

DIFFERENT THAN DAD:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF  
MASCULINE GENDER ROLE STRAIN

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**Different Than Dad:**  
**A Phenomenological Exploration of**  
**Masculine Gender Role Strain**

by

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in partial fulfilment of the  
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## Abstract

The purpose of the study is to explore the ways in which men raised during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have experienced and negotiated tensions and conflicts in masculine gender role expectations. In order to capture the complex and dynamic nature of role strain, the research design follows a qualitative phenomenological methodology. Eight men were selected, all of whom were born approximately in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The men varied in terms of age, education, background, and family situation. Each participant was interviewed at length using a semi-structured interview process that included a wide range of topics beginning in childhood and across the life span. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed according to the presence of dominant themes. The results of the interviews were compared and contrasted with the existing literature on masculinity and Gender Role Strain.

All of the men experienced multiple pressures to change coming from various sources. Given these many pressures, undertaking change was complex and uncertain in which the men felt little sense of direction. The Gender Role Strain Paradigm and its various strain types did not fit the experience of the men well. While some of their experiences are reflected by the construct, the paradigm provides too superficial and simplistic a framework for fully capturing the complexity of their situation. The men's experience suggests that, for them at least, the pursuit of a singular, fixed and independent masculinity may not only be unrealistic, but may be a poor adaptation to the demands of contemporary society. In order to better reflect the complexity of experience expressed by the men, what seems required is a view of masculinity that does not seek

resolution or reconciliation but rather allows for contradiction and conflict. In this way masculinity is not a crisis to be resolved, but rather a complex and dynamic ongoing phenomenon that can take many forms.

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believed in me every step of the way. She has always been my first and last sounding board and reference point. Without her emotional and practical support, and her willingness to take on many of our family duties, I would not have ever been able to find the time to complete my dissertation. She has also brought the ideas within this dissertation to life ensuring that at all times this work stays grounded in reality and applicable to day to day living.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

### 1.1 Introduction: The Crisis of Masculinity

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, profound challenges have been posed to the central assumptions of Western society. The primacy of rationality, the centrality of the individual, the certainty of truth and morality, and the ascendancy of man have all met with serious resistance. The cornerstones of the Enlightenment culture of modernism have been challenged by sweeping social and economic forces. The grand institutions of science, religion, government, education, industry, and family have not only fallen short of their lofty aims but are more and more recognized as the source of entrenched social constraint and oppression. The modernistic traditions once so full of promise and certainty at the beginning of the century became increasingly equated with the perpetuation of injustice by the century's end.

Over this period, the fundamental question about the role and place of men and women in society has undergone tremendous upheaval. At the century's beginning, the respective positions of men and women were seen as part of a natural biological order in which men and women played opposing and complementary roles. Masculinity, along with its counterpart femininity, were seen as part of an ordained social and moral code required for the healthy functioning of society. The superior position that men held relative to women was similarly seen as inevitable and ideal. A patriarchal social structure was viewed as an inherently occurring and critical pillar of civilized society. Masculinity

and femininity existed as fixed normative backdrops against which the behaviour and men and women could be directed and judged.

However, as the century wore on, virtually every assumption associated with gender was challenged. The shift from certainty and essentialism regarding the sexes to uncertainty and criticism happened most rapidly in the latter part of the century as part of sweeping social upheaval. The rise of women's and gay liberation movements gave serious challenge to the beliefs and structures that maintained the patriarchal order. The economy moved away from reliance upon agriculture toward industry, and increasingly toward technology thereby diminishing the need for and value placed on physical labour and production. The idealization of the nuclear family lessened as the family took on more diverse forms following dramatic growths in the divorce rate and single mother households. Developments in birth control and reproductive technologies provided women with greater control and choice in respect to pregnancy. An increasing emphasis on individual rights, personal freedoms and self-development shifted the focus away from social responsibility toward individual self-actualization and gratification. A general epistemological shift away from modernism and science gave way to a postmodern preoccupation with relativism and the challenging of hegemonic ideas and structures that perpetuate oppressive practices.

The result, in respect to the place of men and women in society, was a profound shift away from sex role inevitability toward viewing gender as a complex social construct inextricably linked with other social structures and problems. In particular, traditional masculinity and the male gender role came under critique. Masculinity, once

viewed as a necessary and superior way of being, became centrally associated with a wide range of social and psychological problems. The attitudes and practices of masculinity became increasingly viewed as the lynchpin of patriarchy, the supporting structure underlying violence, the culprit behind many health concerns and the barrier to healthy relationships. Traditional masculinity was seen as in need of profound change. At its worst, it was viewed as the complex of beliefs and practices responsible for society's ills. At best, it was viewed as obsolete and ridiculously out of step with contemporary times.

In a single generation, men born after the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century moved from a relatively unvarying standard of masculinity, to multiple, competing and contradictory standards. Gender scholars declared the onset of a "crisis of masculinity" and proclaimed that male gender roles were dramatically lagging behind the changing times. A new generation of men were believed to precariously straddle the "old" and the "new" masculinity. Their fathers had modelled a way of being that was considered no longer acceptable to a new society and the reformation of masculinity became a major social concern. Throughout the 1970s, the limitations of traditional masculinity were articulated by the women's movement. Masculinity was considered oppressive and the alteration of gender expectations became the subject of much popular debate and tension. Throughout the 1980s, competing views of masculinity fought to establish themselves as the rightful successor to the original framework. However, by the 1990s the passion of the sex role debate had died out and no successor to the traditional framework had been found. The focus of attention on sex roles moved from the social domain and became increasingly individualistic, more psychologized, and much less politicized. The

complexity and passion of popular discourse in respect to the male role waned, dropped from the public radar screen, and was largely marginalized to the academic world.

## 1.2 Men and Gender Role Strain

Throughout the decades of debate about masculinity, one framework for understanding the problems that men experience remained dominant. The Gender Role Strain Paradigm was widely adopted as the best way to understand the struggles that men were experiencing as well as the most instructive as to how men need to change. The framework posits that, given the changes in gender roles and expectations that have occurred, men find themselves caught between competing standards of masculinity. As a result, men experience a straining conflict between traditional expectations and contemporary ones. Men are stuck between opposing ideological pressures where masculinity becomes a phenomenon involving strained roles that individual males cannot resolve.

