: it is the psychology of the Id and the language of war: defense, resistance, drive, conflict, breakthrough, boundary, etc. Throughout this paper I will be using conceptions and terms that derive from Level one.

Linton's second level - each man is like some other men - refers to the fact that we share

common language and common culture and common ways of achieving language and culture with some socially designated members of our species. This level refers also to the ways in which we preserve our loved ones and our communities, while maintaining ourselves as social beings in the eyes of our fellows. While Sociology is the dominant discipline for Level two, The pertinent psychology comes from Attachment theory: some common terms are “Object relations,” “holding environment,” “rapprochement,” etc.

Linton's third Level - each man is like no other men - refers to the ways in which we experience ourselves and maintain ourselves as unique and special, different even from those with whom we share a common culture. The psychological discourse for this level is New Wave, humanistic, narrative-based, and favored by Lit. majors: “we are created by the stories that we tell about ourselves...etc.”

To be fully appreciated, the father's crucial functions must be studied *via* the methods and instruments that are fitted to the universals, to Linton's Level One. These however are currently out of fashion: They remind us of forces that operate outside of conscious control, even as they influence the direction and content of conscious thinking. The tectonic forces of the psyche that drive Level One experience are unsympathetic to our *amour propre* : they remind us that - as Bruno Bettelheim once put it - "We are not the masters, even in our own mental house". In this, the era of the Control Freak, such frames of experience are avoided, and left out of our increasingly P.C. behavioral science.

In addition, as psychology becomes more feminized in its practices, rhetoric and personnel, the conflict-centered psychology that pertains to Level I is also discredited, ruled out in favor of the more touchy-feely attachment theory. Thus, in current Feminist discourse, the father's familial role is critiqued (and disparaged) from the discipline and methods of Level Two, which is sociology, or from the ideology (or theology) of Level Three, which is Humanistic Psychology. According to the critique from the (usually Marxist) sociologists of the family, fathers who insist on playing a special, authoritative role, distinct from mothers, are not serving their children. Instead, they are - like classic capitalists - oppressing the women, e.g., the family proletariat. In their turn, humanistic psychologists predictably deplore the authoritative father: He is, they fear, expressing masculine needs to be dominant and "phallogentric" at the expense of his wife's individuality and "self actualization".

Thus, on the best campuses (and especially the best) biological paternity - the special role of the father in procreation - has been split off in theory from the social condition of fatherhood. Biological paternity is admittedly a fact of nature; but fatherhood, particularly in its patriarchal phrasing, (as a unique status, with its own scope, powers and responsibilities) is regarded by

mainstream social scientists as a corruption of nature.

And so we find that too many men, happy to be let off the hook, have heard the liberating message from academia: They are helping to conceive more babies and more candidates for abortion than ever before, but they are too often refusing to be trustworthy, strong and responsible fathers. According to the new dispensation, this liberation of men from bondage to the patriarchal ideal should lead to the liberation of women. It has not: For as men defect from traditional version of fatherhood, they also defect from the traditional arrangements of marriage - and from marriage as well. As a consequence, too many women are left alone with the kids in single-parent families. Women are more oppressed than ever: The patriarch has gone, but so are the special rations of security and companionship that he provided. Clearly then, the sociological and humanistic revisions of fatherhood are not working. Instead, we are recognizing - perhaps too late - that the patriarchal phrasings of fatherhood were more than expressions of oppressive male politics; it appears that they too were an extension rather than a corruption of the same natural laws that governed biological paternity.

Clearly, if we are going to develop some real answers, beyond political correctness, to the important questions raised at this conference - how do little sons become, in the space of only a few years, fathers in their own right? - we will have to forage through the data and conceptions of Level One, the language of human universals.

In this paper, while recognizing the important contributions of Attachment theory, I will mainly rely on the overlooked conflict perspective. For when we neglect the inevitable element of conflict in father-son relations we end by overlooking a critical feature of the male bond in the family and a major contribution to the son's development as a man and future father.

