

# **Boys To Men: The Maturing Of Male Identity Through Paternal Watchful Protectiveness**

*Michael J. Diamond, Ph.D.*

## **Abstract**

**This presentation will explore how a substantial aspect of fathering serves as one important avenue for the adult male's construction of his unique sense of masculinity. In rethinking the adult pathways to a man's "sense of maleness", prevailing psychoanalytic theories of masculinity are amplified by incorporating more recent advances pertaining to narcissism, the renunciation of early opposite-sex identifications, and the capacity for "fatherliness". I discuss adult male gender development from the perspective of the search for narcissistic completion as informed by the masculine ego ideal. A psychoanalytic, developmental perspective is used to understand the male ego ideal in both its infantile and its more mature forms. I will argue that adult male activity contributes to masculine identity development by transforming archaic, "phallic" ego ideals (resting on omnipotence and desires for narcissistic completion) into more realistic, "genital" ego ideals. Ossified and rigidly polarized gender identity consequently destabilizes and reconsolidates in a more fluid manner when fathering, work, aging and other facets of adult male development help to "correct" what a man may have incorrectly come to believe as being "closed off" to him because of his sex. The adult man is thus given an opportunity to develop a more mature gender identity by renouncing and mourning his (phallic) wish to be unlimited and instead, accepts certain real limits concerning sex, gender, and generational differences. Notions of what is masculine or feminine can thereby more comfortably destabilize in mature adulthood as finite categorization of gender identity is superseded by the complexity of one's multiple, differently gendered identifications. My primary focus will be on the relationship between the father's function as the primordial "protective agent" of the mother-infant dyad and his ongoing construction of his "manhood". The impact of this early fatherly holding function on the father's unconscious striving for narcissistic completion, and its effect both on his genderized ego ideal and previously renounced early maternal and paternal identifications, will be considered. I will propose that adult male gender identity matures by becoming both more cohesive and more fluid as a result of this fatherly provision. A case example will illustrate the painful struggle of a new father limited by his impaired capacity for such watchful protection. This father, through the psychoanalytic treatment process, was able eventually to develop his initial fatherliness and thereby consolidate a maturing sense of masculinity that involved an interplay between his masculine and feminine identifications.**

## **Introduction**

In this presentation I will explore how a substantial aspect of fathering serves as one important avenue for the adult male's construction of his unique sense of masculinity. I shall amplify prevailing psychoanalytic theories of masculinity by incorporating more recent advances, especially those pertaining to narcissism, the renunciation of early identifications, and the capacity for "fatherliness", in order to rethink the adult pathways to such a sense of masculinity. A vignette from my analytic practice should set us on course.

### **Clinical Example: Rich**

**Rich entered treatment at the age of 34, shortly after his wife became pregnant. He felt "particularly depleted" by the excessive pressure of running his own business. Although quite successful, Rich felt driven to add extra accounts in order to "prepare for all the rainy days that lie ahead."**

**Early in therapy, he often spoke concerning his considerable misgivings about having a child. He explained, however, that he needed to accede to his 38-year-old wife's desires, since "her biological clock is running short and she's a `natural mother'."**

**Following his son Daniel's birth, Rich became more agitated and depressed and arranged for increased traveling and other activities that kept him busy outside the home. Despite having fathered the son that he "had always wanted", Rich nonetheless felt terrible about himself "as a man." As he explained, things had become more and more unpleasant for him at home because his wife, Nancy, when not exhausted, "always seemed busy with their infant." Rich complained vehemently about Nancy's "devotion" to Daniel and he angrily deplored her "lack of interest either in me or in sex."**

I will be returning to this case toward the end of my talk to demonstrate how Rich's inability to involve himself with his son was partially founded upon his immature sense of masculinity.

### **Overview Of This Presentation**

I begin by examining the father's role as the primordial "protective agent" while reflecting upon the importance of providing such protectiveness for the development of the father's subjective sense of his own "manhood". The importance of paternal watchful protectiveness on the father's self-esteem, sense of "real manhood", and adult gender identity consolidation is stressed in order to explicate the relationship between this fatherly function and an adult sense of masculinity. I propose, moreover, that adult male gender identity matures by becoming both more cohesive and more fluid as a result of this fatherly function.

I discuss adult male gender consolidation from the perspective of the search for

narcissistic completion as informed by the masculine ego ideal. A psychoanalytic, developmental perspective on the ego ideal, in addition to concepts drawn from anthropological research, are used to understand the male ego ideal in both its infantile and its more mature forms. Selective conflicts that are engendered for men who are called upon to watchfully protect their newborn are considered and potential maturational opportunities that the father's solicitude make possible are highlighted. I will conclude this presentation by returning to Rich's treatment in order to illustrate the painful struggle of a new father limited by his impaired capacity for such watchful protection. I will depict the treatment process as facilitating the development of Rich's initial fatherliness as well as his maturing sense of masculinity.

I will begin by sketching out the nature of this protective, watchful function as a man first becomes a father.