Gender role strain is said to take a variety of forms since gender plays such a fundamental part in everyday life. For example, men are said to suffer from role strain as a result of failing to live up to a perceived ideal of masculinity. The discrepancy between what a man "should be" and how he perceives himself causes psychic distress. On the opposite end of the role spectrum, role strain is said to result from successfully fulfilling the requirements of traditional masculinity. Strain arises because many traditional masculine traits are said to be inherently dysfunctional to the individual and others. Role strain is also said to result from the ordeal of male role socialization. Pressures involved

in “becoming a man” are said to be inherently traumatic. Thus the ways in which boys are expected to conform to a gender role that emphasizes emotional independence from parents and others leads to unresolved and prolonged grief and sensitivity to further emotional injury. In all, men are believed to experience a wide variety of difficulties associated with competing and contradictory and role demands.

The effects of role strain are said to be similarly wide ranging and highly problematic for men. Role strain is argued to be the problem behind men’s inability to change since they are caught between opposing, irreconcilable forces. Role strain is also seen as the problem underlying men’s emotional inexpressiveness, inability to commit to relationships, tendency toward anger, struggles with parenting, and a long list of other difficulties.

The Role Strain Paradigm also suggests solutions to men’s struggle. Like the problems, the solutions can take many forms. However the general thrust involves assisting them to make the transition into a more functional masculine way of being. A two-part approach is often used to help men. First, men engage in conscious-raising to gain greater awareness of the strain that dominates their lives. Men are encouraged to see connections between the competing pressures that they experience and their often ineffectual attempts toward resolution. Men are then taught skills of an updated and contemporary masculinity. Much of the emphasis is on gaining greater emotional awareness and expressiveness, as well as learning more effective ways of dealing with interpersonal conflict and managing personal stress.

Despite wide acceptance among researchers of the Gender Role Strain Paradigm, it has been criticized as an inadequate framework to fully understand masculinity. The criticism almost invariably centres on the inaccuracy of using a role strain metaphor to reflect the complexity of the issues involved. Critics point out that many forces make up gender, of which roles play only one part. Thus the metaphor is superficial and limited, emphasizing only one aspect of a much more complex phenomenon. Other critics have simply stated that the term role is used so widely and liberally that it carries little meaning and provides no analytic framework with which to gain greater insight into the difficulties associated with masculinity. The superficiality of the Strain Paradigm has also been criticized in respect to the solutions that it suggests. It is argued that the simple focus on training men to learn new skills does little to fundamentally transform society or the real problems associated with gender. Such a solution provides men temporary relief from their difficulties but serves only to perpetuate the problem since change on a social level is not viewed as necessary.

### **1.3 Whatever Happened to the Crisis of Masculinity?**

The original sex role framework had been fundamentally altered by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The modernistic emphasis on biology had been swept away in the epistemological shift toward postmodernism.<sup>4</sup> Sex roles had moved from involving narrow, idealized and dichotomized imperatives to becoming a complex discussion that recognized the influence of a range of social forces. How gender was defined moved from something that one “is” based on biology and morality, to something one “does”

based on social interaction and gender discourse. The introduction of a social constructionist framework offered a rich framework for the analysis of gender. However, it failed to viably replace the original sex role framework. While sex roles had been thoroughly deconstructed, there was little, if any, clear alternative to guide the actions of the average man in his day to day life.

Now, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the urgency to change men has all but disappeared. The optimism about fundamentally transforming gender seems to have lost its steam. The tension and activism of the 1970s, the experimentation of the 1980s, and the reconstruction and reform of the 1990s lost momentum as the century turned. The deconstructive powers and rich critique of post-modernism, once so full of promise, has left the sex and gender debate full of doubt and uncertainty. Lacking polarization, the debate also lacks focus and passion. In the face of confusion and complexity, the public concern for gender has waned and fallen off the radar screen. Once highly contentious and urgent, discussion about differences between men and women and their respective place in society has been relegated to academic circles and marginal interest groups.

The “crisis” of masculinity seems to have disappeared. But while the popularity of transforming masculinity has all but died off, the central questions remain. With no clear resolution of the issues, the legacy of the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century remains uncertain. What is the state of contemporary men? What happened to the masculinity crisis? Are men still suffering from Gender Role Strain? Does Role Strain really describe men’s experience? How have men themselves understood and negotiated the changes in masculinity over the last several decades? Where does the future of masculinity lie?

## 1.4 The Study

The study was undertaken to examine these basic questions through interviewing a group of men about their experiences related to masculinity. The purpose of the study is to explore the ways in which men raised during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have experienced and negotiated tensions and conflicts in masculine gender role expectations. In order to capture the complex and dynamic nature of role strain, the research design follows a qualitative phenomenological methodology. Eight men were selected, all of whom were born roughly in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However the men varied in terms of age, education, background, and family situation. Each participant was interviewed at length using a semi-structured interview process that included a wide range of topics beginning in childhood and across the life span. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed according to the presence of dominant themes. The results of the interviews were compared and contrasted with the existing literature on masculinity and Gender Role Strain. The interview content varied widely but all discussion was aimed at better understanding the following questions:

### **Figure 1: Research questions**

1. *How have men born and raised in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century experienced conflicts or tensions associated with masculinity? How have these tensions changed for them over time?*
2. *What themes underlie these conflicts or tensions?*
3. *How have men managed or attempted to reconcile these conflicts or tensions?*

4. *What might the different experiences of men say about how masculinity is experienced and constructed?*
5. *What might the different experiences of men say about whether role strain exists as an apt metaphor to describe the phenomenon in question?*
6. *What might the different experiences of men tell us about how conflicts and tensions associated with masculinity can be addressed?*

The study is predicated upon a number of observations in respect to the existing literature on masculinity. As indicated above, the first is the general acceptance and wide influence of Gender Role Strain as the construct that best describes the experience of men. The second is recognition of the relative disappearance of a thriving masculinity discourse. The third is the rarity of in-depth, qualitative research into the actual experiences of men as compared to the preponderance of quantitative work that has tended to accept Gender Role Strain as a given. Finally, the fourth is that Gender Role Strain, while widely accepted as the best way to understand and guide men, has been roundly criticized as a wholly inadequate framework for understanding masculinity as a complex phenomenon.