But before we address the evolution of sons into fathers, we should first consider its context: The special needs, universal across our species, of the uniquely vulnerable human child. This special vulnerability is always taken into account by any viable human group. Thus, despite differences in their child rearing goals, most societies maintain common understandings about the generic needs to be addressed by any child-care regime. They recognize that, to thrive, the vulnerable child must be assured of two kinds of parental nurturance: It must be given some assurance of physical security, and of emotional security.

There is also a general recognition, across our species, that the same parent cannot provide both kinds of security. The child's physical security ultimately depends on activities carried out far from home: Warfare, hunting (including the hunt for business and clients) and the cultivation of distant tillage. Men are generally assigned the task of providing physical security on the perimeter, not because they are more privileged, but because they are expendable. Thus, in

the hard calculus of species survival, there is typically an oversupply of males, in that one man can inseminate many females, but women, on the average, can gestate only one child every two years during their relatively brief window of fertility. The surplus males, those over the number required to maintain viable population levels, can be assigned to the dangerous, high casualty "perimeter" tasks on which physical security and survival are based. "When it comes to slaughter, you do not send your daughter" is one of our most predictable human rules; and there are very good reasons for it. By the same token, the sex on whom the population level ultimately depends is less expendable; thus, women are generally assigned to secure areas, there to supply the formative experiences that give rise to emotional security in children.

George Murdoch's (1935) tables, based on ethnographic data from 224 subsistence-level societies, indicate that any productive or military activity requiring a protracted absence from the home - hunting, trapping, herding, deep-sea fishing, offensive and defensive warfare - is performed almost exclusively by males. Activities carried out closer to home - dairy farming, erecting and dismantling shelters, harvesting, tending kitchen gardens and fowl - are sometimes exclusive to men, more often exclusive to women, but are in most instances carried out by both sexes. However, hearth side activities, particularly those having to do with preserving and preparing food, are almost exclusively the province of women.

These Murdoch findings cannot be adequately interpreted by Level Two thinkers; a distribution of work-site by gender that is so predictable, across so many different kinds of societies, cannot be explained by sociology alone. These findings can only point to a species regularity, an expression of our Bio-psychological nature, and not to some pan-social masculine conspiracy to keep women in their place. Incontestably, men are creatures of the perimeter; and while they start out swaddled to their mothers in the home, they must eventually leave it for the perimeter. Later, as fathers they must re-enter the domestic world, and eventually work out a schedule of movement, often on a daily basis, between some version of the perimeter and the intimacies of the domestic zone. Tough-love fathers (those who successfully coordinate conflict and attachment) are vital agents in the son's evolution away from the family of orientation, and in his later happy return, as husband and father, to the family of procreation.

Here then is a central Paradox of masculine development: The psycho-umbilical ("Golden Cord") tie to the mother is crucial at the beginning of life, but it must, at some optimal point, be severed. The boy who persists unilaterally as a mother's son will be psychologically vulnerable to the otherwise routine separations inherent in living; in youth, he is at-risk to become an addicted delinquent; in adulthood he will probably be an envious sibling rather than a good enough father to his own children, while his wife or successive wives will be drained by his

chronic neediness, and at risk from his violent rages towards women. In later life - if he makes it that far- he is at-risk to be a depressed psychosomatic cripple, and a drain on the health system.

We cannot comprehend the evolution of little boys into adequate fathers in their own right without taking into account the father's part in sponsoring this vital evolution away from the mother, (and eventually away from the father, as well). Again, the father's role must judiciously mingle conflict and attachment: Sometimes he has to be a buddy, sometimes he has to be an example; sometimes he has to be the disciplinarian, the adversary and the goad.

Currently, the father's special role (when it is recognized at all) is conceived exclusively in terms that derive from the reigning attachment theory: father as back up for the mother, father as buddy, father as coach of little league skills, father as someone who cries with you, and feels your pain.

