

ADOLESCENT MALES REFERRED FOR PSYCHOTHERAPY: EXAMINING EMOTIONAL INSTABILITY IN LIGHT OF PARENTAL IDENTIFICATION

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This is a multiple case, multiple measures study designed to examine the factors that lead to children's identification with their parents and how such identification in turn impacts on their emotional well-being as adolescents. Only the integrated findings are reported in this paper. Results show that the nine adolescent males referred for psychotherapy all manifest strong emotional attachment to their mothers but only five of them seem to have an adequate bond with their fathers. Data suggests that the attention and affection shown by a parent play a significant part in this process. The limited interaction that the adolescents presently have with both parents does not seem to affect the parental emotional bond, but time spent together when they were younger children is highly connected to their positive impression of each parent. Perception of each parent may be crucial to the adolescent males' experience of emotional closeness: positive views of mothers persist in spite of the present difficult situation while images of fathers are readily tarnished under the same problematic circumstances. A number of other factors contribute to an adolescent male's emotional instability. Personal and marital issues of parents are triggered when the boy underperforms in school or manifests behavioral problems. The depressed mother withdraws from parenting and the angry father pressures the boy. The teenage son sees his father as aggravating his difficulties, a negative impression that is reinforced by the boy's perception that his mother is fearful of and troubled by his father. But a close mother-son relationship may also result in gender identity confusion and suicidal rumination. Negative modeling, on the other hand, may be observed in an adolescent boy who is close to his father.

Parental influence on children cannot be more emphasized. Children get to know the world first primarily through their parents and this basic relationship apparently becomes the template by which they later on relate

with other people. Freud and Erikson, for instance, have dealt extensively with how an infant's relationship with the mother becomes the basis for the development of "basic trust" while the father figures later on in the resolution of the so-called "oedipal complex" among young boys.

But while the mother's stamp on the growing child is well documented, little research has been done to similarly study the area of influence that the father has on his child. The paucity of research on this area has prompted one media observer to wonder if fathers really matter. Relatedly, this has also made it difficult to objectively assess the impact of recent social developments where rising costs of living have resulted in fathers devoting more time to work than to family and mothers are increasingly joining the work force. Thus, traditional parental roles – the mother as a "caretaker," attending to the emotional needs of the children and the father as a "breadwinner," imparting practical skills to them – are being passed on to other people (e.g., *yayas*, extended family members, etc.) if not altogether overlooked or abandoned. Such a situation may be particularly difficult for adolescent males, where the father's presence is also seen as important for the boy's development of a healthy gender identity.

The adolescent stage, for that matter, seems like a good point to pause and reflect on the parent-child relationship because of the instability generally associated with this developmental phase. The question invariably arises as to how well parents have equipped their children with the necessary psychological tools to weather the problems that beset young people at this stage. How ready are our children to successfully traverse this critical period of transition from childhood to adulthood?

Recognizing the wisdom in the tenet that children learn their basic attitudes and ways of dealing with the world primarily from their parents – that their parents are their first, and perhaps most important, teachers – this study specifically asks the following questions in an attempt to illuminate that arena in which children make contact with their parents, form an impression of their parents from such encounters, fashion their behavior in their parents' likeness, and in the process acquire psychological resources to set them on the road to establishing their own unique identities:

1. What is the personality profile of mothers whose sons are prone to emotional instability? What is the personality profile of their fathers?

2. What kind of personal interaction exists between adolescent males who are subject to emotional instability and their mothers? What kind of personal interaction exists between these males and their fathers?
3. How do these adolescent males perceive their mothers? How do they perceive their fathers?
4. With which parent do they identify more? To what extent do these factors (parent's personality, parental interaction, and perception of parents) contribute to the adolescent sons' identification with the opposite-sex parent? To what extent do these factors contribute most to their identification with the same-sex parent?
5. How are parental identification, and the factors affecting it, related to emotional instability?