## **1.5 Chapter Overviews**

The structure of this dissertation follows a standard format. Chapters 2 and 3 provide a review of the literature. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology used throughout the research. Chapter 5 presents the data in a narrative form. Chapter 6 provides an

analysis of the data and outlines the themes arising from the interviews. Finally, Chapter 7 presents conclusions and discusses implication for the research.

*Chapter 2: The Male Role.* The study begins with a review of the changing landscape of sex roles over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Chapter 2 provides a summary of the history of the male role and outlines how the perceptions of the roles of men and women have changed dramatically from a narrow and biological complementarity to a wide ranging and contentious debate. The chapter outlines the changes in the way gender and the male role have been understood over time and ends with a discussion of the shift from an essentialist view of gender to a postmodern critique of gender.

*Chapter 3: Gender Role Strain.* Chapter 3 provides an overview of the relevant literature on masculine role strain. It outlines the various typologies of strain and reviews the research that has investigated its various aspects. The chapter provides a critical analysis of masculine role strain as a phenomenon. It ends with a discussion of criticisms of the Role Strain Paradigm

*Chapter 4: Methodology.* Chapter 4 outlines the methodology followed for this study and discusses the considerations that went into its design. Sampling procedures, data collection and analysis, as well as ethical considerations and limitations are discussed.

*Chapter 5: Data Presentation.* Chapter 5 presents the data from the eight men who were interviewed. Each man's "story" is presented. The chapter is comprised of eight separate narratives structured around the chronology of their lives and central themes that dominated the interview. In keeping with a phenomenological methodology, the

narratives are a combination of descriptive detail provided by the researcher and selected quotes from the interviews.

*Chapter 6: Findings.* Chapter 6 examines the interview data in light of the research on role strain and discusses the themes that arise. The interview data is compared and contrasted with the role strain types. Six major themes are presented with a variety of associated sub-themes.

*Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusions.* Chapter 7 provides a summary of the research and presents conclusions based on the findings. The experiences of the men are drawn upon to discuss the presence in the men's lives of tensions associated with masculinity as well as the relevance of the Role Strain Paradigm. The chapter discusses the implications of the research and presents an alternative model, based on the men's experience, for understanding and addressing difficulties related to masculinity.

## 1.6 Chapter Summary

The place of men in society has changed so rapidly and dramatically that, by the decades leading up to the turn of the century, a crisis of masculinity was declared. Lost within an array of bewildering gender expectations, men were said to be under strain as they struggled to find role and identity clarity. The Gender Role Strain Paradigm has been widely adopted as the framework for best understanding the difficulties that changes in masculinity have brought men. However, as masculinity became increasingly recognized as a complex phenomenon the interest in and debate about gender waned, while the concept of role strain came under attack.

The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning and experience of role strain in the lives of eight men. Through the use of qualitative interviews the study seeks to better understand the ways in which men have experienced struggles associated with masculinity. It explores how men have fared throughout the “crisis of masculinity” and asks where men are at present in respect to the crisis. The study has also seeks to re-visit the relevance of Gender Role Strain as a meaningful framework for these men.

## Chapter 2: The Male Role in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

### 2.1 Introduction

Throughout much of history, men and women have been largely viewed as fundamentally different. The differences have been believed to lie not simply in obvious anatomical distinctions, but also in a wide variety of essential psychological and behavioural characteristics. The attitudes and actions of men and women were seen as the necessary actualization of an inner nature unique to each sex. Along with this belief in biological determinism has also come the conviction that the differences between men and women were critical for the healthy functioning of society. Men and women each constituted one half of a greater whole working together for the continued stability and success of a healthy social order.

This framework, which holds that the place of men and women in society is ordained and virtuous, has been a powerfully ubiquitous and enduring belief. However, over the 20<sup>th</sup> century many assumptions underlying traditional sex roles changed dramatically. Sex roles moved from being seen as the cornerstone of healthy society, to a problematic social construct that inhibits personal growth, hinders social progress and obstructs gender equality. This paradigm shift away from sex role certainty and complementarity happened over several decades as a result of a combination of social and economic forces. However, the shift away from a traditional framework has been problematic in its own right. The simplistic and dichotomized view of the sexes as fixed and complementary has been difficult to unseat entirely and no alternative view has

successfully replaced it. For many reasons, from the personal to the political, the debate about traditional sex roles has been complicated, contradictory and often heated.

The male sex role in particular has been the subject of much tension and controversy. In the original sex role framework the male role enjoyed a clear and superior position in the masculinity-femininity equation. However, for this very reason the male role has been strongly challenged and much defended. As well, the male role, as it was originally conceptualized, became increasingly perceived to be out of step with changing times. The altering of the male role over this period can be seen to follow fairly distinct phases in development. Beginning in the 1960s, in the wake of feminism, the male role began to be systematically challenged. This led to a period of close scrutiny in the 1970s, where the taken-for-granted precepts of masculinity were fundamentally unravelled. In response to this challenge, throughout the 1980s, competing ideologies of masculinity fought to establish themselves as the rightful successor to the original framework. By the 1990s, the passion of the sex role debate had died out and no successor to the traditional framework had been found. The focus of attention on sex roles became individualistic, more psychologized and less politicized. The complexity and passion of public discourse on the male role waned and was marginalized to the academic world.

By the century's end, the original sex role framework had been fundamentally altered. The modernistic emphasis on biology had been swept away in the epistemological shift toward postmodernism. What constitutes sex roles had moved from prescriptions of narrow, idealized and dichotomized imperatives to a complex

discussion involving recognition of the influence of a vast range of social forces. Sex roles moved from something that one “is” based on biology and morality, to something one “does” based on social interaction and gender discourse. However, while a social constructionist critique offered fertile philosophical soil for the analysis of gender, it failed to viably replace the original framework. Over the period of a single generation, men had moved from a position of relative certainty and superiority, to uncertainty and contradiction in respect to their place in society. Sex roles had been successfully deconstructed, but there was little if any new framework to guide the average man in his day to day life.