But applied attachment theory can lead to paternal malpractice. The father who can eventually sponsor the son's separation from the mother must be respected, as well as loving and loved. Filial respect is not routinely given to the warm-fuzzy father - he can be loved, but also disparaged, and even pitied; respect is accorded to the firm father, the father who is not afraid of his legitimate power and authority. This does not mean that Dad cannot share in housework, babysitting, diaper changing and all the rest of it. He can do all that, but he still must have a unique role, often disciplinary or confrontational in nature, that he does not share with the mother. If the father is not a mere clone of the mother, if he stands out as a presence, distinct from hers, he will be, at the proper time useful to his son. When the time comes for the son to unravel himself from the mother, he will find, in the father, a guide who has already accomplished, and with pleasure, that important task.

The failure to separate has bad consequences for fathers as well as sons. Fathers who are no more than clones of the mother are at risk to desert the marriage, and often at crucial junctures in child rearing. Make no mistake: the rhetoric of androgynous, equal opportunity child rearing is fraudulent: despite the all the "sharing" psychobabble, the father who is no more than a maternal equivalent will always play second fiddle in child rearing. For starters, the mother has known an intimate connection with her baby nine months before the father even saw his son. Then too, poor Dad has no breasts, and even bottle-fed babies get a nursing experience from mothers that they cannot receive from the bony chests and brusque motions of their fathers. When it comes to attachment, fathers are always playing catch-up. Fathers know this; and unless they can carve out a unique and necessary function, one not shared by the mother, they will too often feel demeaned; to restore pride, they are likely to desert the home ground for those settings - the bar-room, the battlefield or the adulterous bed - where they can feel like men, rather than failed wannabe

mothers.

And given the usual alternatives, desertion can even be the more desirable outcome: demeaned fathers who nevertheless stay in the home, may fall back on the guaranteed male specialty, of violence. If they are not respected for their unique contribution to the home, they may engender the respect that comes with fear, the kind “respect” that is automatically accorded to the brute.

So much for attachment doctrine as applied the father’s familial role. It is deficient, at times even foolish: politicized theology posing as theory. But what does the neglected conflict theory have to say concerning the father’s role in son-rearing? These theorists push us to acknowledge that, besides being the buddy or the alternate mother, the father is at crucial points the necessary antagonist of his own beloved son. Sometimes the father has to be the uncompromising S.O.B. who enforces the law that he himself lives by, sets limits, and sternly punishes any violations. The confrontational father has to demonstrate to his son that he values principle, even above love; and that when love is withdrawn he can feed himself out of his own fund of self-respect. He makes this point by drawing and holding a line in the sand, even if the son hates his guts for doing it. That is how the father gains his standing in the family: by demonstrating conviction, rather than by flaunting - as the radical feminists would have us believe - his superior upper-body strength.

We return now to our main-stream topic: the natural history of separation- individuation, and the father’s adjunct role in bringing it about. Bear in mind that the father - whether attachment-prone or confrontational - does not get into the parenting act in any direct fashion until the end of the neonatal period. At the outset of life, the mother-child merger - a continuation in psychological terms of the intrauterine umbilical link - is primary, and the father, as during the prenatal period, plays only an incidental role. Thus, using cross-cultural research, Niles Newton (1973) found that mothers are always central in the care of the neonate - whether a boy or a girl - and that fathers play only an auxiliary, supportive post-natal function. Newton’s ethnographic descriptions of young mothers in South Africa, the Middle East and China, all point to a standard pattern of maternal engrossment with the infant, in an intense bond that can persist through the first years of the child's life. At all these sites, the infant sleeps next to the mother, is nursed at the first sign of restlessness, and nursing takes precedence over any potentially competing activity.

The mother can devote herself almost exclusively to child care because she herself is being nurtured, "Mothered" by her husband. The father's task is not to share the mother’s chores, but to maintain a protected zone, one in which his gratified and secure spouse can bring about the

mother-child bond that fosters the infant's necessary quotient of Basic Trust. Assured of a stable maternal base, one that he can trust to be there even when he goes away, the infant can begin to explore his world and even provoke change in it. Thus, human development proceeds by paradox, and in a dialectical fashion: The almost exclusive mother-child bonding that is so crucial in the first months of life prepares for the period of early autonomy, when the child will practice psychological and physical separation from the mother. Alternating these out-migrations with episodes of rapprochement and return, the infant begins to evolve the executive capacities that will support his later, more protracted journeys. In effect, the nursing mother sponsors the son's first steps towards separation from the mother and his future alliance with the father: through her offices, the boy reaches a point where the "I-Thou" distinction appears, and the father - like himself, an entity distinct from the mother - acquires the tonus of reality, of unremitting and trustworthy "there-ness." Thus, as the linear arrangement of the family - father tends mother, mother tends kids - begins to break down, the father who nurtures, the father who is different from the mother, becomes a psychological "object", a presence in the emotional life of the child.

