FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS: The Promise of Intimacy

ABSTRACT

Many heterosexual females present with similar histories, having repeated the same dynamics with different partners, often dynamics they experienced with their fathers growing up. To the degree that a father lacks attunement for his daughter’s needs, her hurt, anger and other feelings and the consequent defenses of disavowal and projection set her up for conflict in her relationships and, in extreme cases, the development of addictive behaviors. This paper weaves together contributions from different disciplines to create a comprehensive theory and practice to guide therapists in the exploration of conflict, the resolution of feelings, and the deconstruction and integration of projections. It advocates group psychotherapy to help the daughter heal her childhood wounds, change her pattern of relating, and establish partnership as an adult.

Keywords: attunement, conflict, repression, projection, disavowal, trauma bond, addiction, father-daughter relationship, power, partnership, intimacy.
FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS: THE PROMISE OF INTIMACY

The father-daughter relationship is important for the heterosexual daughter, not only when it goes well, but also when it goes awry. As an example in the latter situation, when the father lacks attunement to the daughter’s need for approval, she may no longer explore the full range of her feelings and impulses; she may limit herself to accessing and expressing behaviors that are deemed acceptable to him, leaving her disconnected from her inner wants, needs and feelings. If the validation that she seeks continues to be lacking, eventually she may give up trying, and, disconnected from herself, she may become progressively alienated from her father and others as well, and in many ways isolated and lost (Weiner, 1989).

Often female patients repeat the same dynamics again and again with different partners, dynamics they have learned from their relationship with their fathers. Some patients with more extreme dysfunction become caught in addictive processes. Therapists need to have a theory and practice with sufficient focus and detail to better understand these phenomena and how to help these patients change their patterns of relating.

The subject of father-daughter relationship dynamics is an emerging field of inquiry, a field now beginning to reach some degree of maturity. Some research and theory are becoming available which can help therapists explore the impact of father-daughter dynamics on their patients. This paper borrows from theorists and researchers in order to weave a new theory which supports therapists when working with such patients. Using clinical examples of heterosexual females in both individual psychotherapy and mixed gender psychotherapy groups in private practice, this paper argues that psychotherapy and, in particular, group psychotherapy are well suited for helping the daughter complete her psychological development when her father has lacked attunement for some of her critical developmental needs.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Freud understood that very early the daughter switches her attachment from her mother to her father, and that the father becomes her love object. He also stated. “it is from that
(experience), in the normal course of development, she should find her way to her ultimate love object” (Freud, 1933, p. 162). After Freud, in contrast to the robust theory on mother-child bonding and in spite of the development of elegant methodology to make attachment research possible, as recently as thirty-five years ago, Barclay Martin wrote in his comprehensive review on parent-child relations that attachment to fathers had not yet been directly studied (Martin, 1976). The traditional role of the father as sole breadwinner precluded an appreciation of his psychological importance until recent years, as theorists and researchers largely ignored his role in the family, and in his daughter’s psychological development, as well (Griswold, 1993).

In contrast to this lapse, we are fortunate to have a rich literature relevant to understanding the mother-child relationship as well as relationships in general. Donald L. Winnicott wrote about the attunement between a mother and her child. He also added the terms the “true self” and the “false self,” the true self being the result of “good enough” parenting, and the false self a façade or personality structure that emerged within a child to cope with dysfunctional parenting (Rodman, 2003). Working primarily with children and elaborating on her father’s theories of repression, Anna Freud clarified and categorized defense mechanisms (Freud, 1966, and Wong, 1989). Heinz Kohut focused on the tiny narcissistic disappointments when attunement is lacking, which, in his view, could lead to either growth, when the disappointment is small enough, or pathology when the disappointment is more than what the child can bear (Kohut, 1971). Margaret Mahler, important in understanding attachment theory, delineated stages of development between a mother and her child, specifically naming and clarifying the tasks of separation and individuation which are critical for the child’s emerging sense of self (Mahler, 1975). Elegant research has validated these findings, correlating the mother’s behaviors (such as smiling, touching, vocalizing, acceptance, etc.) and sometimes parental behaviors (such as restrictiveness, permissiveness, cognitive structuring, hostility and other affective components, etc.) to various aspects of the development of infants, children and adolescents (dependence and independence, aggressiveness and withdrawal, obedience and other aspects of socialization, cognitive achievement and psychopathology) at various ages and stages of cognitive and socio-emotional development (Martin, 1976).
Many theorists have noted that childhood experiences impact not only the formation of the child’s personality but also the relationships that the child builds later in life. John Bowlby, studying infant-mother bonding, theorized that the secure and insecure attachments developed in early life shape the ability to establish interpersonal bonds as an adult (Spitz and Spitz, 2009). Marriage and family therapists such as Harville Hendrix have written that the choice of a specific partner is highly influenced by the internalized positive and negative aspects of his or her parents (Hendrix, 1988), indicating that the internalizations of the caregivers create a template for future relationships.