## **2.2 Masculinity and the Essence of Man**

Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century the idea that the male role might be problematic was never seriously considered. In fact it was widely believed that men were simply biologically superior to women in every important way. There was little debate in respect to what constitutes “being a man”. There was little overt discussion about the definition although there were countless ways in everyday interaction that implicitly stated what a man is and should be (McPherson, Morgan, & Foresstell, 1999). An explicit discussion was considered unnecessary because what defined a man was a given; it was something in his essence and something that made him inherently superior.

In Western society, the view of the male role started to change prior to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Social and economic life in the 1800s was driven by an agricultural economy where men were considered superior because they were physically more

capable to do the work required. The family was the critical unit of production. Most men and women had circumscribed roles with males running the production and females responsible for domestic duties (Lindsey, 1990). Toward the latter part of the 1800s, there began a shift toward urbanization and an industrial economy. More women began to find work out of the home, particularly in areas of manufacturing. However most positions were menial jobs in factories and didn't yet pose a significant challenge to the prevailing view that men were the stronger and superior sex.

An essentialist view dominated thinking about sex differences. This view located the source of masculinity within the male. Fundamental masculine attributes were considered to be inherent and separate from outside experience (Bohan, 1997). What made men masculine was considered to be something that naturally occurred within them. In fact, it was generally believed that men literally had within them some essence that made them the superior sex. The literalness of this belief is best exemplified in the various strategies undertaken in the field of chemistry at the time to find and bottle the essential fluid that accounted for masculine superiority (Blum, 1997). It was widely believed that this elixir was not only good for men, but women too; a "wonder potion" with an almost god-like power (Hoberman & Yesalis, 1995).

Scientists went to extraordinary lengths to find it and demonstrate its vigour. In 1889, the prominent French physiologist Brown-Sequard<sup>4</sup> injected himself with an extract that he derived from the testicles of dogs and guinea pigs. He claimed that these injections increased his physical strength and intellectual energy, relieved his constipation, and lengthened the arc of his urine. (Hoberman & Yesalis, 1995). In 1918,

Leo Stanley, the resident physician at San Quentin prison in California, began transplanting testicles removed from executed prisoners onto other inmates. He also experimented with transplanting the testicles of ram, goat, deer, and boar. He insisted that the operations were successful at treating an array of problems including senility, asthma, epilepsy, diabetes, impotence, tuberculosis, and gangrene (Hoberman & Yesalis, 1995). In 1931, the German chemist, Adolph Butenandt distilled 15000 litres of policemen's urine in the hope of finding an essence, and then mashed up some 2000 pounds of bull testicles. He found nothing (Blum, 1997).

In an irony that foreshadowed the coming upheaval of the male role, an essence of sort was finally found but not where or what was expected. It was not found in the testes of "masculine" animals or in the urine of male icons of traditional masculinity. Instead, the male hormone testosterone was finally discovered by isolating it in the testes of a small number of laboratory mice (Blum, 1997). As if to add further insult to injury, since its discovery, testosterone has failed to be the source of unlimited power that was expected. Nor has it proven to be an essence unique to men, but exists as well in women. Finally, it is not the pure and immutable source of masculinity. Testosterone is a hormone that is quickly and easily converted by the brain in males to the "female" hormone estradiol (Blum, 1997).

### **2.3 Masculinity as a Sex Role**

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the agricultural economy started to give over to industrialization and the women's emancipation movements began to gain strength.

Women were entering the work force and pressing to enter into more prestigious positions of influence. It was believed however by many men that women were simply too delicate for the rigours of higher level employment. The stress placed upon them was considered bad for families and society. Research was undertaken in an attempt to demonstrate the superiority of men and inferiority of women so as to justify women's exclusion from positions of power and influence (Connell, 1995; Segal, 1997). This turning point marked the beginning of a new wave of sex difference research. However the voluminous research that compared men and women across an array of psychological traits, emotions, attitudes, personality traits, interests, and other characteristics demonstrated only minor differences (Epstein, 1988; Kahn & Yodder, 1989; Mednick, 1989; Tavis. 1992).

The first and second world war, along with the Depression, contributed much to upheave commonly held beliefs about the roles of men and women in society. With most men away, the wars required greater numbers of women to participate in manufacturing and to take on more overt leadership roles within communities. Women entered these realms of the workforce with a success that was surprising to researchers and community leaders who continue to believe that women and men's roles needed to be distinct. The staggering rate of unemployed males during the Depression meant that many males found themselves no longer in the role of chief breadwinner and head of the household. The central defining role for many men simply disappeared. With no prospects for work and no sense of place in the family, men abandoned their wives leaving them to raise families single-handedly (Lindsey, 1990). In a relatively short span

of a time, the fixed and distinct roles for men and women began to significantly overlap and the first serious challenge to conventional thinking about sex differences was posed.

The certainty of the roles that men and women held in society were beginning to be seriously challenged by the women's emancipation movement as well as social change. However, these changes in roles were not necessarily viewed as progressive or positive. Rather, there continued to be a general interest among political leaders and social scientists to view the changes in sex roles as temporary and idiosyncratic. There was a prevailing belief that men and women rightly played different parts in society and that this difference was grounded in biology. However, since the perceived differences between men and women weren't successfully explained by sex difference studies, researchers looked for other ways to explaining why men and women should hold different places in society.

One theory was symbolic interactionism first coined by Herbert Blumer in 1937 (Blumer, 1969). He argued that society is created and maintained through the interaction of its members and how its members collectively define reality. This precursor to a social constructionist perspective holds that reality is not an essence but rather what its members agree it to be. It emphasizes the meanings people attach to their behaviour as well as the behaviour of others (Mead, 1934). Interaction occurs in a patterned, structured way because people can agree on the meaning of shared symbols, such as words, language signs and gestures. Group members respond to each other on the basis of shared meaning and expectations for behaviour. These ideas were further developed by Goffman (1959) in his use of a dramaturgical metaphor to suggest that people assume

roles as a performance to meet the demands of social situations. Rather than driven by biology, people are said to play roles to convey the best possible impression with the hope of achieving a desired set of results (Goffman, 1963).