### **The Nature Of Paternal Watchful Protectiveness**

The archaic and universal wish to be tended to, protected, and provided for is experienced in both imaginary and actual relationships with others throughout the life span. The Christian, paternal imagery of "Our Father which art in Heaven" (from the "Lord's Prayer," New Testament, Chapter 6, Verse 9-13), is the foremost Western depiction of this fundamental longing. As this imagery implies, the preeminent representation of such a protector and provider role is that of the father. For the child who has grown up, this universal longing is boldly revealed in Ira Gershwin's captivating jazz era lyrics:

**There's a somebody I'm longing to see  
I hope that he, turns out to be  
Someone who'll watch over me.**

.....

**Oh! How I need, someone to watch over me.  
--"Someone To Watch Over Me," (from Oh, Kay)  
by George & Ira Gershwin (1926).**

I have argued elsewhere (Diamond, 1996) how this initial paternal presence of protective watchfulness continues to evolve and develop alongside other fatherly representations over the life cycle. Thus, the involved father who is able to "watch over," "hold," and protect the mother and "her" developing fetus, infant, and small child is likely in due course to become the father who must again "hold," bear, and support with interested restraint his adolescent child's identity experimentation and subsequent distancing from family dependencies. The progressive developmental accomplishments that depend upon this early fathering contribution increase the chances that even in a grown child's mid-late adulthood, a healthy, internal sense of being watched over will remain vibrantly alive.

How is this primordial component of fatherliness made evident and what does it involve?

## **The Father's Protective Agency: The Emergence And Development of Fatherliness**

A father provides a timely and nurturing holding environment for the mother and the developing fetus, infant, and small child during the period when the mother-child relationship, characterized by primary attunement, is essential for the development of what Bowlby (1988) termed a "secure base." In serving as the dyad's original "protective agent," the father shields the mother from impingement and interference from without, while she carries, bears, and suckles their infant. Thus, particularly before the infant can make use of him in other ways, the "watchful" father frees the mother to devote herself to their baby. In "holding" the mother-infant dyad near the end of pregnancy and for several weeks after the baby's birth, the father is able to promote the mother's necessary "primary maternal preoccupation," which becomes the basis for the infant's ego establishment (Winnicott, 1956). Thus, as a delegate of "the outside world", the father provides for and serves as an external beacon to his wife and child, protecting their intense, primary mutuality with one another (Stern, 1985; Benjamin, 1988).

The attuned father, consequently, is especially able to "parent his wife" at the very time she most needs such care (Herzog, 1982b). Unfortunately, as the clinical vignette indicates, Rich was unable to create such a shared alliance with his wife.

Although I will give prominence to the significance of this less conspicuous and hitherto rather neglected facet of fathering, it is nonetheless evident throughout the literature that this fatherly characteristic has largely been relegated to those ill fated realms of discourse where fathers are treated as "the forgotten parent" (Ross, 1982b). Certain parental phenomena, such as providing an ego-supportive "holding environment" (Winnicott, 1956), serving as a steady and responsive "container" for a baby's unpleasant feelings (Bion, 1959), and supplying "empathic mirroring" (Kohut, 1971) have historically been conceived of as "maternal" in function. It is not surprising, therefore, that the more receptive and serene paternal functions involving "holding," "containing," waiting and empathy, all of which are represented by fatherly "protective watchfulness," have long been ignored, presupposed as maternal or feminine traits (see for example, Schwartz, 1993; Ehrensaft, 1995), or simply treated as insignificant and peripheral. After all, the fundamental qualities of this fathering function contravene the more universal, "phallic" gender stereotype of men as active, penetrating, and potent. I propose, however, that such a gender stereotype is partly a defensive function of inadequate paternal watchful protectiveness and, as I hope to demonstrate, the very attainment of such paternal functions serves to expand, strengthen, and consolidate an adult male's sense of manhood.

## Value and Impact of Paternal Watchful Protectiveness

In accepting his familial caretaking role, fathers are provided an important opportunity for overcoming developmental obstacles and working through intrapsychic conflicts (affecting generativity and mature object relations), while creating new familial legacies of male nurturance (Benedek, 1959; Diamond, 1986; 1996; Betcher & Pollack, 1993). Fathers capable of such engagement, furthermore, are more likely to experience an increased sense of familial worth and personal self-esteem as they become "engrossed" in their newborn (Greenberg & Morris, 1974; see also Pruett, 1993). As I will subsequently explicate, the selfless generosity, sacrifice, and servitude required by such early forms of fathering strengthen a man's sense of "real manhood," primarily because such fatherly protection and provision serve the imperatives of a man's ego ideal as determined by his unique development, while simultaneously fulfilling his culture's "ubiquitous code of masculinity" (cf. Gilmore, 1990). I will claim that the attainment of this life step (among other developmental passages) indicates the maturing male's mastery and integration of his phallic urges into their more aim-inhibited forms.