Family therapists, group psychotherapists, psycho-dramatists, and group relations theorists have contributed systems theory, role theory and psychoanalytic theory to advance our understanding of how individuals differentiate within a family or a group. Gregory Bateson, Murray Bowen, Don Jackson, Lyman Wynne, Carl Whitaker and Salvador Minuchin, all family therapists, recognizing that the family behaves as a system and applying principles of systems theory, understood that in order to establish and preserve homeostasis of the group, different members within the family take up complementary and symmetrical roles (Spitz and Spitz, 2009). Role theory, as developed by Jacob L. Moreno, the father of psychodrama, suggests that individuals actualize parts of themselves and de-actualize other parts. This differentiation helps to preserve homeostasis in the family but creates the potential for polarization and conflict, particularly deleterious when the child seeks to have relationships outside the family as an older child or an adult. The technique of role reversal is used by psycho-dramatists to establish or reestablish rapport, and deepen intimacy (Moreno, 1953). Wilfred Bion and some of his followers have focused very specifically on projection. Through projection, we disavow certain traits within ourselves, usually traits unacceptable to us. We then project those traits onto others, sometimes sacrificing authenticity and empathy (Horowitz, 1985, Skolnick and Green, 2004).
Although there has been an enormous amount of research and theory developed about the mother-child relationship, family relationships and relationships in general, the father-daughter relationship did not receive much direct attention until the last thirty-five years.

As Griswold documents, the shift of significant numbers of women into the workforce in WWII and the politics of feminism challenged the near monopoly of the father on providing economically for the family. From these sweeping economic, political and sociological changes, the role of the father in Western cultures is no longer to be the sole bread-winner in the family, which has created an opportunity for the father to choose new ways of fathering. The sixties and seventies saw many fathers take on a nurturing role in their relationships with their children, which was often seen as a personal growth exercise and a gift to their families. More recently, for many men, in a society in which the line between male bread-winning and female domesticity is becoming blurred, the father’s involvement in child-raising is increasingly seen as an opportunity, and sometimes either a right or a responsibility. Griswold argues that the role of the father is in transition and currently there are a wide variety of role definitions, leaving “fatherhood fragmented and fathers uncertain.” “Some men hold onto past assumptions, others embrace new possibilities; some resist doing child care, others offer workshops on how to do it better” (Griswold, 1993, p. 269). Meanwhile, the nineties brought an explosion of literature about the importance of the father and his role in the psychological development of his children of both sexes, often from women who wanted to explore the impact of their father on their own stories (Barras, 2000, Goulter & Minninger, 1993, and Hammer, 1983). Linda Nielson has asserted that the father-daughter relationship is important for both the father and the daughter, and she has written about how fathers and daughters can improve their relationships, as have other contemporary writers (Nielson, 2004).

In spite of a continuing mother-centric perspective, with the changing role of the father, we have begun to compile significant research and theory looking at the father’s impact on his children. Some of this developing research and theory has been recently summarized in an anthology by Charles Lamb, called the Role of the Father, which explores the father’s impact relative to the mother’s in a wide variety of ways and in
various stages of the child’s development. This anthology addresses the father’s impact in situations of marital distress, separation and divorce, in families where the parents come from different socioeconomic backgrounds or different cultures, and in families with mental illness or a disabled child. It also explores the parenting in families created by gay, lesbian and transsexual partners (Lamb, 2010).

Statistical analysis first sounded the alarm that the average father spends less time with the children than the mother (Phares, 1999). Of the 38.9% of children under the age of eighteen who do not live with both their biological or adoptive parents, only 3.9% live with their single, separated or divorced father. Also significant, of the 24.2% of the children under eighteen who live with their single, separated or divorced mother, some 84.2% see their fathers once a week or less. Of the children who live with both parents when they both work fulltime, the father spends only one-third as much time interacting with them as the mother, and when the mother works less than the father, the relative interaction time with the father decreases even further. To complicate these findings, one needs to pay attention to the child’s family system, because the evaluation by the mother and other adults of what the father does with the time can have more impact on the child than how much time is spent (Lamb, 2010, and Dickstein and Parke, 1988).

In spite of the statistics which underline the traditional role of the mother, research studies overwhelmingly point to the importance of the father, debunking what Jonetta Rose Barras has named “the myth of the superfluous father” (Barras, 2000). The research argues that the quality of parenting is more impactful than the quantity. “Sensitive fathering-- responding to, talking to, scaffolding, teaching and encouraging their children-- predicts...socio-emotional, cognitive and linguistic achievements as much as sensitive mothering” (Lamb, 2010, p. 4). That is, both parents are equally influential on the child’s cognitive, social and emotional development, even when the father spends fewer hours with the child. The average father and mother are equally capable of good parenting, at least in research situations, and both are known to be affectionate, nurturing, responsive and active (Lamb, 2010). When the father does have sole responsibility for the children, his behavior becomes similar to the behavior of the mother, suggesting that
the important behaviors are both learned and learnable (Phares, 1999). Good fathering
does not stem from his individual attributes or even from his masculinity, as some might
think. Rather, fathers and mothers impact their children in similar more than dissimilar
ways, by creating secure, warm, close, responsive and attuned relationships (Lamb, 2010).