In pursuing these questions, the researcher is guided by a theoretical model primarily derived from his years of experience in working with troubled adolescents. In dealing with the subject of emotional instability, the four behavioral characteristics proposed by Spont (1992) were adopted: unpredictability of response to stimuli, increased lability of baseline, unusual intensity of response, and unusual responses.

METHOD

Research Design

This research made use of the multiple case study, multiple measures approach. According to Kazdin (1991), the multiple case study is the more central and appropriate approach in the area of clinical psychology, to which the present research properly belongs. At the same time, in the spirit of the multi-trait, multi-measure approach (Campbell & Fiske, 1959), at least two instruments or two methods were employed to measure the different variables involved. This is designed to countercheck qualitatively the information yielded by each instrument on one variable and in so doing ensure the conceptual integrity of that particular variable under study, which is the very essence of validity. From a clinical point of view, multiple measures

also allow the researcher to analyze the nuances of each variable and come up with a more complete and thorough understanding of the interplay among the different variables. However, only the integrative findings are presented in this paper; the case studies are reported in Garcia (2003).

Participants

Purposive sampling was utilized and participants were limited to adolescent males from two-parent families. They belong mostly to the middle class socio-economic group, are studying (or in the case of dropouts, have studied) in private schools and have an adequate facility for English.

Participants were invited from the group of clients referred to the researcher for psychotherapy. Their cases involved problems in school and social adjustment: they were distracted/disruptive in class or refuse to attend school, or were aggressive if not withdrawn. To keep the participants as close as possible to the normal population, those who have been diagnosed with clear pathologies (e.g., depression, schizophrenia) were excluded. Referrals were also asked from colleagues working at a private clinic or school guidance office.

A total number of nine teenage males, representing various ages in the early adolescent (age 12-14) and middle adolescent (15-17) stages, took part in the study.

Instruments

A number of instruments were used for this research. Both objective personality tests and projective techniques were administered to the adolescent males and their parents. The parents were given the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation – Behavior (FIRO-B), which was introduced by Schutz in 1967 (as cited in Waterman, 1987), and 10 cards of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) that Murray published in 1938 (as cited in Stein, 1955). The same set of TAT cards were given to the teenage boys who also worked on a Sentence Completion Test (SCT) revised to include items tapping the specific variables under study, the Child's Attitude toward Father/Mother (CAF/CAM) questionnaire constructed by Hudson (1992, as cited in Fisher & Corcoran, 1999), Armsden and Greenberg's (1987, also cited in Fisher & Corcoran, 1999) Index of Parent Attachment (IPA), and

selected parts of the Ateneo High School Survey Questionnaire (Liwag & Villongco, 1997) dealing with parent-child activities as well as decision-making opportunities.

All the participants were also subjected to one-on-one interviews, with a semi-structured guide covering areas related to the various factors under study and designed to provide substance to test findings as well as elicit other information that may not be reflected in test data.

Procedure

Parties who agreed to participate in the research were seen in an actual clinic set-up. A joint interview with the parents regarding their son's problematic behaviors was first conducted, while their adolescent son took the tests. The interview with the son on how he perceived his present situation was immediately held after the testing.

A separate testing schedule was set for the parents, with the mother and father being asked to take the tests at different times. This was done to enable each parent to express himself or herself more freely. Testing for each parent was immediately followed by an interview regarding his or her personal processes.

Results were prepared separately per individual (mother, father, adolescent son) before the information was put together for the family unit. A group profile based on the nine cases was obtained afterwards.

Statistical information such as mean and standard deviation were obtained from raw scores of objective personality tests (FIRO-B, CAF/CAM, IPA), and t-tests were conducted to check for significant differences between the scores for mothers and fathers on the CAF/CAM and IPA.

The researcher's analyses and interpretations of the TAT stories were subjected to peer check by two female psychologists who both have a master's degree and at least 10 years of experience in doing assessment work and therapy with children and adolescents.