The above is still attachment theory talk: As a source of comfort and security, the father who is loving, competent and distinct from the mother stands forth in the boy's eyes as a pillar of benevolent strength. As such, he spreads an umbrella of security under which the son can temporarily shelter, even as he continues to become a distinct person, in his own right. Thus, the father whose special, "patriarchal" virtues distinguish him from the Magna Mater, becomes in the proper season what the psychoanalysts call a "Transitional Object" - a kind of psychological half-way house. Standing apart from the mother, the father as mentor and "role-model" provides a secure way-station on the son's psychological voyage away from her, and allows that risky evolution to go forward.

But once again, the father's role in bringing about the son's individuation is not exhausted by the optimistic language of Attachment theory. When it comes to understanding the ambivalent, potentially tragic relationship between fathers and sons, love is not enough. After all, fathers and sons are not too far away - in evolutionary time - from a shared primate heritage of violent male-to-male, father to son rivalry for sexual possession of reproductive females, including the son's mother and the father's mate. The Naked Ape is protected, by the incest *tabu*, against the wilder expressions of that competition, but the primate behaviors that the Naked Ape inhibits, are still conserved in the head as potent and even - let us be blunt - murderous fantasies.

The first generation psychoanalysts - those who inherited the "tragic" European view of

Human affairs - were the leading exponents of conflict psychology, and the leading students of the "Oedipal" track in child development. In their narrative, little boys, charged high with untested illusions of omnipotence, are driven early on to challenge the prerogatives and possessions of the father. For them, the primate confounding of Eros and murder is not easily contained in fantasy; particularly if their fathers are themselves weak, absent or violent, the lurid Oedipal fantasy can easily become the virtual reality of the excitable child. However, if they come up against true patriarchs, fathers who are neither antagonized nor intimidated by their small son's enmity, (and who admire him, as a chip off the old block, for his bold spirit) these same little boys are quickly - and with real relief on their part - introduced to some basic propositions of the masculine reality principle: "you are not big, powerful and supremely competent; instead, you are small, puny and laughably unready. However, you do show promise for better things, and matters can change. If you pay him proper respect, your generous and forgiving father will help you escape from your unfortunate condition."

Thus, when the small sons of patriarchal fathers realize -however grudgingly - that they cannot appropriate the father's prerogatives and powers by force, they are ready to receive another bulletin from the reality principle: "if you can't lick 'em, join 'em." Young sons give up infantile, omnipotent fantasies of co-opting the father's powers by violence, in favor of identification, and a disciplined filial apprenticeship. From then on, the boy's self-esteem will be based increasingly on experiences of real mastery, rather than hectic Superman fantasies.

In short, the boy comes out of the Oedipal engagement with a built-in internal presence: the superego, the sometimes harsh inner monitor that will not let him hurt - or even think of hurting - those that he either loves or should love. But rigid self-restriction is not the whole story. Via the superego the son gains an internal (and therefore trustworthy) sense of resource: so long as he acts in the service of his community, and against the enemies (including destructive potentials within himself) of his loved ones, he will have access to his own vital energies, his own iron rations of the psyche. Now he can make and fill his own bottles; he can live off his own fat; he can survive emotionally without the mother, and he is, in the psychological sense, weaned. With his internal logistics assured, the boy is ready to slip the psychic umbilicus and to make his final graduation from the status of "mother's son."

The boy's post-Oedipal affection for the mother is not a result of merger; instead, it is a consequence of the separation that has been accomplished. For it is only after this decisive internal separation has been achieved, and boys no longer desperately need their mothers, that they can really love them - and women in general - in a relatively uncomplicated, full-hearted way. Feeling whole within themselves they do not need to be completed through the mother - or

through her surrogates.