Some differences exist: in two parent families, the father spends more time playing with
his child or children, while the average mother carries roughly 90% responsibility for the
day-to-day care of the children, whether providing the meals or setting up dental
appointments. (Phares, 1999, and Clarke-Stewart, 1978). Also, the father spends more
time with sons than with daughters, but the fathers are more rejecting of comfort-seeking
behaviors from their sons than from their daughters (and visa versa for mothers) (Martin,
1976). Adolescent girls from divorced parents who spend more time with their father are
more goal-directed and academically successful than girls who spend less time (Phares,
1999).

Another consistent finding is that both parents spend less time with the child as the child
becomes increasingly autonomous as he or she grows older. Boys are more aggressive at
every age than girls, although whether this is from nature or nurture is uncertain, as infant
boys are also handled more aggressively than infant girls and punished more frequently.
Another finding confirms Karen Horney’s earlier observations, that young girls are more
self-controlled and obedient, and generally more amenable to socialization than young
boys (Martin, 1976).

The literature is increasingly informing not only psychotherapists but also educators,
business administrators and legislators. Public policy is slowly changing so that the
father’s role is becoming better supported by society in some important ways (such as the
father attending prenatal classes, being present at the birthing process, and receiving paid
paternal leave), in an attempt to promote the fathers’ financial and psychological
involvement in the lives of their children (Lamb, 2010). These interventions come at a
time when government, in a historic shift that can be described as movement from
“institution” to “companion”, is becoming increasingly involved in the educational, economic, and ethical aspects of family life (Griswold, 1993).

Authors have also looked at some specific challenges highly relevant to the father-daughter relationship, especially when the dysfunction is more extreme, such as the father’s impact on the development and maintenance of eating disorders in his daughter (Maine, 1991). Trauma theory and addiction medicine have also studied the phenomena of extremely dysfunctional relationships. Patrick Carnes, an expert in sexual addiction, has explored the potential damage on the daughter of a traumatic relationship with her father, whether the trauma was caused by emotional, physical or sexual abuse. He describes a “betrayal bond,” named also in the literature as a trauma bond, in which the child remains attached in an unhealthy way to a father or a partner who has been abusive to her (Carnes, 1997). Anne Wilson Schaef described several addictive phenomena that masquerade as true intimacy, but fail to bring the security or gratification of a healthy relationship (Schaef, 1989).

These and other theorists have contributed rich ideas to our understanding of the father-daughter relationship. The rest of this paper focuses on the dynamics of that relationship, and how to help the daughter whose father failed to provide the attunement she needed in order to complete her psychological development and establish partnership for herself as an adult.

DEVELOPMENTAL UNDERSTANDING

In order to understand the importance of the father’s influence on his daughter, it is helpful to appreciate the initial extreme dependency of the daughter as a helpless infant in the arms of her caretaker, generally if not completely dependent on others for nurturance and attachment. Sigmund Freud, D.W. Winnicott, Heinz Kohut, and other psychoanalytic theorists hypothesized that it is within this relationship that the child forms a sense of self, by gradually internalizing her care-giver(s) and the care-giving (Freud, 1930, Rodman, 2003, and Kohut, 1971).
The father may help the mother in varying degrees with nurturing, sometimes acting as a primary caregiver. He also generally adds to the security and stability for the child through his love for the mother and the family. Thus, the father potentially plays a strong role by “mothering” the child and the family in various ways.

As indicated above, less has been said in the psychoanalytic literature about the father to differentiate him from the mother and to define his role. However, Freud suggested that in a healthy situation the father signals the limits on the child’s continuous access to the mother. The child learns that she cannot have the mother to herself, because the father wants her also. Freud called this the “reality principle,” which is thought to be the impetus for the child to develop progressive independence from the mother, and eventually from both parents (Freud, 1930). Thus the child moves into the next general task of the father-daughter relationship, which can be understood as “separation-individuation,” borrowing the term from Margaret Mahler (Mahler, 1975).

As the child turns her attention from the mother to the father, in the case of a heterosexual daughter, the potential sexuality between the father and daughter adds intensity to their relationship; in addition, it encourages the daughter to define her sexuality. From age three or earlier, according to Freud and others, as she becomes aware of her sexuality, she experiences “I am sexually attractive because I am attractive to my daddy.” The healthy father, comfortable with his own sexuality, does not resist his daughter’s developing sexuality, nor does he abuse it.

The work of separation-individuation, a process that began at or before birth, continues through childhood and adolescence and even into the young adult years. The daughter may still be “Daddy’s Little Girl” and highly dependent on her mother and father for various needs, such as validation, affection, approval and guidance. However, from the time she begins to form thoughts, needs and feelings, she works to develop an identity of her own. Not yet adult, during this process her identity is still malleable, and both her mother and her father have significant influence on the development of that identity.
Later, as her own identity consolidates, the daughter will no longer be dependant on her father as before. Because he has been attuned to her needs, and willing to use his power in ways that validate the different parts of her true self, she will have developed the capacity to trust herself, as well as her father and others. The healthy daughter relates to her father—and also to other men—from a well-developed and stable identity within herself.