RESULTS

The adolescent males' mean age was 15 while that of their mothers and fathers was 43. Eight of the boys were still going to school during the time

of study. Most of the mothers were working full-time, with only two not holding any regular office job. Majority of the fathers have full-time jobs but one had a part-time employment to accommodate a vital role in a lay religious organization.

The behavioral symptoms manifested by the adolescent males in this study, as reported by their parents, consisted of low motivation for studies ($n = 8$), ill-temper ($n = 5$), difficulty following parental rules ($n = 4$), sexual identity confusion ($n = 3$), and lack of self-confidence ($n = 2$). As the figures suggest, these problems do not seem to occur independently of each other and are usually reported in combination with the other complaints mentioned above. These concerns actually closely resemble the most predominant problems of adolescents reported by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (Pruitt, 1999). Many of these concerns are first detected in and are directly related to the school setting, which is after all the most important socializing influence on children next to the family. The adolescents' failure to deliver in school usually has emotional repercussions and underpinnings, among them, aggressive and defiant behavior, low self-esteem and sexual identity confusion.

A general lack of positive or constructive instrumental activity in the teenage boys' projective tests was found, and this seems to reflect their lack of or limited emotional resources to cope with pressures. As a whole, they respond to problems by getting depressed and discouraged or angry and impulsive. Specific reactions include committing suicide ($n = 6$), crying and withdrawing from people ($n = 5$), blowing their tops ($n = 4$), committing murder ($n = 3$), sneaking out ($n = 3$), lying and cheating ($n = 2$). The instrumental activities that they resort to can actually be readily classified under Spooon's (1992) indicators of emotional instability. Suicide, for instance, is an "unusual response" to difficulties. Anger, irritation and murderous thoughts speak of unusually intense reactions to problem situations as well as lowered tolerance for stress. Passivity, escape and avoidance, and lying and cheating are behavioral examples that may be considered unpredictable responses to day-to-day problem situations because they are inappropriate or unsuitable solutions to pressures. The long-term persistence of these behaviors among the boys is indicative of emotional instability.

Parental Identification

Test results and interview data show that all of the nine teenage males who participated in this research identify first and foremost with their mothers, affirming the female parent's place as the primary caregiver and main source of emotional security and interpersonal warmth for their children (LaRossa, 1986). Five of the males also show adequate attachment to their fathers.

Mean scores on the FIRO-B paint a similar personality profile for the mothers and fathers: disinclined to engage in social interactions, selective of close associates. They also prefer to work alone and make decisions without interference from others. But where the mothers are concerned, this may primarily be due to their mid-life stage, where the tasks of reassessing their identity issues, searching for a new self, shifting focus from career and family to being mentors of the larger community naturally entail a turning in into one's self. An examination of their individual profiles, in fact, shows a greater variety of personal orientation that makes it difficult to account for mother-son attachment. The explanation may be found, though, in most mothers' verbatim description of themselves as "understanding" and "loving" to their children. No matter what their personality inclinations may be, most mothers seem able to take on their parental roles with a good measure of skill and purpose, transcending personal qualities (and in the case of the participants of this study, also overcoming the pressures of career responsibilities) to be the warm, attentive and caring people that they are expected to be to their children. Both Western and local studies (Thompson & Walker, 1989; Asprer, 1980 and Minoza, Botor, & Tablante, 1984, both cited in Liwag, de la Cruz, & Macapagal, 1999) confirm that mothers are socialized to consider parenting as integral to their identity and exert serious effort to play the part.

The fathers, as a whole, seem more characteristically cautious and selective. While they may see themselves as patient and persevering, they do so in the context of work. Many of them are proud of their educational attainment, if not actually their present career status, and expect their sons to be as successful as them. Evidently, their attention is primarily focused on being good family providers, an outlook that – as previously suggested by other researchers (Liwag et al., 1999; Lamb, 1981) – has somehow placed their personal relationship with their children on the backburner. Still, those who are at least sufficiently outgoing seem to enjoy adequate bonding with

their sons, suggesting that the father's sociability may be a factor in his son's development of affinity for him.