Although influential in some academic circles, symbolic interactionism did not take hold early on and certainly did not support the idea that men and women were ordained to be forever different. Instead, in the 1950s, an alternative theory was more widely embraced in the form of the concept of “sex roles” popularized by Talcott Parsons (Connell, 1995). Parsons laid out an explanation of the influence of sex roles which recognized biological determination, but also gave greater influence to a newly coined process, “socialization” (Parsons & Bales, 1956). In this functional theory, men and women played opposing parts prescribed through social expectations linked to their sex. Further, men and women were seen as enacting necessary and functional roles that led to the complementary completion of important social duties. Differences between the gender roles were therefore based on fundamental differences in the primary functions that men and women served in society. The masculine role was seen as involving “instrumental” functions such as decision-making or task completion, while the feminine role involved in “expressive” functions such as nurturing and caretaking. Men and women worked together to form a whole and complete family unit. Each complete unit existed as parts of a larger and fully actualized social order.

Functionalism, with its adherence to sex role differences allowed for an easier fit with essentialism and male superiority. It also provided a more complete theoretical framework for the compelling idea of normative sex roles. Functionalism provided the

modern conception of a masculine gender role as a normative referent; a sex role ideal to which men strive to adhere and are sanctioned if they fall short (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985). Since the prescribed roles represent the essential functions of a healthy society, gender expectations are standards that each man could be measured against. Terms such as functional or dysfunctional could then be applied to the behaviour of men.

For the most part, the first generation of sex role theorists assumed that roles were well defined, that socialization went ahead harmoniously, and that sex role learning was normative. Internalized sex roles were seen as contributing to social stability, mental health and the performance of necessary social functions. Functionalist theory assumed a concordance among social institutions, sex role norms, and actual personalities. However, functionalism also allowed that conflict and change were an inherent part of gender roles. Since society changes and gender roles exist to serve the goals of society, then so too do roles change in accordance with society. It opened up recognition of the possibility that the fit between the masculine gender role and social order might, for some men, be changeable and at times conflicted (Connell, 1995).

One of the first studies that examined the connection between sex roles and functioning in men was Helen Hacker's paper entitled "The New Burdens of Masculinity" (1957). She observed that men were increasingly being called upon to take on the more feminine expressive qualities, while still maintaining their original instrumental qualities. She regarded this as a problematic conflict for men and described it as follows: "men are now expected to demonstrate the manipulative skills in

interpersonal relations formerly reserved for women...Yet with regard to women they must still be sturdy oaks” (Hacker, 1957, p. 229).

Throughout much of this early research, there was a general recognition of changes in masculine sex roles while maintaining the belief that there remained a masculine gender ideal that needed to be adhered to. The most notable example was Patricia Sexton’s influential book entitled, *The Feminized Male; Classrooms, white collars, & the decline of manliness.* (1969). She lamented the changes in masculinity and blamed women for socializing their male children to be weak, soft, indecisive, and counter to their “true nature” of “toughness in body and mind” (Sexton, 1969, p. 15)

Another influential work during this period was Mirra Komarovsky’s, *Blue Collar Marriage* (1964). Using in-depth interviews and sketches of everyday life, she portrayed a picture of masculinity that was constructed in a complex and often tense process of negotiation usually with women. She described a general sense of unease among working men in an American steel town. On the whole, men appeared unhappy with little communication with their wives, prejudice, anger, and narrow views of the world outside their lives. This book was one of the first pieces of scholarly work to identify the male role as problematic and poorly adapted for contemporary life.

In all, during the post world war two period and prior to the rise of feminism in the 1960s, there was a general recognition that sex roles were changing as a result of social and economic forces. However, deeply entrenched beliefs about the roles that men and women needed to hold in society remained, and changes in sex roles were generally viewed as something that should be resisted.

## 2.4 The Destruction of Masculinity: the 1970s

In the 1970s, with the progression of the Women's and Gay liberation movements, there was a dramatic growth and interest in masculinity and the male role. Two main themes in respect to the male role emerged. The feminist movement brought recognition of the close association between the male role and a patriarchal social structure. The link between "the political and the personal" was made clear and the male role was seen as closely associated with, if not responsible for, the oppression of women. A second theme arose from this first belief. Following the lead of feminism, some men argued that it wasn't just women who were oppressed by narrow sex roles. There arose a literature that began in earnest to suggest that the male role was just as oppressive to men.

Feminist critiques of patriarchy served to focus the masculinity literature with a greater coherence although much of the literature was not supportive of feminist ideas (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985). Instead, what was considered a feminist "attack on men" served to rally broad public debate and a defensive response from men. The "masculinist" literature countered feminist criticism not by acknowledging their experience or perspective, but instead by suggesting that men have it just as "bad" as women.

Throughout this period, the "problems" associated with the male role were largely understood as the restrictions, hardships, and general penalties for being male. Popular books such as Farrell's *Liberated Man* (1974) and Nichols' *Men's Liberation* (1975) outlined a common two-part theme: that traditional masculinity leads men to engage in

negative behaviour such as violence and oppression; and that men themselves pay a hefty price for attempting to live up to traditional masculinity. For the first time, terms such as “role strain”, “male dilemma”, and “crisis of masculinity” were introduced into the masculinity literature.

A wellspring of books devoted to the male role emerged, most were autobiographical accounts of the hardships and frustrations endured by men who either tried in vain to live up to gender ideals or experienced the pain of successfully fulfilling the now dysfunctional masculine gender ideal. Unlike the feminist analysis that was going on at the time, most of the books on men tended to psychologize men’s problems by locating the source of patriarchy and oppression in men’s heads rather than social structures (Segal, 1997). Feminism was interpreted by men as meaning the need for women to break out of restrictive roles, and thus a “masculinist” literature called for similar action in relation to men (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985). The central theoretical proposition in terms of the problem of masculinity during this time was that men were oppressed in a fashion comparable to women. Thus books such as Goldberg’s influential *The Hazards of Being Male* (1976) argued that men are not privileged over women but rather are similarly oppressed by rigidly prescribed sex roles. It was argued the solution lay in calling problems with sex roles a draw and both sexes breaking free of antiquated and unfair sex role expectations.

In a study of popular books written during this decade, four consistent themes relating to the problem of masculinity were found in the literature (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985). First, that traditional masculinity was an essentially negative and oppressive

force in the lives of men. Second, that men, like women, needed to be liberated from oppressive sex roles. It is noteworthy that this view occurred alongside the emergence of the personal growth and self-actualization movements in psychology which similarly emphasized personal liberation and development rather than concerns about social justice, inequality, or power.