**DYSFUNCTIONAL PATTERNS**

Attunement refers to the resonance between what the child needs and what the caregiver provides. D.W. Winnicott formulated that with “good enough” mothering, the mother resonates with the infant’s needs (Winnicott, 1993, p. 123, and Rodman, 2003); that mother is attuned to her child. That is the theoretical ideal. Usually daughters develop with some degree of variation from that ideal. When the care-giving is experienced as either intrusive on the one hand or absent on the other, “too much or too little,” the attunement is lacking.

Karen Horney theorized that the child needs affection and approval, and will develop whatever behavior patterns result in the reward of that affection and approval (Weiner, 1989, and Horney, 1950). To the degree that the father’s personality has been distorted by his own dysfunctional upbringing, the daughter, vulnerable and sensitive because of her dependency, may be required to distort her own personality in order to get her basic needs met.

Winnicott pointed to this phenomenon with his term “the false self” (which Horney called the “neurotic self”), in contrast to the true, real or authentic self (Horney, 1950, Rodman, 2003, and Meissner, 2009). Winnicott and Horney were focusing on the mother but it is reasonable to generalize these concepts also to the father, and to recognize many needs of the child: validation (“I acknowledge you, therefore you exist”), affection (“I love you therefore you are loveable”), and approval (“I approve of you, therefore you are good”), as well as food, clothing, shelter and safety.
As stated above, if some of the daughter’s critical developmental needs are not met, she will no longer explore or express her full range of feelings, impulses and behaviors; she will limit herself to exploring what is acceptable to the people who are important in her psychological world. Worse, she may give up trying, and, disconnected from her father’s approval, she may become progressively alienated from her father and others as well, and in many ways isolated and lost (Weiner, 1989).

Through the process of repression and disavowal, some parts of the daughter are driven outside her conscious awareness (Freud, 1966). The repressed feelings distort her perceptions; they color her views of herself, her father, or both. Through projection, she accentuates those parts in her father which she has repressed within herself. She will tend to project subjectively-held positive parts of herself onto her father and idealize him, while shaming herself, or, on the other hand, project subjectively-held negative parts of herself onto her father, denigrate him, while repressing and disavowing those parts within herself.

In the dysfunctional situation the daughter has become dependent on her father and others for the experience of being complete. According to Horney, she may be left with merely a vague sense of discomfort, and the sense that she cannot completely trust herself, so she keeps her point of reference outside of herself (Horney, 1950, and Weiner, 1989). Myron Weiner describes her experience:

…a diffuse sense of discomfort, anxiety and apprehension, and a shaky sense of self. The child can no longer trust … her own feelings, but has shifted the point of reference outside the self. and [becomes] torn by conflicting needs and desires (Weiner, 1989, p.422).

Progressively more and more out of touch with her own thoughts, needs and feelings, she develops a pattern of letting her father and others have power over her, becoming victim to their needs and decision-making.
Tania reported that when she calls her father on the telephone, he talks at length about himself and his problems. Tania feels angry about this, and remembers that for years as a child she followed him around the golf course, pulling the cart while he played golf. Tania is unsure whether or not she wanted to do this with him and for him, but she imagines that if she ever expressed displeasure, let alone anger, he would have responded with displeasure, and anger of his own. Now she finds it difficult to express not only her anger, but also her wants and needs.

In *The Feminine Mystique* and other literature from the women’s movement of the 1960’s and 70’s, Betty Friedan and others pointed out that in our western society the father tends to have more power than his wife (Freidan, 1973), giving the father the most power of anyone in the family, being both the parent and male, and leaving the daughter with the least. Thus, the daughter is ordinarily the most vulnerable person in the family to being impacted by the father’s behaviors (Goulter and Minninger, 1993, and Griswold, 1993).

When the lack of attunement between the father and the daughter has been extreme, for example, when the daughter has experienced abuse or abandonment, the experiences can be not only harmful, but even traumatic for the daughter. As described by Patrick Carnes, the daughter who has been traumatized has the tendency to develop a betrayal bond to her father (Carnes, 1997), also called a trauma bond or shame bond. For a patient with such a trauma bond, getting consistent attunement and approval from her father is not an option. She gives up hope for an intimate, trusting relationship. She tends to relate to her father as an object, perhaps as a perpetrator, and she is vulnerable for replacing her attachment to him with attachments to the patterns of abandonment and abuse.

When such a heterosexual daughter relates to men, her tendency for relating will be through her trauma bond. She may relate to all people as objects, expecting either to control them or to be controlled by them. She may further develop a preference for attaching to substances and processes over people, especially if she is biologically predisposed (Flores, 2005). The addictive substances and processes offer her immediate
rather than delayed gratification, modulation of affect, and the illusion of longed-for perfect attunement.

Caralee has wonderful memories of her father reading bedtime stories to her, but she also reports that he raged at her. She is a competent university professor, but she tends to be quiet when she is in conflict with others, rather than speaking up in order to get her feelings expressed and her needs met. Worse, she has often chosen the addictive highs of easy sexuality and romance over healthier relationships. She came to treatment having attached to a series of partners who were periodically abusive and abandoning, repeating the cycles of hope and despair she remembers experiencing with her father growing up.