An infant is fortunate indeed to have both the mother's ordinary "primary maternal preoccupation" and the father's sufficient "protective agency," in combination with adequate physical endowment and freedom from unforeseen external trauma. Such an infant is shielded from those primitive annihilation threats to personal self-existence, stemming from experiencing an overwhelming sense of helplessness involving terrors of falling apart and dissolving, which severely compromise subsequent cognitive, affective, and intrapsychic development. The fetus and then infant provided with "good enough" initial mothering and fathering is thus likely to "go on being," largely unriddled by the more primitive anxieties interfering with each subsequent developmental task (Winnicott, 1956; 1960).

Freud (1930) stressed the gravity for the child of such paternal protectiveness when he stated: "I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection" (p. 72). Children of fathers who are unable to provide sufficient protective agency during the earliest phases of their lives are less likely to receive important fatherly provisions at the later stages, even though there are subsequent opportunities for reparative paternal contributions (Diamond, 1996). The provision of sufficient paternal protective agency early in children's lives is quite pressing, and its absence has wide ranging social and psychological implications. There is evidence, for example, that children of fathers less involved in these initial phases of fathering are more likely during later childhood (and adult) development to incur paternal sexual abuse (Parker & Parker, 1986), father abandonment (Comer, 1989; Ballard & Greenberg, 1995), and the detrimental effects of uninvolved or ineffective fathering, including "father hunger" (Herzog, 1982a) as well as the defensive organization of gender experience (Schou, 1995).

A father's "protective agency" function remains important throughout his child's development, though its forms will alter and its significance will recede as other fatherly provisions become more salient throughout the life cycle. As I hope to indicate, the male's capacity for the self-sacrificing role of fatherhood lays the foundation for paternal protective watchfulness. I will next consider how this capacity grows to fruition and how it may become disrupted.

## **The Capacity for Paternal Protectiveness**

Attempts have been made over the last quarter century to examine the more instinctual basis of fathering despite the prevailing belief that fathers are further removed from the instinctual roots of parenting than are mothers (Benedek, 1970; Greenberg & Morris, 1974; Greenberg, 1985; Ehrensaft, 1987; Pruett, 1987; Shapiro, 1993). This psychogenetic approach to fathering has emphasized both the father's function as a provider and his capacity for fatherliness ties, which render his relationship to his children a mutual, developmental experience (Diamond, 1986).

Benedek (1970), for example, posited an instinctually rooted character trait termed "genuine fatherliness," which enables a father to act toward his children with immediate empathic responsiveness. Redican (1976) detected latent predispositions for paternal caretaking, even among non-human species. He discovered that male primates assisted with birth, protected infants and their mothers from predators, and actively nurtured the young to the point of becoming primary caretakers when necessary. Greenberg and Morris (1974) and Pruett (1987) observed such human character trends in the psychophysiological forms of fatherly "engrossment" with their newborn and father-infant "biorythmic synchrony," respectively.

The process of becoming a father begins long before his child's conception and birth. Just as the roots of a woman's motherhood are traceable to the distant past of the little girl's wishes to be like her mother and experience maternal yearning to (re-)create through nurturance, so too can the foundations for a father's attachment and relationship to his infant be discerned in the little boy's procreative and defensive instincts, wishes and behaviors linked to his relationships to both his own mother and father. Consequently, a father's actual attachment and relationship to his infant begins long before labor and delivery (Ross 1975; 1982a; Gurwitt, 1976; Herzog, 1982b). Ross (1975) examined these precursors to fatherliness in terms of generativity and nurturance. Nonetheless, the specific developmental forerunners of the father's capacity for protectiveness have neither been studied nor elaborated.

I shall next consider the essential intrapsychic dimension of masculine gender identity development in order to better understand the relationship between this capacity for fatherly protectiveness and an adult sense of manhood.

## **Male Gender Identity Development And The Consolidation Of Masculinity In Adulthood**

I have found that the most fertile psychoanalytic conceptualizations of masculinity stem from an appreciation of a man's striving for narcissistic completeness. The writings of both the French psychoanalyst, Chasseguet-Smirgel (1984,1985), and the Finnish analyst, Manninen (1992,1993), have been central in developing my own thinking about this sense of maleness. In addition, my understanding of the shaping of male gender identity has been influenced by the post-classical theoretical contributions which emphasize the pre-oedipal identifications and attachments in the mother-infant dyad (Greenson, 1968; Stoller, 1975; 1985; Chodorow, 1978; Fast, 1984; 1990; 1994; 1995; Benjamin, 1988; 1996; Betcher & Pollack, 1993; Pollack, 1995; Axelrod, 1994; 1995; Schou, 1995; Elise, 1996; and Bassin, in press ).

I will call upon the familiar psychoanalytic notion of the ego ideal in order to explicate the nature of the male's struggle to heal the abrupt, traumatic loss of omnipotence that results from his early separation from his mother. This trauma is often "shattering" for the young boy because it reflects both the lost dyadic connection and the narcissistic wound caused by the repudiation of what is lost. Fast (1994,1995) reminds us that this "separation" is compounded for the boy child by virtue of the fact that he must simultaneously recognize that he is sexually different from his mother just when he is "losing" her. The "double whammy" created by these two-fold losses render the boy's situation as particularly "wounding" and therefore more developmentally challenging. I argue, moreover, that the boy's trauma must be appreciated as a "necessary" loss which itself provides maturational opportunities.