And again, contrary to attachment doctrine, the boy is finally able to truly appreciate his father after he has cooled out the conflict between them. *Via* the newly installed superego, his rivalrous anger is now directed away from the father, and towards himself. The superego, the punitive aspect of conscience, is now sensitive to moral flaws in the son; and the father, newly freed from filial criticism and censure, can now be idealized. The quondam mother's son has switched allegiances, and is ready to be reborn, as the father's son.

Thus, the son who has closed out the rivalry with his father does conserve love and respect for him. He can go on to learn from his father, and from other authoritative figures: uncles, older brothers, teachers, coaches. This is the so-called "latency period" - the time when the child, no longer distracted by powerful appetites or fears - can devote himself to the rapid acquisition of new learning, and new skills. The school and the male peer congregation becomes a world in its own right, alternate to the family.

However, Latency is only a temporary calm before the storm of puberty shakes up the psychological *status quo*. Now the adolescent personality is subject to tectonic shocks as the body moves toward sexual maturity and adult physical powers. There is no mind-body dichotomy in human psychology, and the expanding, surgent body sends shock waves through the whole psychological system. Boys are suddenly thrust into adult bodies, even as their emotional life regresses back to its primitive manners. For example, the Oedipal struggle with the father may be revived, but now in a more dangerous form: The pubertal boy's challenge to the father is now more than the grandiose delusion of a physical and mental midget; now it is backed up by a body that can be more powerful and quicker than the father's.

In addition, the growing boy's commitment to an extra-domestic destiny on the perimeter is put at risk by these tectonic shocks of puberty: once again, he is tempted reject the father's way, to turn back toward the mother, to be her champion against the father.

The pubertal transition is universal; and most viable cultures have developed fairly predictable ways to ensure that the biopsychological shake-up does not lead to social crisis, in the form of aggravated adolescent rebellion. Particularly in traditional societies, the whole age-grade of male elders is mobilized to back up the father's threatened authority, to help the boy complete the separation from the mother, and to turn him back towards the perimeter, and the ways of men. The biological father helps the son achieve the first vital separation, from the mother; the collective fathers are mobilized to bring about the second great separation: From the family as a whole, and even from the physical precincts of the home community.

Typically, the collective fathers arrange an ordeal, a *rite de passage*, through which the

pubertal son is consecrated to these various paternal ideals. These rituals take as many forms as there are distinct cultures, but they are never unambiguous expressions of paternal love. Once again, the generic elements of these rites are predictable from conflict rather than attachment theory. The sons must pay heavy dues of pain and terror to the fathers before they are allowed to join the company of men. The ordeals of passage can range from penile subincision with cowry shells as practiced by Papuan natives, to the *Bar Mitzvah* ceremonial of orthodox Jews. But in all cases, the young candidates are exposed to a trial, usually under the attentive, critical gaze of the assembled fathers, who watch for signs of weakness.

Whiting and Child (1953) found that the severity of the ordeal varied, across cultures, with the length of the breast-feeding period. The ritual marks a final passage away from the mother; Since late weaning implies a strong maternal bond, a stringent ordeal is required to break it. By this token, if the boy is too visibly frightened or tearful, then he has not passed the test: He has cried for his mother, he is still her cry-baby "Mama's boy," and he has not been reborn - as a father's son and junior colleague - into the company of men. But if the lad endures with some grace and fortitude, then he has begun to make it as a man. Now he is one of the "twice born:" reborn as a son of the collective fathers, and as an age-grade brother of the initiates who have endured the trial with him. Thus, the *rite de passage* provides the initiate with "brothers": The age class of young men who are bonded to him through the ritual, and who represent the portion of the community that will be his company beyond its borders.

Perhaps most important, the ritual initiates the son's attachment to some totemic sponsor, whose supernatural powers - his "medicine" or mana - will also provide the candidate with luck and protection on the road. The *rite de passage* extends, for the candidate, the range of paternity: now it reaches beyond the biological father, beyond the collectivity of community elders, to include the ultimate fathers - the spiritualized ancestors, and the gods.