Steve Karpman, M.D., a psychiatrist in the 90’s who studied families, particularly families with addictions, understood that family members behave as a system. Seeking stability, they tend to form a stable triad, now called the Karpman Triangle (the triangle known to be a particularly stable geometric configuration). In such a triad, three or more family members mold their individual defensive systems into the complementary roles of perpetrator, victim and rescuer (Karpman, 2007).

Because of the father stereotypically having more power than anyone else in the family, it is the father who ordinarily tends to take the role of the perpetrator, while the mother tends to play the victim. After children are born, such a mother may evolve into an enabler, ineffectively arguing for the rescue of herself or one or more of the children.

Most family members have a preferred role, but each individual learns all the roles well. Up against life’s challenges, family members are more likely to switch roles than to break free of the patterns. For example, when a father, commonly in the role of a perpetrator, receives a pay cut at work, he may react by switching roles in the family. Suddenly in the victim role, he may complain that his pay decrease was his boss’s fault. The daughter, ordinarily in a victim role, may take up the role of a rescuer to comfort him. The mother can easily slip into becoming the new perpetrator, and, worried about the decreased funds
for groceries and clothing, complain of his being irresponsible. In the extreme situation a paradox of power emerges: the power of the perpetrator depends on the reactions of the others. In order to maintain the stability of the system, the family members develop varying degrees of denial and distortion rather than change their familiar dynamics.

The daughter who is used to denying and disavowing parts of herself intensifies that process in such a dysfunctional family dance. To the degree that the mother and the father are in conflict, the daughter will join whomever she senses is the weaker parent, in order to support the family homeostasis. To the degree that the mother plays a dysfunctional role, she remains unavailable to help the daughter break out of powerlessness and denial about herself.

Carolyn, an unmarried heterosexual female in her early forties, was an only child, and she had delighted in her father’s affection. She also remembers going to her room to focus on her homework every night, while her father denigrated her mother while becoming increasingly inebriated, and her mother “just took it.” She reports that every morning she scolded her mother for her passivity the night before, while she engaged cheerfully with her father over breakfast. She only recognized her father’s drinking as problematic when she was in college, when he became abusive to her. She came to understand now that as a child she played the role of perpetrator to her mother’s victim stance, and enabler to her father’s alcoholism; later in college, she played victim to his verbal abuse.

The mother’s response to the father is highly significant, and her influence can be either mitigating or exacerbating for the daughter’s developmental struggle. To the degree that she stays available to relate intimately and honestly from her true self and develops an equitable balance of power in the co-parenting relationship, she helps the daughter move forward developmentally. However, to the degree that the mother is either enabling of the father’s dominance through passivity and denial, or controlling and denigrating of him, she presents a role model for a particular way of interacting in a partnership, giving messages to the daughter about men which undermine the daughter’s ability to trust. The
same situation is true for the siblings. To the degree that they offer healthy support for the daughter’s process, they help her as well as themselves, and to the degree that they thwart their own and her healthy development, they increase her challenge.

The daughter from a dysfunctional family will be challenged when she wants to develop a healthy partnership. For the purposes of this discussion, relationship building can be described as progressing through five stages: romance, appeasement, conflict, working through and intimacy. In the first stage of romance, when the partners are very attracted to each other but do not yet know each other well, they are in denial about the ways in which their partner is limited. In this stage, although she has repressed some of her own qualities or personality characteristics from childhood, because the daughter has chosen someone who accentuates those qualities within herself that she has repressed, she has the illusion of being complete. In the second stage, appeasement, she is able to stretch to please her partner using skills she has learned in childhood, but because she cannot expect to feel complete unless she is complete within herself, she starts to feel that there is something missing within her or within the relationship.

In the third stage, the stage of conflict, the partners come to the point when the skills learned in childhood may be insufficient for working through and resolving their conflicts. One or both partners is openly dissatisfied and in conflict with the other. The personality deficits from childhood leave them unable to meet the challenges involved in developing a successful partnership.

Caralee presented in treatment with a mild depression. A heterosexual female in her mid-forties, she linked her symptoms to her unhappiness from her relationship with her boyfriend of two years. She said that he complained that she was “soft” on disciplining her teen-age children, allowing them to be impolite to him by ignoring him or talking back. She was tired of being criticized by him, and she was tired of the arguing that ensued when she defended herself. While she had learned to be positive and supportive, her boyfriend tended to be negative and
judgmental, and while she had learned to be reserved and polite, her boyfriend was outspoken.

Many relationships end at the conflict stage; healthy relationships move through the conflict, work through the challenges, and reach the stage of secure intimacy. Relationship conflict presents an important opportunity for growth for both individuals involved, and for the daughter to move forward developmentally towards becoming a complete adult. Thus, establishing partnership often offers not only support but also an optimal degree of challenge, and, where the family left the daughter developmentally incomplete, the relationship that the daughter has chosen can help her complete her unfinished process.

To undo the damage and complete her development, the daughter will need to access and heal the feelings underneath her defensiveness, making her defensiveness unnecessary and freeing her to make healthy choices. Through exploring her conflicts with others, she will have the opportunity to identify her feeling and also her repressed and projected parts, and integrate them into her behavior. As she grows in her acceptance of all parts of herself and others, she may be able to return to her relationship with her father and others, and experience greater intimacy.