Whether this pre-oedipal "trauma" is cast in relational terms, along the lines of Benjamin (1988; 1991) and Pollack (Betcher & Pollack, 1993; Pollack, 1995b), both of whom stress the premature loss and/or repudiation of the small boy's sense of connection and identification with his mother (i.e., what are termed, "desiring and identificatory attachments"), or whether the trauma is cast along more traditional, metapsychological lines emphasizing the loss of an ideal state of primary narcissism and unity with the maternal object, the issue essentially concerns the important "wound" to which the boy child must adapt. The "genderized" nature of the masculine ego ideal is therefore founded on the particular struggles that boys experience during the initial stages of gender differentiation (see Fast, 1984; 1994, for a clear, empirically based discussion of the boy's unique conflicts around differentiation). What might be termed the "ubiquitous masculine striving" consequently, at least on one level, reflects the male's efforts to repair this narcissistic wounding by seeking to recapture the lost connection and/or ideal state of being that was both disrupted and subsequently disavowed.

## **The Nature And Development Of The Masculine Ego Ideal**

Manninen (1992, 1993) has described the distinct casting of the boy's quest for narcissistic wholeness. The narcissistic core of human psychic development is motivated by the attempt to reduce the gap between the ego and its ideal. Drawing from Chasseguet-Smirgel (1984; 1985), Manninen (1992) suggests that the boy's traumatic loss of the symbiotic paradise of the early unity with his mother leads him to create a phallic image of himself in relation to the world in order to regain control of the object now separate from his ego. The little boy omnipotently forms the adaptive and defensive illusion of "the supremacy of his own masculine equipment" (Manninen, 1992, p. 25) during this period of "phallic narcissism" in order to overcome the painful, "gaping wound" created between his ego and ego ideal. The penis thus represents the source of both gratification and narcissistic completeness.

The penis moreover represents a defense against the dangers of a separate yet needed object. Elise (1996) employs current understanding of both preverbal representation (cf. Stern, 1985) and the overinclusiveness of early mental representation (e.g., Fast, 1990) to maintain that the relationship to separate objects begins with the nursing relationship. The basic elements of "psychic bisexuality", namely being penetrated and penetrating, are contained in the infant's relationship to the nursing breast. Elise argues that a gender split develops in order to defend against the omnipotent, penetrating "breast" mother (who presumably, as the Kleinians suggest, is dangerous because she is needed and envied). As a result of the binary categorizing of the phallic phase, the ability to penetrate comes to be seen as inherently male and is equated with the penis. The Oedipus complex, with its ideal of gendered complementarity, serves to structure further the masculine (and patriarchal) ideal along these phallic lines (Elise, 1996; see also Benjamin, 1996; Bassin, in press). Consequently, in addition to exemplifying the hope of recapturing the omnipotent state of "fusion" with the mother, the penis represents a resolute defense against the "danger" of being penetrated by the separate and needed "breast" object.

The unconscious wish to achieve unity with the now separate mother takes the form of the wish to conquer and possess her while penetrating her body. The boy's phallus becomes his masculine ideal as penis pleasure offers the promise of narcissistic completeness. This male, "phallic power" promises then to transform the boy's traumatic separateness from his mother into an increasing influence over her. By adulthood, this "ultimate narcissistic wish for full manhood" (Manninen, 1993, p. 36) takes the ideal form of offering one's chosen partner perfect satisfaction much like don Juan.

The extent to which such phallicism dominates the male psyche is a function of several factors, the most significant of which is the unavailability of a paternal ("genital") object, typically the father with whom the little boy can reciprocally identify and on to whom the child can project his ego ideal. Such a "genital" father (who is able to carry his son's ego ideal) can only become internalized when a real "other" has already provided the "good enough" fathering that can be

observed initially in the mutual involvement of the early, dyadic father-son relationship (e.g., Blos, 1985; Benjamin, 1988; Diamond, 1996), and later in the reciprocal identifications throughout the oedipal phase (cf. Diamond, 1996). Such an internalized ("good enough") father, who then can become the "genital" object for his son's projected ego ideal, is necessary for ego development to progress in line with a maturing ego ideal (e.g., Axelrod, 1995). Without this maturing ego ideal, phallicism becomes psychically urgent for the adult male's achievement of the missing psychic cohesion. This phallic urgency then is what may underlie the stereotypical "male obsession" whereby, as Manninen (1992) noted, "only by conquering the world can one conquer the mother" (p. 7).

Returning to the "little man" of childhood, it is evident that the extent of the boy's phallicism in search of narcissistic completeness greatly influences his ability to accept the oedipal reality. Oedipal mastery requires a realization of his own limitations and becoming content with something less than an idealized, narcissistic wholeness. From this perspective, a male's lifelong psychic work becomes developing the ability to tolerate the limits on the satisfactions that can be attained.