Most of these adolescent males currently spend very little time with both parents, with meal times as their usual point of contact. Having dinner and breakfast is the most frequent shared activity the boys have with their mothers – this is consistent with the previous studies of Liwag and Villongco (1997) as well as Youniss and Smollar (1985) where eating is a typical activity with either parent. In contrast to these earlier studies, however, shopping – instead of watching TV – is the other activity they usually have with their mothers, one that they also find most enjoyable. It is apparently one area where they feel their mothers continue to tune in to their needs, particularly that of being physically attractive and likeable to their peers.

With their fathers, they like engaging in or talking about their hobbies or special interests. Studies show that fathers' interaction with their children usually takes place in the context of the fathers' needs for recreation (Pollack, 1998, as cited in Larson & Richards, 1994; Larson & Richards, 1994). Joking is also apparently an integral part of such contact. Larson and Richards (1994) point out, however, that joking is a limited way of making emotional contact and that a father who makes everything into a joke risks making his son feel that his father cannot take him seriously. Also, outside of the occasional family outing, the boys are physically with their fathers only during dinner and breakfast, recalling previous findings that most Filipino fathers seldom engage in child-rearing activities (Tan, 1995) and personal conversation is an activity that is noticeably rare among fathers and adolescents (Collins & Russell, 1991; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Indeed, the boys in this study agree that they "do not talk much" with their fathers and have "few things" they could discuss together. But while some may argue that limited time together between parents and their children during the adolescent stage does not really impact on their emotional closeness (Larson & Richards, 1994), time together when the children are much younger seems essential to the formation of this bond: the boys in this study who show adequate attachment to their fathers suggest as much.

The mean of differences between the scores for mothers and fathers on the CAM/CAF was not statistically significant ($t = -.76, p > .05$) but the qualitative data suggest a problem in the boys' present relationship with each parent, perhaps with the fathers more than the mothers. They complain that their mothers have "changed" and are overprotective and demanding. They think that their mothers are too anxious and strict with them, and may

be particularly so when the female parent anticipates a negative reaction from her husband. As a whole, though, the mothers are perceived positively. They are not only seen as good in doing household-related tasks but they are regarded as caring people, able to give personal comfort and emotional assistance to their sons. Their mothers help them out in their studies, pray for them when they are in trouble, recognize their need for friends, and facilitate their communication or interaction with their fathers.

The fathers are described as competent at work or proficient in certain specific skills like "playing darts" and "driving". At the same time, however, they are said to be overprotective and unable to understand their sons' emerging needs as adolescents, frequently hurting their sons' feelings. Rare are the instances when the father is presented as capable of relating warmly to his son. Four boys in particular have difficulty relating to or are unable to connect with their fathers. Many are at a loss on what to do when they see their fathers and move gingerly around the male parent. Impulsive and temperamental, the male parents are viewed as unreliable persons and undependable partners to their mothers. The father is seen as a source of embarrassment to his wife: he cheats on her, drinks or is unable to talk things through, making him likely to give up easily on the marriage during difficult times. The father is also seen as too caught up in his work, has no time for his children, and is emotionally inaccessible. Either that or he is seen as haunted by his personal demons and is yet to make peace with his past, which derails his efforts to be an accomplished person.

Mean scores for the mothers on the IPA (along the dimensions of Total Attachment, Trust, Communication, and Alienation) are higher than those for the fathers although t-tests show that the difference is significant only in the area of Alienation. This may mean that while as a whole, the adolescent males feel that they have an adequate sense of attachment to both parents, the stronger affinity is with their mothers. The mothers seem to be the primary source of interpersonal warmth and psychological security, probably the most significant among significant others.