HELPING THE DAUGHTER MOVE FORWARD
The issue for therapists is how to help the daughter amend these processes, and to help her move forward developmentally, while also giving her relationships the best possibility of achieving secure intimacy.

If the daughter’s family or part of the family is willing to participate in family therapy, the whole family can become activated to abstain from the dysfunctional relationship patterns. Or, a daughter in psychotherapy can be taught how to improve her relationship with her father and other family members, or at least prepare them for the changes she is making. Otherwise, the daughter’s attempts to become free of the old patterns may be met with some resistance, especially initially.
Although the daughter may harbor a wish that the father and others may change, often the other family members are unavailable for participating in her treatment, and the daughter, perhaps still intimidated by the father’s dominance, may not want her father to be involved. The father’s dominant positioning in the family hierarchy protects him from much of the pain the daughter feels, and thus he may lack the motivation necessary for change. He can still help his daughter by being present and compassionate as she struggles with the relationship, offering her the very important security of unconditional love, to the best of his ability.

It will be useful for the daughter, no matter what others around her decide, to focus her energy where she can make the most difference: changing herself. As she participates in healthier ways, she may find that her relationships improve, and that her father and also others respond differently to her.

Whether the daughter focuses on the difficulties she is experiencing or has experienced in her relationship with her current boyfriend (or husband) or with previous partners, the processes for her growth and development are the same. Her relationship difficulties highlight unfinished business from childhood, once outside her awareness, and something about her that might be good to change.

In committing to her own change process, it is useful for her to reframe her problems from something “bad” to something “good.” Thus the saying goes, “the bad news is good news,” because breaking the denial about oneself, however bad that feels, is crucial for forward movement. Her relationship difficulties offer her a “second chance” to grow up in areas that were bypassed or mismanaged the first time around. Many couples and marriage therapists have noted that the choice of a partner often offers the particular challenges that the person needs for his or her growth (Hendrix, 1988). A word of caution: if the daughter has become involved in an addictive relationship because she was traumatized in the past, it is important that she not allow herself to become needlessly re-traumatized (Carnes, 1997). However, as an adult she has resources that were not
available when she was a vulnerable child, and she can therefore better take care of herself. Sometimes it is necessary for her to be involved in a highly challenging and even traumatic relationship in order to work through her previous experiences.

Individual psychotherapy can offer the daughter guidance through her process of growth and change; however, group psychotherapy can be especially effective because it offers a lens on the patterns of participation in relationships that the daughter develops with peers. Often the daughter of a dysfunctional father-daughter relationship has become adept at skills particularly useful in other hierarchical relationships, such as appeasing and caretaking. She may find herself playing either the dominant role or the subservient role, because she knows both roles well. Such relationships, which include the psychotherapist-patient relationship, potentially hide the feelings repressed from childhood. “Daddy’s little girl” makes a “good patient:” she pays her bill, accepts her therapist’s schedule, and possibly accepts his or her interpretations even when they aren’t attuned to her needs. In a psychotherapy group, the group members, as peers, will challenge the daughter to develop her skills for relating on a level playing field.

The anger, shame and fear the daughter repressed will show up in defensive behaviors that will be off-putting to others in the group. When the defensiveness is explored and the fear, anger and shame exposed, the feelings from prior dysfunction and trauma can be acknowledged and healed.

*Carolyn came into group psychotherapy as a high stakes commodities trader. She was confronted very early on in the mixed gender group on her pattern of dominating the conversation with fast, anxious talking. The group asked her to consider if the assertiveness that has helped her on the trading floor has blocked her from developing the level of intimacy she wants with her male sexual partners. While in group she learned to explore her emotions, including her underlying anxiety, while sharpening her skills for listening to and compromising with others. She also developed a clear sense of her own needs, and after two*
years in the group she adopted an infant baby boy, who is currently thriving.  
(Carolyn is in both individual and group psychotherapy.)

Thus to the degree that the daughter attaches to others in the group, she gains not only support and guidance for her forward development, but also multiple relationships that potentially challenge the defensive structure of her false self. If the daughter is in a mixed gender group of males and females, the patterns of relating to her father may be more likely directed toward the men in the group, but the valences for particular attachments are not necessarily gender specific. Even if the daughter is in an all female group, her characteristic patterns of attachment will still emerge in her relationships with the other group members.

Thus, where the daughter developed a false self to protect herself from her childhood feelings, she may find herself in conflict with others. Group psychotherapy often teaches new group members that to participate in conflict is an affirmation and an opportunity. The affirmation is that the group member was seen as being both important enough to the group and strong enough to be the target of strong feelings. The opportunity is that conflict highlights a defensive pattern that could be important to understand. Thus, conflict can be viewed as a gift, albeit a gift most people do not want.