In Freudian psychosexual terms, the perpetual struggle is between the seductive, grandiose power of phallicism promising transcendence of limitations, and the more relative achievement of adult genitality that is anchored in reality. The reality-based genitality involves adaptive assertion, aggression, and modulated phallicism, whereby phallic urges are transformed into more aim-inhibited and object recognizing forms, in the relational context of mourning, acceptance, submission and uniting with others. There is a tendency to forget that in its essence, genitality implies a synthesis between autonomy and connection whereby antithetical elements in the psyche can be reunited. By dint of this synthesis, the capacities to wait, watch, and hold become internalized for the man truly able to have intercourse with the world.

Chasseguet-Smirgel (1984; 1985) describes the latter pole in this dialectic as reflecting the maturation of the ego ideal whereby the ego gains its value from "aiming towards" rather than maintaining the illusion of "achieving" the ideal state of the ego. This "progressive" solution to the unappeasable longing for an unattainable ideal (i.e., "the malady of the ideal"-Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1985), can thereby culminate in a "loving union with the world" that simultaneously acknowledges the fact of the world's "otherness".

In attaining such "genitality", the unappeasable longing for an unattainable ideal becomes gradually transformed to enable a deep connection that simultaneously acknowledges the fact of differentiation. The mature ego ideals then, in Freudian terms, are made manifest in the seeking of instinctual discharge combined with a concern for the object. This maturing sense of masculinity consequently requires the attenuation of childish narcissism and omnipotence while witnessing the growth of a more healthy, "adaptive narcissism" (involving strength, power, and

assertion), a more realistic adaptation to limitations, and an enhanced capacity for mature object relations where individuality is experienced in dialectic with both "generativity" (Erikson, 1962) and "otherness" (Shane & Shane, 1989). The appearance of such a mature ego ideal in the arena of protective, watchful fathering is aptly described by Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985) as "supplying (one's) love its daily bread" (p. 72).

Although focusing on the arena of work, Axelrod (1995) also emphasizes how adult male activity contributes to masculine identity development by transforming archaic ego ideals (resting on omnipotence and desires for narcissistic completion) into more realistic, "genital" ego ideals. This "refining" of masculine ego ideals promotes the maturing of narcissism in a normative, "continuous reworking of core developmental issues associated with masculinity" (p.3).

I next examine the specific nature of an evolving sense of masculinity in adulthood.

## **Adult Gender Identity Consolidation**

I am proposing that a healthy sense of masculine gender identity involves an ongoing, plastic process of destabilization and reconstruction at various pivotal stages throughout development. In essence, maturing gender identity for males requires sufficient waning of the dominance of the "phallic" ego ideal that essentially denies gender (and generational) differences in the service of the narcissistic wish for unlimited sex and gender possibilities (i.e., what Fast, 1984; 1990 had termed, "bisexual completeness", an illusion that is more likely for boys). This less developed, "phallic" form of gender identity demands the disavowal of one's earliest (sex and) gender "inappropriate" identifications, a repudiation of what the little boy believes are the specifically "feminine" aspects of his relationship with his mother (see also Bassin, in press; Elise, 1996). Benjamin (1996) situates these repudiated early identifications during the oedipal phase where the ideals of gender bifurcation tend to rely on concrete, binary, and oppositional forms of complementarity.

This "phallic" renunciation creates an unconscious gender ossification which often becomes manifest later as gender confusion or rigid, defensive certainty. The resulting male gender identifications are more fragile than flexible, partly because they are formed out of the conflicted, unconscious wishes to embrace and embody one's repudiated feminine identifications in what Schou (1995) terms the "wish to be complete". Thus, core gender identity, which serves to maintain the boundaries of one's gender based on the sense of its psychobiological certitude, becomes split off from the the more plastic, gender role identity, --namely, that necessary psychosocially constructed "multigendered self" that helps to preserve what Aron (1995) described as, "the fluidity of our multifarious identifications" (p. 202).

The construction of a healthy adult (masculine) gender identity requires what Ogden (1989) referred to as "the creation of a dialectical interplay between masculine and feminine identities" (p. 138). This involves the experience of a cohesive sense of manhood where core gender identity is not split off from a flexibly masculine gender role identity. In attaining this more differentiated, "genital" ego ideal, issues pertaining both to the acceptance of the limitations of one's gender and to its contrasting elements, no longer have to be denied in the service of primary narcissism. Such a man does not have to have or be "all" in order to experience his manhood with all its "limitations" (see Fast, 1994). Similarly, the previously renounced, early overinclusive opposite-sex identifications that were deemed gender inappropriate (i.e., what Elise, 1996, terms "psychic bisexuality") are recovered and antagonistic elements can be reunited (Elise, 1996; Bassin, in press). Notions of what is masculine or feminine can thereby more comfortably destabilize as finite categorization of gender identity is superseded by the complexity of one's multiple, differently gendered identifications. This concurs with Benjamin's (1996) contention that the "lived ambiguities of gender" (p. 36) are made tolerable only when this higher level of (postoedipal) differentiation is achieved. Accordingly, such phasic maturation is evident in the more complex forms of gender complementarity fashioned by the capacity to sustain tension between contrasting elements that remain available rather than forbidden (Benjamin, 1996).