In a similar vein, the third theme involved the belief that masculinity was a product of oppressive socialization and therefore the solution could be found through personal activities such as consciousness-raising, and group therapy. Finally, the fourth theme was the recognition that sweeping changes in sexuality and gender were indeed occurring as a result of women's liberation and, like it or not, men needed to adapt. In all, throughout this period there existed a generally held belief that masculinity was in an extreme state of upheaval requiring major revisions in what it means to be a man. What was perceived as lacking, and yet to come, was a blueprint for how to undertake this change.

## **2.5 The Construction of Masculinities: The 1980s**

Throughout the 1980s, essentialism started to meet with serious challenge as alternative sex role models were introduced. The upheaval of thinking in respect to sex roles settled into opposing positions on masculinity. Various views on the male role established themselves as competing perspectives. A variety of positions in respect to how masculinity fits with society became more fully articulated. People began to fit themselves and others into different camps when, for the first time, different interests

and political views were more explicitly linked to different masculinities. Each group had its own particular view and each offered its own solution.

The most influential work of this period was Pleck's re-examination of the male gender role entitled, *The Myth of Masculinity* (1981). In what at the time was considered to be a major revision of the understanding of gender roles, Pleck argued that men's problems were not a result of failure to live up to a normative gender referent, but rather due to the constraining, unrealistic and dysfunctional nature of male role expectations themselves (Segal, 1997). He contended that gender role conformity frequently lead to psychological and relational dysfunction. He further argued that failure to live up to gender roles lead men to strong feelings of self-devaluation and over-conformity to their roles. Pleck's model, commonly referred to as the Gender Role Strain Paradigm, took hold as the dominant framework in the area of masculinity studies (Pleck, 1995).

Other groups developed and rallied around competing positions, each situating the problem of masculinity in a different domain. While most groups agreed on the fundamental belief that significant changes in the masculine gender role were occurring, there was little consensus about the nature of the problem and its resolution. Clatterbaugh (1997) outlined the prominent perspectives that formed and became institutionalized into movements and organizations over this period of time.

A dominant view was the conservative perspective which included both moral conservatives and biological conservatives. This view held that any movement away from traditional gender roles is contrary to healthy and moral functioning and changes in masculinity reflect social decay rather than progress. In many respects this view was a

hold over from the earlier functionalist school of thought and enjoyed wide ranging support. At the heart of the conservative perspective was the belief that any change in sex roles should be resisted as it is in opposition to natural and moral absolutes. The solution to sex role problems was seen as the simple return and close adherence to functionalist doctrine.

On the other end of the political spectrum existed the profeminist perspective. Profeminist men aligned themselves alongside feminists and agreed that the masculine gender role was maintained through male privilege and its corresponding oppression of women. The profeminist approach sought to undo patriarchy, give up its so called “male dividend”, and create a world of balanced gender equity. Profeminists viewed any prescriptions about a male or female role as inherently limiting and oppressive. The aim of the approach was to create a world free of any and all assumption about the role and place of men and women.

A smaller but highly vocal view of the male role problem existed within the men’s rights perspective. This view denied that men are privileged relative to women and held that instead men have become the primary object of sexism and oppression. Their main contention was that feminism has become such a powerful and insidious force in society that men have become the target of attack. They argued that misandry had replaced misogyny, but unlike misogyny, misandric attacks on men and masculinity had become socially acceptable and widely institutionalized. Much of the emphasis within this group was in respect to what was seen as legislative injustices against men related to divorce, child custody, affirmative action, domestic violence and sexual harassment. A

less clear solution was put forth by this perspective other than ensuring that all legislation treats men and women with absolute equality.

A perspective that saw a great deal of popular attention was the mythopoetic men's movement. This view was most closely associated with a handful of men's workshop leaders. The most notable of these leaders was Robert Bly who wrote the bestseller *Iron John* (1990). This perspective emphasized the importance of spirituality, ritual, and the recognition of deep unconscious masculine patterns. It held that men's innate masculinity had been overly feminized in modern society and that men therefore needed to reconnect with their true masculine nature. Much of the approach involved workshops and weekend retreats exclusively for men that sought to recapture their lost "wild" and vital self. The solution offered was solely directed toward men. The problem of the male role was seen as resolved through men taking back their "true selves" and reconnecting with the power and passion that made them uniquely masculine.

A similarly popularized perspective was the evangelical Christian men's movement. This religiously fundamentalist movement sought to re-establish men as good fathers, providers, and the head of the household. The perspective overlapped the conservative view, the mythopoetic view and aspects of the Gender Role Strain Paradigm. The problem with society, according to the view, was that men have either abandoned their ordained place as head of household or never learned the skills to manage the position successfully in the first place. The solution lay in the family. Husbands were to devote themselves to a fundamentalist belief in the superiority of men over women, and women needed to embrace their role as subordinate. The view did

require men to change. It demanded that men take greater responsibility, work hard, earn well, and devote themselves to their wife and child. In short, men were seen as needing to re-establish their God given right as master of their domain.

In all, the 1980s saw a variety of experiments in masculinity. For the first time the term masculinity was pluralized to “masculinities” as the question of the “problem with men” found explanations and answers in a variety of groups. Different perspectives located the problem and solutions in different areas. Some emphasized the need for social change, others argued for a return to traditional practices, while still others emphasized the need for personal growth. At their core, many continued to cling to essentialist and functionalist assumptions about sex roles. While the discourse on masculinity broadened and many ideas were offered, very little fundamentally changed. In fact, rather than finding any resolution, the debate in respect to the roles of men and women settled into entrenched positions. However, the proliferation of perspectives helped get the myriad issues, interests and emotions into the public arena and sparked a great deal of popular attention.

## **2.5 The Reconstruction of Masculinities: The 1990s**

The 1990s can be characterized in many respects as involving the de-linking of the discussion of masculinity from feminism and patriarchy. It can also be characterized by a growing downturn in popular interest in sex roles. A smaller number of academics and political organizations remained active though in general there were fewer books

published, less research, fewer conferences and less discussion overall about what were once highly contentious and heated issues (Clatterbaugh, 1997).