Parental Identification and Emotional Instability

To best appreciate the possible impact of parental identification (and the other factors relating to it) on an adolescent boy's emotional wellness or lack thereof, it may be vital to examine first the patterns of family interaction that these young males are apparently caught in.

Family dynamics. Data from the case studies suggest that the mothers go through a significant departure from the traditional role that they play towards their teenage sons, the warm and attentive part which their sons appreciate them for. Most of the mothers involved in this study feel powerless or unable to deal with their sons' present problems and disengage as a result. While some of them claim that they are stepping aside because they believe it is the father now who is more suited to oversee their son during this stage of adolescence (because of sex role and sex identity considerations), this emotional distancing from the son seems to flow basically from a felt inadequacy and failure to rein in the son. This is evident in their self-admission that they also find themselves impulsive and impatient. Thus, a gap in the mother-and-son relationship is formed and the son starts to lose touch with his basic emotional anchor, his mother.

With the mother taking the sidelines, the father steps in and becomes — or tries to be — the major figure of influence to the son. Optimistic and confident of solving problems, the fathers pressure their sons into taking immediate action and expect to get instant results. But because they were not as involved in their sons' upbringing prior to this stage, and do not really enjoy the close bond that the boys have with their mothers, the fathers' stringent attempts to whip their sons into shape invariably stir up feelings of anger, resentment and rejection among the boys. The father-and-son relationship, which may not even have bloomed yet, is effectively nipped in the bud.

In the wake of the father's unsuccessful attempt to influence his son, blame falls on the mother. It is unclear whether the fathers in this study do anything overtly to create this impression or if it is merely the subjective perception of the mothers. But the guilt over the son's apparent lack of emotional flexibility is something the mothers obviously take responsibility for. They seem to feel sorry that they have not brought up their sons to be more responsive to their fathers' attempts to set them straight. So the mother feels compelled to step back in and support her husband, this time getting tough on her son to avoid being blamed further by her husband and perhaps to make a better account of herself as a mother as well.

The son is surprised, hurt and disappointed by the mother's sudden change of behavior. His mother, his foremost friend and ally in the family, has now joined forces with his father, the enemy! He resents his father all the more for pressuring his mother into taking this track and becoming this strange new person who, instead of showing him support and understanding, is now as strict and inconsiderate as he thinks his father is.

With his mother and father bearing down on him, the adolescent withdraws from both parents and loses confidence in himself or acts out and becomes defiant. The father becomes more frustrated and impatient over the son's apparent lack of improvement. And the mother now has to worry not only about a teenage son who more and more fails to live up to expectations but also an angry husband whose failure to positively influence their son somehow puts her (the mother's) own competence into question. The couple's personal issues are triggered in the process and the marital relationship is strained – something that does not escape the son's attention and disturbs him further, thinking at times that he caused this conflict between his parents.

The different factors at play. From the above, there appears to be a significant crack in the adolescent son's relationship with both parents, perhaps with his mother more than his father, although the breakdown in the male teenager's relationship with his father also serves to emphasize the fragility of their bonding. This gap in the relationship with his parents seems to be a major consideration in understanding the emotional disturbance manifested by the adolescent males in this study. It is ironic, indeed, that at a time when they need assistance most to face the rocky changes in their lives, many adolescents are cut off from traditional sources of support, making it more difficult for the one who cares most about their welfare to provide assistance (Pruitt, 1999; Larson & Richards, 1994).