Masculine gender can consolidate in such a flexible manner then only if phallicism ceases to dominate and genitality, with its more optimal, fluid, and complex sense of gender differentiation and multiplicity, takes on its rightful place in the psyche (cf. Fast, 1984; 1990; Aron, 1995; Schou, 1995; Bassin, in press). This permits both the ubiquitous, narcissistic "phallic" illusions and previously renounced, overinclusive, bisexual identifications to become integrated in order to facilitate creativity (i.e., healthy, "adaptive grandiosity"), and, as I will argue, to help establish watchful, protective fathering. As the vicissitudes of this "phallic" narcissism and mutual exclusivity attenuate through integration and mastery, culturally sanctioned ideals of manhood, which reflect culturally shared components of the adult male's "genital" ego ideal, can become realized in accordance with the individual's achieved developmental phase.

### **Cultural Ideals of Manhood And Their Relationship To Paternal Watchful Protectiveness**

Axelrod (1995) suggests that societal ideals of manhood serve a counter-regressive function both on a cultural and individual level. While I prefer to recast the dynamics in terms of the often neglected narcissistic drive to conquer in order to achieve completion and integration rather than solely in the direction of the more theoretically problematic regressive wish to be sheltered, I too emphasize the importance of the cultural element in understanding the ubiquity of the masculine striving.

Gilmore (1990) examined traditional injunctions to achieve "real manhood" across cultures and concluded there to be a "deep structure" of masculinity that is encouraged by a range of rituals and manhood ideals. From his retrospective cross-cultural study, he found that the vast majority of cultures perpetuate a male role with three main functions--to impregnate, to protect, and to provide. Among contemporary westernized men, the protective, providing father imago reflects duties emblematic of such constantly sought manhood. Although we cannot know the biological or archetypal basis of this paternal depiction with certitude, it seems evident that this idealization of the father as a delegate of the outside world operates powerfully as a cultural representation even when the real parents do not reinforce it (Benjamin, 1988).

So how might the need to prove one's manhood become actualized in the realm of watchful, protective fathering? I will next consider how a man's self-esteem, as determined by his need to prove his manhood by attaining the masculine ego ideal, is manifest in the realm of watchful, protective fathering. As I have indicated, both gender identity consolidation and cultural adaptation are served by this fathering function.

### **Watchful Protectiveness and Adult Masculine Gender Identity Consolidation**

The mature paternal imago is endowed with pleasure in watchfully protecting his family. I believe that the capability for self-sacrifice, generosity, and servitude are fundamental to this paternal protective watchfulness. Indeed, findings from anthropological research and psychoanalytically-informed observations indicate that mature adult masculinity is less dominated by narcissism and instead, is more object-oriented. Betcher & Pollack (1993) suggest that this more developed form of masculinity synthesizes autonomy and connection, and I have argued (Diamond, 1996) that the father's ability to provide such protective watchfulness depends on his capacity for more vicarious, less direct forms of gratification through identification and empathic object relationships.

The aptitude for paternal watchfulness is partly a function of the new father's own earliest maternal and paternal identifications (Diamond, 1986). The act of watchfully protecting enables the father to reexperience both his attachment to and loss of his own available early, paternal object, while simultaneously accessing and reworking his disavowed maternal identifications. The boy's unique developmental dilemma of how he is to become a male while maintaining a close connection with his mother, is recreated for the man when called upon to watchfully protect his progeny. Like the growing boy who has to become capable of joining his needs for autonomy with his needs for connection, the father who becomes "engrossed" in his newborn while "holding" the mother-infant dyad, consequently is able simultaneously to experience a "loving union with the world" and to acknowledge the "fact of its otherness" (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1985).

In sum, both the culturally based sanctioning of the protective, providing dimensions of masculinity and the intrapsychic embracing and re-integration (on a higher level) of the disavowed lost, early maternal and paternal attachments serve to further the linkage between this fatherly provision and the adult's construction and consolidation of a maturing sense of maleness. This more mature form of manhood represents a movement from a man's experience of being at the center of his odyssey, as epitomized by the mythic Odysseus whose journeys take him far away from his Penelope and Telemachus, perhaps to a more Zeus-like form where, like the mature Odysseus returning to Ithaca, his watchfulness can protect his progeny.

Fathering thereby serves to increase the likelihood of weighting the perpetual male struggle along "genital" lines as acceptance, submission, and waiting become essential to carry out the necessary tasks. The holding, containing facets of a father's watchful protectiveness strengthen a man's capacity to accept (and ultimately, to mourn) the recognition that his ultimate "phallic" objective (for narcissistic completeness) will not be achieved. This seems to be what Manninen (1992) was addressing when he stated that, "genital wonder at the world is taking the place of the phallic striving for control" (p. 24). The matured ego ideal is consequently projected on to the very objects that provide access to reality. The father's watchful protectiveness of the mother-infant dyad enables him to connect directly with the world lying beyond his control, while attenuating further his infantile omnipotence through what might be understood as an "optimal disillusionment".