However, the belief that the male role was dysfunctional, strained, and in need of change remained. There continued to be a strong view that the masculine gender role needed to be re-constructed into a more healthy and functional way of being. This conviction was expressed primarily in two related areas of concern about men. The first was the increasing concern about the socialization of young males and its relationship to what was seen as the growing problem of extremes of male violence (Garbarino, 2000; Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Miedzian, 1991). The second was the movement in psychology toward a “new psychology of men” based on the Role Strain Paradigm of Pleck (Levant & Pollack, 1995). Boys and men were widely believed to be in need of reconstruction in order to give up outdated and harmful ways and to better fit with changing times.

The 1990s saw a burgeoning of interest in young adult males who commit acts of unpredictable and extreme violence. The concern was spurred on by a number of highly popularized incidents in which male teenagers brought guns to school and opened fire on classmates and teachers. At the same time, the earlier spate of books about girl’s self-esteem and depression were being replaced by an interest in boy’s inner life (Pollack, 1998). As well, there was increasing recognition that the academic performance of boys had dropped significantly below that of girls (Hoff-Sommers, 2000).

There was broad concern that many young males were being exposed to a variety of harmful social forces in the forms of parenting problems, violence in the media, social

and peer pressure, and poor role models leading to general feelings of emotional instability and disenfranchisement from the community. This led to the development of large scale programs to better socialize males and improve their communication and conflict resolution skills. Young males were viewed as mysterious, conflicted, and potentially dangerous if not provided with the right intervention. Books and how-to manuals emerged that sought to teach parents and educators how to “unlock the mystery of young males” and how to help them be confident and strong, yet sensitive and empathic (Pollack, 1998).

At the same time men, particularly those who were still viewed as traditionally masculine became renovation projects in their own right. In respect to adult males, the view that the masculine role was under strain persisted, with a particular view that men were locked into unhealthy ways of being that needed to be unlearned. By the century's end men were less likely to be the object of challenge by feminist groups and more likely the subject of change by psychologists (Faludi, 2000). The dominant view of masculinity concerned itself with teaching men the new skills of manhood. Traditional masculinity and men in general were increasingly seen as from a bygone era, often confused and unskilled for contemporary times. In television and popular film, men were more frequently portrayed as incompetent, bumbling or conniving, and rarely balanced, mature and equipped to handle the day to day demands of life in a mature and sophisticated manner (Nathanson & Young, 2001). Programs to teach men the “new skills” of masculinity were developed calling for the re-construction of masculinity toward a definition of manhood that included greater emotional connectedness at home as well as

work (Levant, 1995, Gratch, 2001). In all, by the turn of the century, masculinity was regularly portrayed as dangerous, ridiculous, or hopelessly obsolete and in desperate need of reform (Hoff-Sommers, 2000; Nathanson & Young, 2001).

## 2.6 The Deconstruction of Masculinities

Programs to reconstruct masculinity, like the many solutions offered before, largely failed to gain wide acceptance or to offer a viable and clear alternative to competing sex role frameworks. The problem seemed to lie in the continued reliance by these frameworks upon modernistic assumptions. There remained in these perspectives a belief that there existed a workable and widely applicable model for sex roles, if only it could be found. Scientific reduction and modernistic inquiry continued to drive the search for understanding and resolution of the male role problem.

By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, science and modernism were challenged by a postmodern epistemology. Increasingly, it was recognized that the objectivity of science and the certainty and generalizability of modernism produced simplistic, biased and sometimes harmful results. Postmodernism began to supplant modernism as the framework of choice for meaningful, context-sensitive and non-oppressive social analysis.

As the modernist models of sex roles lost ground, a postmodern understanding of sex roles emerged. Discussion of the male role became part of a larger analysis of the construction of gender. Masculinity moved from being a prescribed sex role to a cultural “discourse” on manhood. There was greater interest in how men are represented in our

culture. As well, there was increased interest in men's individual experiences and the variations of what it means to be a man. There was less preoccupation with assumptions of homogeneity and more with variation and nuance among men.

One postmodern model that gained early ground came in the form of social constructionism. In many ways social constructionism is symbolic interactionism repackaged. It involves the complete refusal of essentialism and a strong critique of functionalist thinking. The social constructionist argument is that gender is not a trait of individuals at all, but rather a construct that identifies particular transactions that are understood to be appropriate to one's sex. The foundational assertion of social constructionism is that there is no way of knowing with certainty the nature of reality. Knowledge does not reflect discovery of a free-standing reality, nor is it revealed by careful application of procedures. Rather, what is purported as truth is a construction; a best understanding intertwined with the contexts within which it's created. Knowledge is created and shaped through the modes of discourse through which perceptions and descriptions of reality are exchanged. Thus knowledge is purely a product of social interchange (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 1985).

In the social constructionist model, sex and gender are not actual free-standing phenomena that exist inside individuals to be discovered and measured by social scientists. Rather, they are agreements that reside in social interchange (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Lorber & Farrell, 1991). Masculinity is the meaning that people agree to impute to a particular class of transactions between individuals and environmental contexts. In this way, masculinity is not something "one is or has", it is something "one

does” (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The factors defining a particular transaction as feminine or masculine are not the sex of the actors but the situational parameters within which the performance occurs. Thus, no one is inherently feminine or masculine. Rather, in particular contexts, people “do feminine”; in others, they “do masculine” (Bohan, 1997)

In this understanding of gender and behaviour, the demands of social contexts constitute the primary determinants of how men behave in masculine ways (Eagly, 1997; Lott, 1990). Experiences of men are different from those of women because, in large part, men encounter differently gendered situations. This process is circular and self-maintaining. Even when encountering what appear to be similar situations, men and women face discrepant prescriptions (Bohan, 1997). Although a man might free himself from the gendered demands of his social world and might occasionally or frequently “do feminine”, his experience remains different from that of a woman. In such situations he confronts the discrepancy between his actions and those expected of him. Tensions exist between social and personal expectations and contextual demands. Yet the man typically sees his responses as resulting from his personal characteristics and fails to see the contextual demands of the situation explicitly.