It must be pointed out, though, that given the developmental needs of the adolescent males and their parents, conflicts are bound to arise between them. This is referred to as the interlocking crises between adolescents and their "midlife-ing" parents – that is, the simultaneous meshing of two turbulent life stages (Carandang, 2001). But the feeling of distress is perhaps magnified in families with an adolescent son whose academic performance and social behavior persistently falls short of expectations, and mothers may be subjected to the greatest amount of stress under this situation. For one, more than the fathers, they seem to be the one looking forward to retirement, that is, to a time when they can put the worries of parenting behind, attend to their own personal pursuits and perhaps redefine their relationship with their husbands, this time not as a mother to their children but – as they have started in marriage – a loving partner to their husbands. The presence of an underachieving or misbehaving teenage son in the family douses cold water on this dream. Instead of riding quietly into the sunset, the mothers are pulled back into the trenches. They not only have to address

their teenage sons' problems but they must now also contend with the negative reactions of their husbands, frequently finding themselves having to mediate between the two and perhaps making little progress on either front. Furthermore, the mothers have to deal with marital issues that are perhaps not faced or denied by the couple but are somehow triggered by the adolescent sons' problems.

Given this crucial role that the mother plays in the emotional life of her son and husband, her inner resources become of primary importance. How effectively she navigates the tangled web of relationships and expectations that her being a mother and wife plunges her into depends on how consistently she is able to muster her emotional resources and keep her focus. Without such, she is hardpressed to extend support and assistance to other people or her family in particular. In this context, test data showing that most mothers in this study are overwhelmed by feelings of powerlessness and are unable to see beyond formulaic problem-solving methods certainly has implications on their adolescent sons' emotional adjustment. The mothers' feeling of helplessness seems to rub off on their sons, many of whom feel depressed and discouraged and are unable to think constructively when faced with new challenges or emotionally-loaded problem situations. Close to their mothers and protective of them, the boys become sensitive and vulnerable to their mothers' own emotional difficulties. This can be seen in the boys' perception that their mothers are fearful of and troubled by their fathers, making them resentful of the male parents.

But given that only one mother in the study may be described as overanxious and neurotic, on the surface at least, the boys' close attachment to their mothers does not seem to pose much risk to the son's emotional well being. However, the very rarity of such a case in the present research makes it impossible to say if this general observation holds true. Comparing the adolescent males who identify primarily with their mothers to those who also show secondary attachment to their fathers does not also yield any distinct difference in terms of the number of symptoms of emotional instability that they manifest.

On the other hand, all of the boys who identify primarily with their mothers show suicidal ideation in their projective tests. The same boys also manifest possible indicators of gender identity confusion. While these are not conclusive, the data is important to consider as a reflection of how close – and possibly sticky – the mother-and-son relationship is. The data actually calls to mind mother-daughter conflicts which, due to greater

enmeshment, occur more frequently and last longer than in other parent-child dyads (Smetana, 1988). In such mother-daughter systems, it is not uncommon for the daughter to turn the conflict inward, threatening herself to punish her mother where the female parent is most vulnerable. By hurting herself, she threatens her mother's main purpose and obsession in life: being a good mother. Over-identification with the mother, it seems, can also bring out the same problems and pitfalls in the mother-son relationship.

Data from the present research shows that limited time together does not apparently undermine the teenage males' ability to identify with their mothers. Previous studies even show that while adolescents may experience more daily conflicts with their mothers than with their fathers, they still feel closer to them (Collins & Russell, 1991). While their mothers may nag them, censure them and curtail their activities at times, the anger or resentment does not seem to cut deep and undermine their relationship.

But other researches also indicate that for males in particular, the amount of interaction with their mothers plays an important role in their ability to cope with problems. Larson and Richards (1994) reported that boys who spend more time with their mothers – especially time alone or talking – were rated better adjusted by their teachers, appeared less depressed, and reported more positive daily emotions. They infer that the amount of time shared by mothers and sons is related to the son's well-being because when they have conflicts, the tendency is to avoid each other.