### **Conflicts and Obstacles For Males In Providing Watchful Protectiveness**

Many men cannot so easily yield their own masculine position as the Odysseus to his Penelope and Telemachus. Instead, as the mother is directing her energies to her infant's odyssey, fathers such as Rich, are dominated by their own more urgent conflicts and needs to achieve their fragile, "phallic" ego ideal. Such men must seek to deny the reality of their wife and infant child's needs while seeking to maintain their own more narcissistically-based form of masculinity which require an active and phallic form of controlling, conquering and vanquishing.

The residue of this phallic taste for "controlling, conquering, and vanquishing," may often remain while serving quite adaptive functions (for example, in the contemporary male "warrior" world of business and industry). My point, however, is that this adaptive residue must be balanced by a maturing sense of "otherness" that enables such phallic strivings to be expressed more progressively in mutual play within transitional space where the other is taken into account (rather than, for example, in the forms of incest and murder). An expanded, more creative matrix for connection can be established when the male psyche is able to reunite and link the impulses to penetrate and conquer with

those to be penetrated and contain (see Elise, 1996).

Men who are dominated by their narcissistically-based forms of masculine striving, when initially called upon to father, may become depressed or more frequently "act out" by having affairs, abandoning their family, losing themselves to their work, and generally becoming unavailable as watchful protectors in the father's version of postpartum depression. The tragic quality of such failed fathering, as Lansky (1992) has described, is compounded by the male's sense of shame and guilt surrounding his arrested sense of manhood.

Most adult men must struggle to transform their more phallic-like impulses to penetrate and conquer the environment in order to attain a position more consonant with the genital ego-ideal. The successful mastery and integration of the phallic- (aggressive and narcissistic) urges rather than their extinction or repression, sets the stage for the attainment of the adult's genital ego-ideal. This major life step requires acceptance and submission to the reality of limitations and loss in order to connect with the adult man's "environment" (namely, from the perspective of my thesis, his infant and wife). This in itself may come to represent an important "challenge" for the mature male--a challenge quite in line with his evolving masculinity where his sense of manhood comes to represent the ability to stand alone and yet, to connect by allowing for the individuality of others to exist and thrive. This is evident in the statement of a member of a new father's group, a former star athlete, who described his successful experience of containfully watching his young infant and wife:

I watched them playing with each other and I knew that I would destroy something they were sharing if I made my presence known. It was difficult though to just watch; I wanted to get in there and do something...maybe toss my daughter up in the air or tickle her. I resisted the temptation though and I am glad. That evening, I noticed that I felt "older and heavier," not so "light and spry." But you know, I felt more like a man that night than I ever have, even before when I played on the football field.

### **Paternal Watchful Protectiveness As A Maturation Opportunity For Gender Identity Consolidation**

Fast (1994) suggested that pregnancy (and, I would add, several additional facets of fathering), provide an opportunity for the man to move toward new and more satisfying resolution of such sex and gender conflicts. In other words, a man is given an opportunity to develop a more mature gender identity after fatherhood by renouncing and mourning his (phallic) wish to be unlimited. Instead, the new father is presented with the occasion to recognize and accept certain real limits vis a vis sex and gender, as well as generational differences.

Ossified and rigidly polarized gender identity can destabilize and reconsolidate in a more fluid manner as fathering helps "correct" what a man may have

incorrectly come to believe as being "closed off" to him because of his sex. For example, the protective, watchful facets of fathering help men to correct their distorted ideas that they must forgo their wishes to be nurturing as inappropriate to their maleness (Fast, 1994). This directly promotes what Fast (1984) terms, "optimal differentiation", while furthering an adaptive, mature sense of masculinity involving the synthesis of autonomy and connection (Betcher & Pollack, 1992) as well as more complex linkages between the varied genderized identifications (Aron, 1995).

Before returning to the clinical material that I began with, I will briefly address one specific narcissistically-grounded issue that a new father, such as Rich, must wrestle with in order to protect his progeny.

### **An Essential Developmental Issue and Its Obstacles For The New Father**

A father will naturally experience both jealousy and envy of the intense, mother-infant mutuality. His capacity to serve as a protective agent consequently depends on how he deals with his envy. The "holding" father must successfully integrate both the creative and destructive aspects of his envy of the primary maternal-infant bond (Hyman, 1995). This synthesis results both through his creative expression, which further establishes his tie to the infant (Diamond, 1992), and through his identification with the "blissful union" experienced by the mother and her baby (Hyman, 1995). Moreover, the mother's sensitivity to the father's needs and her attunement to her husband's feelings of loss help ameliorate his sense of exclusion, envy, and rivalry (Hyman, 1995; see also Shapiro, 1993; Jordan, 1995).

The father's watchful holding of the mother-baby dyad can constructively serve to protect him from his destructive envy of motherhood and to compensate him for feeling unimportant and left out of the mother-infant dyad. This adaptively provides him with a sense of narcissistic fulfillment and completion along more phallic lines as "proof of...his masculine life giving potency" (Manninen, 1993, p.38). It is important to recognize that such "phallicism" is often an important precursor to the "adaptive grandiosity" (Wolson, 1995) that is inherent in the "genital" ideal and that will become a necessity for subsequent dimensions of fatherly nurturance.