Caralee was in her sixth session of group psychotherapy when she laughed off an issue which was sensitive to Jennifer, another woman in the mixed gender group. Jennifer said, “I feel so angry with you, I want to pull you by your hair and throw you across the room!” Caralee whitened. At the next session she reported that as a seven year old, she experienced her father waking her from a nap and throwing her across the room, and she never knew why. She further disclosed that her first marriage had been physically abusive. She had felt so comfortable and safe in her individual therapy that her deepest fears were never triggered and never emerged, whereas in the group psychotherapy she was challenged to access her fear and work with the violence in her past. (Caralee and Jennifer are in both individual and group psychotherapy.)
It makes sense to think that if the daughter wants to disrupt the defenses that were created to protect her from her pain and other feelings, she will need to experience the feelings that her defenses keep at bay. Some psychoanalysts have theorized that one stores repressed feelings. Perhaps the feelings that are triggered in the daughter’s current conflicts are not only from current situations but also from previous situations when she was caught in the same or similar dynamics with her father and perhaps others. The dynamics are likely energized or even created by passion that was shut down, childhood feelings that were never fully resolved.

If the daughter becomes serious about accessing, healing and integrating her feelings, she may choose to prioritize feeling her feelings in various ways. Because the expression of feelings was discouraged in childhood, it can be useful for the therapist and patient to metaphorically use a spotlight, a magnifying glass, and a megaphone to highlight her feelings as they emerge in the treatment. If the daughter becomes so overwhelmed by her feelings that she might be unsafe temporarily, she may need to develop a safety plan so that she doesn’t harm herself or others while she is still learning new skills. Boys tend to channel at least some of their anger into sports, such as football or baseball; the daughter may choose similar activities to consciously channel her anger, perhaps tennis, softball, or track, or quiet activities like meditating or journaling. She can use role-play or psychodrama in her psychotherapy sessions to set up a scene to more fully or more deeply express the feelings once buried inside of her. As a greater intensity of feelings emerges, the daughter can, if the therapist and her group are willing, use props such as a squash or tennis racket, or a bataka, to express herself more fully. For example, she may choose to hit a chair cushion with a racket to access and release her rage. In childhood the daughter was trained to repress her feelings, now she can be retrained to work with them.

*Caralee made a decision to access the buried rage repressed during her childhood and became open to experiencing her anger in her daily activities. She became aware of her anger while cleaning her house and washing the dishes.*
became an aggressive tennis player and enrolled in acting classes where she became comfortable with the role of Lady Macbeth. Also, she learned to take “feeling time-outs” for feeling anger. One Sunday afternoon, enraged with her boyfriend, she deliberately went to a crowded shopping mall, sat on a bench and fumed internally at the people who passed by. She reported that her anger abated after an hour or two, and she went home feeling peaceful.

Wherever the daughter works with her feelings on the experiential continuum, from merely reporting her feelings to screaming them, psychotherapy can help her access and express her feelings, heal them with self-acceptance and acceptance from others, and integrate them with new understandings. One can drop bombs with anger or one can build bridges; it is important that accessed feelings are channeled constructively, rather than destructively. As the daughter develops mastery of the expression of her feelings, she expands her capacity to work through the conflicts that emerge in her relationships.

After about two years in group psychotherapy, Tania, a heterosexual female in her late thirties, became comfortable being in the group when others were expressing their emotions, and she finally became able to practice expressing her own anger to her therapist and to others in her mixed gender group. Meanwhile, she learned to express her needs and wants to her boyfriend, whom she later married. (Tania is in both individual and group psychotherapy.)

The daughter can be coached to have conversations to explore her conflicts with others while attending to her childhood wounds. In childhood the daughter didn’t fully express herself; now, speaking up clearly and communicating honestly can be powerful. She might practice such a conversation in the safety of her psychotherapy group, following the well-established guideline of “I statements,” stating 1) “I feel _____ when you do _____ (such and such); 2) the impact on me is (or has been) _____; and 3) in the future I would like from you _____”. Another group member, perhaps playing the role of her father or partner, can respond by 1) acknowledging what she said, saying, “I heard you say you feel (or felt) _____ when I _____ (do such and such)”; 2) apologizing for his
actions, and 3) stating what he would be willing to do in the future as amends. Eventually she can be coached to reverse roles with a father-substitute or boyfriend-substitute in the group, in order to develop or enhance her compassion for her father or partner, and more deeply heal her pain (Moreno, 1953).

Interpersonal conflict, whether it is with a father, a partner or with a triggering group member, presents an opportunity for repair of the childhood dysfunction on another level, because the conflict signals specific parts of herself that she has previously repressed, projected outward, and disavowed (Skolnick and Green, 2004). These traits will very likely be the same traits or similar traits that a father (or other family members) possessed when she was a child, and perhaps the same or similar traits she found objectionable in a series of boyfriends previously (Hendrix, 1988).

The daughter would do well to access and accept these traits within herself. One must be cautious around the challenges created by semantics; that is, she is likely to use words with a negative spin about her partner’s traits, and different words with a positive spin when she describes herself. Thus, both the therapist and the daughter may need to search to see her task clearly. If she resents her partner’s selfishness, she may need to learn to practice more self care. If she dislikes her partner’s arrogance, she may need to access her confidence and self-esteem. If she complains about his being mean, she may need to develop her assertiveness and her access to her anger. If she minds his being inactive, “a couch potato,” that may be a signal that she needs to follow his lead and learn to relax.