Examination of the present data provides no conclusive evidence that those boys who have comparatively more interaction with their mothers are better adjusted emotionally. Still, two – who probably have the most difficult fathers in the study, owing to their fathers' unresolved personal issues – seem to benefit from the understanding and support that adequate time spent with their mothers afford them. Their mothers talk about and affirm their feelings, help them understand their fathers' unreasonable or erratic behaviors, and try to give them pointers on how to handle these situations. The importance of such support coming from the very persons to whom they are primarily attached and whom they perceive to care most about them cannot be more emphasized. Although they seem to be under the most difficult family situation of all the males in the present study (due to the intense emotional problems manifested by their fathers), the two seem to be coping better than the others. They display less indications of emotional instability and such symptoms are also less intense. This is clearly related to the support that they get from their mothers who try to soften the blows

and protect them from the problems caused by their fathers' unusual behaviors.

Where the fathers are concerned, data suggest that most of them are still primarily focused on their careers and only one has started entertaining thoughts of retirement. Still apparently riding the wave of their successful efforts at work, they are brimming with pride and optimism and apparently believe that there is nothing that they cannot manage or deal with. It is their strong hope as well that their sons will be just as successful as they have been, expecting their boys to compete favorably later on for colleges and jobs. When their teenage sons started to falter in school and manifest attitudinal problems, the specter of their sons' career failure loomed before them and upset them. It is not inconceivable that the fathers' belief in themselves was somehow shattered. Their past experiences of failure and disappointment surfaced, triggering feelings of anger and frustration.

They respond to this threat to their egos by pressuring their sons, believing that their boys only need to work hard and be whipped into shape by a strict taskmaster, which the fathers are essentially to themselves. But this sudden increased involvement in their sons' affairs does not seem to amount to anything much. Busy with their work, passive in interpersonal relationships and not demonstrative of their affection, the fathers' efforts to help are likely to be seen as unwelcome interference from strangers.

A strong negative image of their fathers actually emerged from the adolescent males' test data and whatever desirable skills they could manage to cite about their fathers was easily outweighed by the general assessment of their fathers as distant persons and unfit marital partners to their mothers. This unfavorable view of their fathers signify considerable conflict in the father-son relationship and the adolescent males seem to consider their fathers not only of little help to them but also of contributing further to their difficulties, if they are not the actual direct cause of their problems to begin with. In this regard, they bear a striking resemblance to how street children (Carandang, 1996) and drug-abusing teenagers (Karedan, 1998) in the local setting perceive their fathers.

The present data shows, as other studies do, that whatever little time fathers can spare for their teenage boys is primarily spent having fun together. Most of the boys in this study get to enjoy their fathers through hobbies, sports and other recreational activities that they take up together. It is apparent, though, that outside of shared leisure activities, fathers and their adolescent sons rarely get together and talk. Considering that their mothers

are also present for a greater majority of the times that the adolescent sons are with fathers outside of the occasional family outing, the time that fathers and sons spend alone together and the opportunity for them to talk and get to know one another is really small. This is aggravated when fathers use the time to crack jokes, their inappropriate timing or abrupt nature suggesting that the jokester – the father – is out of touch with the situation, cannot face up to problems, or is unwilling to get close and personal with his son. This may explain why some of the teenage males in this study also feel that their fathers do not or cannot take them and their problem situations seriously.

It is interesting to note that four of the fathers in this study who frequently resort to joking all have significant personal problems or career frustrations or both that they are grappling with. This suggests that joking may actually be a defensive reaction to conceal significant difficulties that are weighing them down. When the fathers themselves are struggling with their own personal issues, the situation can be explosive for the sons. Studies show that children growing up with depressed or angry fathers actually have the same degree of maladjustment as those growing up with depressed and irritable mothers (Kempton, Thomas, & Forehand, 1989). It is important to note that in the present study, the adolescent males significantly attribute their unwanted behaviors to their fathers. While they may get scared when their fathers get upset, they also get angry and try to avoid their fathers as much as they can. At a time when the boys are drawn to their fathers because of the need for sex-role bonding, behavioral modeling may also be at its peak and how the father reacts to problems is likely to influence the way his son – especially if the son is attached to him – manages his own problems. Unfortunately, since most of the fathers in this study are inclined to either stay away or blow their tops when they are involved in their sons' affairs, that is exactly how their adolescent sons also seem to behave under pressure.