The holding father adaptively elevates his infant (along with the infant-maternal bond) by projecting his ego ideal on to the infant and then treats the baby (and infant-mother dyad) as complete. The radiance of the infant as the ego ideal falls upon the father who is then able to become "engrossed" in, and protective of, his newborn with whom he feels a "loving union" while concurrently experiencing its "otherness". The father's longing for the primitive sense of fusion is consequently manifest principally as an attachment to his infant as a differentiated object.

Lacking these adaptive and reality-oriented elements of narcissism, what I think of as a "narcissism in the service of connection", more omnipotent, maladaptive grandiose expressions render some fathers unable to maintain empathic sensitivity with their wife and baby as separate individuals. Fathers such as Rich who are deficient in healthy narcissism are unable to provide the necessary holding functions because they are both threatened by exclusion from, and excessively needy of inclusion into, the mothering dyad.

I will now return to the clinical material by reminding the listener of Rich's painful internal struggle in his failure to make himself available as a watchful, protective father for his newborn son and wife. As I hope to illustrate, despite being initially unable to balance his childish, "phallic" narcissism by calling upon more mature ego ideals, Rich did begin to access his "fatherliness" (i.e., his capacity to accept his fatherly caretaking role) and provide the necessary paternal protectiveness through the therapeutic process.

### **Clinical Example Redux: Rich**

**Rich was well into his second year of analysis when his son, Daniel, was about eight months old. Rich's wife, Nancy, had become increasingly enraged with him over his absences from the family and continued unavailability. She resented his "constant neediness and demands while being so unable to give".**

**Rich struggled with how ashamed and cowardly he felt about his withdrawal. He realized that he was repeating his own father's pattern, which he recalled as "leaving me all alone in the hands of my crazy mother, who poked me incessantly." "Thank God that Nancy's not crazy," he added, "but still I can't stand watching her give so much love to Daniel while I feel so unloved and devalued."**

**In exploring Rich's shameful withdrawal, he realized that he had made Nancy into an "ideal" version of his mother. He concurrently had recreated the sense of being left alone without a father's watchful protection (i.e., without an adequate dyadic, paternal identification that could serve as the forerunner to his projecting his ego ideal on to his "genital" father).**

**Lacking an internal, "watchful" paternal presence,**

**Rich could not safely be alone without the idealized ("breast") mother he made Nancy into and desperately clung to.**

**Rich could only experience himself as a "whole man" when he was able to relive the illusion of completely satisfying his own mother, and consequently, re-experience himself as having recovered the "lost paradise" of being inside her. He stated, "I was Nancy's only man for so long and she was so there for me." "It hurts to admit it," Rich continued, "but I don't want to share her because she'll just replace me with Daniel and I'll be all alone again." The "rainy days" that Rich had been**

**compulsively preparing for could be understood as reflecting his infantile anxieties of being "left out in the cold"--a "cold" that rendered him feeling unprotected and inadequately provided for as if violently torn away from the warmth and comfort of a forever shattered, human connection.**

**We were analyzing how his sense of masculinity and accompanying self-esteem were linked to his fantasy of having his wife all to himself and in turn, experiencing her as the source of his longed for return to an ideal state of happiness. Rich became more able to recognize, disclose, and bear his deep sense of shame and abandonment in his analysis as his experiences were connected to his "phallic" ideals born out of childhood grandiosity. As a result, Rich's need to withdraw from Daniel and Nancy could lessen and he began to identify with Daniel as a self-extension in need of protective, involved fathering. Rich recognized how much his son needed a father who could "be the umbrella for Danny and his mother." He mused as to how Daniel would need him in the years' ahead, while genuinely appreciating Nancy's capacity to give so much love to their son.**

**In a session just after Daniel's first birthday, Rich proudly described the deepening father-son bond while noting his own increased acceptance of his differentiation from Nancy. He next turned his thoughts toward his relationship with his wife and observed that he was no longer draining her with his own neediness. He stated somewhat delightedly, "You know, now that Nancy isn't so tired all the time, I can even imagine her lusting after me again." Rich then playfully indicated both his steadily increasing differentiation from and connection to Nancy when he added the punch line, "But you know what? I just might not be in the mood myself!"**

## **Conclusion**

A father's "watchful protectiveness" helps provide a "good beginning" for his infant child and a parenting alliance with his spouse, while strengthening his own emerging paternal identity and his adult sense of masculinity. The nature of his protective agency, his serving as the "someone watching over" from the outside is multi-determined and based largely on the unique needs of his child, his wife, himself, and the operative marital, familial, and cultural system.

The father who can provide such watchful protection to his progeny is blessed in a host of ways, not the least of which is the opportunity he is given to reconstruct his own fundamentally conflicted and therefore often quite vulnerable sense of masculinity in a way that is more cohesive and yet more flexible. The quiet servitude inherent in this primordial fatherly provision furnishes compelling evidence as to the ability to repair and heal the earliest of male wounds by creating a unique and complex, mature gender identity of his own.

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