Typically, a culture is founded on an origin myth: A story of how the people, at some time of trial and supreme danger were sponsored, rescued and rendered special by the intervention of unordinary - usually supernatural - beings. The typical puberty ritual recapitulates this drama: Like his people in the origin myth, the candidate is in a liminal condition, a state of emergency, and if he survives the ordeal, it is because he too - like his people in the founding myth - has found favor with a totemic sponsor. As a young child, he became for a time the son of his father; now, as a youth, he becomes - via the ritual - the protege of some favoring deity. The earlier, post-Oedipal alliance with the biological father endowed the son with some sense of inner resource, allowing him to separate from the mother. This later affiliation, with the spiritual fathers, gives the son the courage that he needs to separate from the community as a whole - from

the mothers again, and now from the biological fathers as well.

More importantly, this new alliance refreshes the young man's sense of inner resource: the conviction of having captured some of the totemic "father's" substance. With the "father" essence now held securely inside, the son can visualize being a father in his own right, to his own children. knowing that he can leave the home and the community, knowing that he can live off his own psychic substance, the son can look towards mating, marriage and fatherhood for himself. Like his father before him, he can court a woman, he can attempt the frightening but exciting voyage into her body, and - secure in his manhood - he can return to the domestic world, the mother's world that he has recently "escaped". But this returnee is not a needy child; he is a mate, and a providing father. He can live again among the "mothers," he can turn a woman into a mother, without collapsing into the "Mama's Boy" condition. He comes back knowing that he can leave.

This passage into young manhood has inoculated the son against the dangers of the female in the world and in himself; and it also inoculates the community against masculine violence. In his passage towards manhood the son's aggression has been transformed: through the civilizing offices of his father, backed up by the communal and totemic fathers, the son's potentially anti-social aggression has been given a positive, pro-social sign. In effect, the boy's aggression follows the general line of masculine evolution: as he becomes in the psychological sense his father's son, and moves his sights beyond the mother's domain, his aggressive potentials track with him, and find new, non-domestic targets. From now on, his enemies will not be found in his own house or significant community; he will preserve these precincts as demilitarized zones, wherein his children and other dependents can feel secure. His enemies, if any, will come to him from outside his own house, from beyond the communal periphery - or he will forage beyond the perimeter to find them.

True enough, the square and even priggish sons of patriarchal fathers may grow up to patronize women, but they are by the same token protective of their mothers, wives, girl-friends and daughters. When killing is the argument, they fight the men who come from the outside to hurt or kill their women and kids. Strong mothers build secure homes; Father's sons maintain secure neighborhoods. Un-fathered sons, by contrast, deploy their aggression indiscriminately: they can be murderously aggressive within the home as well as outside of it. They are prone to abuse, damage and even kill their aging relatives, their wives, their kids and their neighbors. un-fathered sons destroy the homes and the neighborhoods that fathers, father's sons and mothers had once built. Brutalized women are rarely the victim's of father's sons; quite the contrary: violence against women is the side-effect of unchecked matriarchy. Sons without fathers,

mother's sons, use violence to simulate the psychological distance that is beyond their reach.

Our ground has just shifted: now we are considering the legions of boys who grow up under the ambiguous familial conditions that are rapidly replacing normal fatherhood in America. What, we ask, is the likely fate of sons who come of age without a father, or with fathers who are little more than androgynous, ineffectual clones of the mother? At least one consequence is clear: in the absence of compelling fathers, the mother's presence fills not only the outer domestic frame, but also her son's interior psychic space. These boys - the offspring of single women, lesbian couples, or devalued "pops" - are not likely, in their proper season, to win true psychological distance from their mothers.