The fathers may not also be the first people adolescent males turn to for help because the latter perceive the former to be underhanded in treating their mothers. The teenage boys sense marital issues, including their mothers' problems with their in-laws, which intensifies the boys' anxieties and worries.

That only about half of the adolescent males in this study developed adequate attachment to their fathers may be an indication of the role that identification with the father or lack thereof plays in a teenage boy's psychological stability. Two of these fathers have temper outbursts and

drinking problems that may be considered neurotic and cause significant stress to their sons. But as in the case of the mothers, these two fathers represent a small percentage of the participants, which does not allow for conclusive inferences to be made.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Data, in general, show that an adolescent male's positive perception of his parents may be the critical factor in the development of emotional attachment between them. Parents who are affectionate and attentive to their children thus enjoy an advantage. The male teenagers who perceive their parents in a good light also seem to have many activities with them when they were younger, suggesting that time spent together is an important determinant of emotional closeness although it may not appear so at this stage. Where emotional instability is concerned, their mother's depression and subsequent withdrawal seem to be an important factor. Their limited time together can deprive adolescent males of the guidance and support of the maternal figure to whom they are primarily attached. On the other hand, those who are too attached to their mothers may be subject to identity confusion and suicidal ideation. Pressure from their fathers contributes further to the adolescent males' distress. They see their fathers as people whom they and their mothers cannot depend on. Ironically, because of the need for sex-role bonding at this stage, the sons may also be susceptible to negative modeling from their fathers.

The above findings have implications for the practice of psychotherapy. The present data show why it may often be critical to extend to the mothers as well the same emotional support that they seek for their children. While the research highlights and affirms the important role that mothers play in their children's adjustment and growth — seen, for example, in the fact that mothers are the ones who initiate getting professional intervention for their sons — it also shows the enormous pressures mothers are subjected to. They have to do a delicate balancing act, trying to provide assistance to their sons even as they also remain on the look out for their husbands' expectations and demands. Part of helping the mothers, then, invariably involves doing counseling work with their spouses to thresh out marital issues that are triggered by their adolescent sons' problems.

But mothers need to watch out, too, about being so emotionally close to their sons that their sons absorb their mothers' personal issues. It is important that a distinction between the mother's own personal frustrations, particularly in relation to her husband, and the son's own experiences and personal feelings toward his father, be established during psychotherapy.

Although fathers may seem to play a secondary role in their children's emotional development, the fathers' potential value as a source of support for their sons—as well as for their wives—cannot be taken for granted. Fathers need to spend time with their sons, however, and exert the effort to get to know them. They need to establish their presence in their children's day-to-day lives and go beyond leisure activities as their only point of contact and sole reference point for what their children like or require. While the need for fathers may seem more pronounced when their sons enter adolescence, the only way they can apparently be of valuable help to their children is when they spend time with them and establish deeper bonds with them as the children are growing up. This emotional accessibility can only come, of course, through an examination of their interpersonal styles and the personal issues that keep them from reaching out to their children. Thus, as it is with the mothers, fathers can also benefit from one-on-one counseling.

Where dealing with the adolescent boys themselves is concerned, it seems that the basic issues to check out are emotional disconnection from their fathers and over-identification with their mothers. These factors—which also take into account their parents' personal issues and adolescents' impressions of them and extent of interaction with them—are shown by the present research to have an impact on the adolescent males' emotional growth and adjustment.

In closing, it must be said here that the process of psychotherapy usually seem to end when the adolescents' parents are better able deal with their personal issues, which results in their being able to understand and respond appropriately to their adolescent children's needs. The adolescents, apparently reaping the benefits of having parents who can form a balanced perspective and take supportive action, are in turn better able to navigate their way in day-to-day settings and cope with the emotional difficulties that they encounter in adolescence.

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