In her group psychotherapy, Caralee saw that she uses humor to avoid the serious exploration of issues. As she gradually became aware of her own psychological issues, she came to appreciate her boyfriend’s expressive honesty and realism, in contrast to her tendency towards evasiveness and denial.
Finding these previously denigrated and disavowed qualities and accepting them within herself will help her become accepting of those traits in her partner and others (Skolnick and Green, 2004). This may help her feel a commonality with her partner, and change her perspective of him from enemy to friend. As one wise man stated, “I had the lenses on my glasses backwards,” and further, “I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to be changed in the world as on what needs to be changed in me and in my attitudes (Alcoholics anonymous, 1976, p. 451). Identifying and developing missing pieces from her development will also free her from a piece of her dependency on others, allowing her to be more complete.

Caralee has been in her mixed gender psychotherapy group for about three years. She has been learning skills for “the level playing field,” like being honest and open about her true thoughts, needs and feelings. Passionate but not over-reactive, she has developed skills for recognizing and working with her feelings when they just start to emerge. She has done work to express and heal her childhood feelings. She has accessed and accepted previously buried parts of herself, such as her anger and aggression. Her defensive patterns have abated. She asserts herself with clear boundaries that support her healthy functioning. She trusts herself, and she is accepting of herself and others around her. As of this writing, she has been building a relationship with a man who is extraordinarily supportive of her, and she is using her anger and newfound assertiveness to write a book for women in business.

The daughter, now capable of being independent, becomes capable of being interdependent. Instead of giving herself away, she becomes able to share of herself, giving nothing away. Having mastery of her emotions, she both has the ability to modulate her feelings and the freedom to express them. No longer projecting parts of herself onto her partner and others she experiences others more realistically (Skolnick and Green, 2004). Feeling secure and even empowered, she contributes as an equal in her important relationships, participating in decision-making. Thus, the daughter’s healing and growth expand her capacity for partnership, and deepen her experience of
intimacy. The promise of intimacy inherent in the father-daughter relationship becomes fulfilled.

CLOSING DISCUSSION
Many heterosexual female patients present with similar histories, having repeated the same dynamics again and again with different partners, very often the same dysfunctional dynamics they experienced with their fathers growing up. This paper presents a comprehensive theory and practice to support therapists in helping such patients heal their childhood wounds and change their patterns of relating.

This paper recognizes the importance of the father’s attunement to his daughter’s needs, and then explores the consequences of the dysfunctional situation. It guides the therapist to encourage the patient to focus on herself, and to help her accept her interpersonal conflicts as opportunities for explorations and growth, to access and express her feelings, to reclaim and accept those parts of herself she has repressed within herself and projected onto her partner, father or others, and to integrate those previously repressed parts of herself into her ongoing behavior. As the daughter reclaims parts of herself she becomes more complete as a person. As she becomes accepting of these parts of herself, she will find herself more compassionate for others. Thus, this paper guides the therapist in helping the daughter complete her own development and also successfully establish partnership for herself as an adult. The theory and the implications for practice can be modified and used to better understand other relationships as well, such as father-son, mother-son, mother-daughter and sibling relationships.

The paper weaves together contributions from classical and neo-classical psychoanalysis, attachment theory, interpersonal group psychotherapy and systems theory, family and couples therapy, addiction medicine and trauma theory, feminism and contemporary group relations theory, as well as our more recent findings of the role of the father in the modern family. In so doing, it demonstrates how different disciplines can inform each other in creating a comprehensive theory and practice. For example, psychoanalytic theory offers a developmental understanding of some addictive processes. Meanwhile,
addiction medicine and trauma theory describe the more severely dysfunctional family situations, and in so doing, inform our understanding of incest and sexual abuse, as well as clarify some phenomena of less severe situations studied by attachment theorists and family therapists.

The theory in this paper offers students new to the field of psychotherapy a particular roadmap for healing and growth; further, it introduces them to the value of using a theoretical framework to guide them in their work. It offers individual, couples, family and group psychotherapist specific applications of psychotherapy in helping patients who seek to improve their partnership capabilities. In particular, it offers a step-by-step guide for deconstructing projections. In addition, it offers the individual, family and couples therapist a strong argument for considering group psychotherapy.

The general public can infer from the theory and practice presented here that it is useful to see conflict not as a problem but rather as an invaluable opportunity for growth and change. Projections can be deconstructed, allowing the participant to take responsibility for his or her feelings and experience. Anger can be seen as a gift, one that signals something significant for the daughter and potentially for both partners, something important that was missed in childhood that would be good to understand and repair.

We have only relatively recently begun to look at the role of the father, and our research and theory continue to be greatly impacted by our understanding of the mother’s role. This paper points out that because the father has the most power of anyone in the family, his attunement to his daughter’s needs is likely to have a large effect on her development. The potential sexuality between the father and his heterosexual daughter creates a qualitative difference in his impact on his daughter in contrast to the mother’s impact. We are only just beginning to learn about other qualitative differences between various combinations of father-dyads and mother-dyads, which can be topics for future research and theory.
REFERENCES