But even children without fathers will usually find other, albeit less reliable ways to hack at the golden cord.¹ Boys who cannot achieve true psychological distance from the mother fall back instead on unreliable substitutes: physical distance and social distance. Physical distance they achieve by flight: from the mother's home to the streets, to the fighting gangs that rule them and, at the end of the day, to the penitentiary and its all-male fraternity. Social distance they achieve by dropping out of the mother's cultural world, and off her scale of values; unable to finally split from the mother, they provoke her - through criminality, addiction, sexual exploitation and physical violence against women in the home - into throwing them out of her decent house. Self-evicted to the streets, they turn to booze and drugs for the transient comfort that they can no longer take (or expect to get) from their mother's hand.

Through such desperate means, fatherless sons demonstrate - to their peers, to their mothers, and to themselves - that they are truly Men, and not needy little mama's boys. Finally, by their physical violence and verbal raps on women they try, ineffectually, to kill off the unrelinquished "woman" - the psychic after-image of the mother within themselves.

Finally, in the absence of reliable fathers and elders, young men try to create their own puberty rituals. They self-administer their own *ad hoc* initiations. In the fathering society, the tests of manhood are administered by the male elders; and these trials are training for lawfulness, civil order and manly productivity. But when the tests are conducted by unsupervised gangs of adolescent males, the passage is not into responsible manhood, but too often into the world of the criminal. Instead of curbing anti-social rebellion, the puberty rites of teen-age gangs too often augment it.

¹ Like boys, girls also need to establish some independence from the Magna Mater; but fatherless daughters too often achieve this goal by becoming unwed mothers at an early age. When they have captured some token of the father's powers for themselves, sons can split from the mother; similarly, by reconstituting the maternal principle in their own bellies, girls can let go of their birth mothers. As a consequence, the father-absent ghettos fill up with babies having babies.

Young men have recently discovered another, more drastic means for achieving social distance from their mothers, while at the same time avoiding fatherhood: the latest version of the male gang, the homosexual community. Again, much like liquor or crack, homosexual sex tends to be impersonal and its objects tend to be replaceable. In the gay community, as with other forms of addiction, one attains pleasure, but without risking intimacy and the possibility of loss. At the same time, distance has been gained from the mothers: The homosexual world is a world of men that excludes - even mocks and caricatures - the "breeders," the dangerous mothers.

Finally then, despite their many well-documented short-comings, patriarchal fathers are the best means that our species has devised for managing the gravest threat to organized social life: male - particularly young male - violence. In our American case, the streets have been "Beirut-ized" by violence from sons without fathers, and with only rudimentary superegos.

But I do not mean to imply that all un-fathered sons are fated to be wife-abusers, muggers, homosexuals and dope-heads. The majority of mother's sons do manage to separate from the mother, at least in the social sense: They seek and often find motherly wives who will welcome their closeness, but also tolerate their occasional defections and infidelities. In effect, they recapitulate, through their maternal transference to the wife, the "rapprochement" mother of early childhood. They find an equivalent of the birth mother who delighted in their first steps, but also coaxed them back into her maternal embrace. Such pleasant women can stabilize the mother's sons, and convert them - for a while at least - into good citizens, even into provident fathers. And this fortunate match can hold, but only so long as the wife remains willing to mother her spouse. Typically, these mother's sons are put at risk in the post-parental years, when their now older wives - who have raised their kids, who have paid their species dues - begin to defect from the mothering way (see Gutmann, 1994). These post-parental wives still share the husband's bed, they still get the meals out; but their feelings towards their husbands have subtly changed: they are still willing to be the wife, but not the husband's mother. This straying older wife has imposed, on the husband, a separation from the maternal figure that he himself has never before encountered, expected or initiated.

This belated separation from "mom"/ wife can precipitate the much-debated "mid-life crisis" in vulnerable men: In order to hold the wife's attention, in order to keep her in a nurturing mode, predisposed men can develop significant somatic symptoms. Through them, they say to the wife, "If you don't want to take care of me, at least be caring toward my liver, or toward my heart." Their symptoms also bring them to the attention of clinic personnel, internists and nurses; and RN's can be, for such men, the final mother figures of the life cycle.

In sum, the failures of early separation can - under ideal circumstances - be compensated, and

even for a long time; but they eventually declare themselves, sometimes so late in life that the original deficit can no longer be traced to its origins.

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