## **2.7 Post-Deconstruction Masculinities: Complexity and Uncertainty**

A postmodernism epistemology and social constructionist framework have provided a rich and meaningful guide to the analysis of gender. This meta-theoretical

approach has allowed for greater reflection and complexity than any model that has come before it. It also represents a qualitatively different way of understanding how masculinity is talked about, understood and maintained in society. But this perspective has also been the subject of a very practical criticism. At its heart is a problematic relativism: the idea that what is seen as preferable in respect to any situation depends entirely upon the situation. Relativism allows for wide-ranging critique and meaningful discussion, but these discussions tend to work only in the abstract. Relativism, and thus social constructionism, doesn't apply well in everyday life (Nathanson & Young, 2001). It provides guidelines as a framework for critique, but offers little in the way of prescription or direction in respect to day to day action. In short, it allows for the asking of meaningful questions, but offers little in the way of solutions (Held, 1995).

## 2.8 Chapter Summary

After a century of questioning, the male role remains a complex and uncertain construct. Ways of thinking about the male role has been offered, all of which has genuine resonance with real life and which continues to influence thinking about gender. Essentialism endures as a compelling and intuitively appealing idea. For many, there seems to be some fundamental and absolute difference between the sexes. Functionalism remains attractive to those who support the belief that an ideal model for a healthy family and society exists. Other perspectives, including the mythopoetic and men's rights perspectives each strike different chords of experience and continue to enjoy a limited support. Social constructionism has been an influential framework for the analysis of

gender within society. By the end of the century, what seems undeniable is that the masculine sex role is not a single thing, and not a coherent system. Rather, it is a construct at the intersection of a complex and dynamic system of many forces. It is a terrain that is changeable and moving all of the time. Gender is a word that is used to capture a complicated set of interrelations between internal human forces and external structural influences. It is a fluid and uncertain terrain full of contractions and complexities.

## Chapter 3: Masculine Gender Role Strain

### 3.1 Introduction

As was seen in the previous chapter, the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw an upheaval in gender roles. What constitutes the “male role” moved from a fixed set of assumptions linked closely to beliefs in biological imperatives and innate superiority over women, to a view that men’s roles are often contradictory, dysfunctional, and damaging. Early in the century, scientists sought to “bottle” the essence of masculinity believing that men held within them the very stuff of power, youth and vitality. By the century’s end, masculinity had become so synonymous with oppressive and destructive forces that there was a pervasive belief that men and boys needed to be rescued from it.

The concept of the male role had broadened from the rigid view of a sex role to which all men should adhere, to gender as a fluid, contradictory and multifaceted social construct buffeted by a wide range of social forces. As much as there had been a broadening of understanding of masculinity, this had not necessarily led to a clarification of what is contained within the term “male role”. Rather, the construct of male role became increasingly complex and contradictory with a widening of views in respect to “how a man should be”.

Role strain has been the prevailing construct that has attempted to capture and describe the experience of men caught in the complexity and contradiction of the masculine gender role. Most research in respect to male roles has been closely linked to an essentialist and functionalist view of masculinity. Masculinity was seen as something

located within each individual man whereby masculine behaviour was the innate expression of the natural order of things. Sex differences were largely considered as significant and unalterable. Early research into the male role concerned itself with establishing the many ways in which men and women are uniquely divergent from one another. The differences between men and women were measured in order to capture the “natural” differences between men and women and classify various traits as inherently masculine or feminine.

A second line of research built upon sex difference research concerned itself with examining how well men measured up to the established masculine standard. Men were assessed in terms of “how well adjusted” or “how male” they were compared to the fixed standard of maleness. Research examined the extent to which some men possessed masculine traits, as opposed to feminine traits, and the extent to which some men failed. It became possible to deem some men as inadequately meeting the expectations of masculinity whether as a result of poor socialization or simple biological inferiority. These studies almost invariably “found” that the males who were deemed as most inadequate were members of oppressed and marginalized groups such as African Americans or homosexuals (Brown, 1957; Woronoff, 1962).

### **3.2 Gender Role as a Complex of Forces**

The increasing tendency to view gender as a social construct has led to a re-thinking of sex roles. The view that masculinity is a complex of forces increasingly underpins research into the male role. In summarizing the contemporary view of

masculinity, Clatterbaugh (1997) describes a gender construct which encompasses a range of internal and external forces. This involves four simultaneous components: the *masculine gender role*, the *masculine stereotype*, the *masculine gender ideal*, and the *gender identity*.

**Figure 2: The four components of masculinity**

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
<i>Masculine gender role</i>	<i>The roles required for an identifiable group of men</i>
<i>Masculine stereotype</i>	<i>Broad assumptions regarding “typical” beliefs and behaviours of men</i>
<i>Masculine gender ideal</i>	<i>Common images of male success and accomplishment</i>
<i>Masculine gender identity</i>	<i>A subjective view of personal masculinity</i>

The masculine gender role is defined as the “set of behaviours, attitudes, and conditions that are generally found in men of an identifiable group” (Clatterbaugh, 1997, p. 3). Masculine gender roles can therefore vary between groups of men based on differences in social roles. Thus, masculine gender roles differ along cultural, ethnic, racial, class, and other social lines.

The second component, the masculine stereotype, refers to what people think men typically believe and how they typically behave. The masculine stereotype involves broadly held assumptions about the masculine gender role, regardless of whether there is evidence to support the belief. The gender role and stereotype are different in their focus of interest. The gender role focuses on specific characteristics of a group of men, while the stereotype looks more broadly at the beliefs that people hold in general about men.

As Basow (1986) observed, gender roles and stereotypes need not agree, and stereotypes are “at best, exaggerations of grains of truth” (p. 12).

The third component, the gender ideal, reflects what people think men should be. These are the culturally held and widespread beliefs about what the behaviour of men should ideally include. Examples of gender ideals are reflected in statements such as “men should be self-assured” or “men should marry women”. Gender ideals do not have to be rooted in reality. Like all ideals, they are abstract and powerful images of success and accomplishment. There is often overlap between masculine stereotypes and masculine ideals. The distinction between the two however involves whether the characteristic described is seen as positive or negative. Stereotypes of masculinity can be positive such as decisiveness or strength of will, or they can be negative such as a propensity toward anger or disinterest in parenting. Ideals on the other hand, always involve positive traits to which all men should aspire.

The power and influence of masculine stereotypes and ideals is thought to be considerable. Clatterbaugh (1997) describes how certain masculinities are favoured and actively promoted and thus become dominant or hegemonic masculinities. Men who come closer to embodying hegemonic masculinities tend to be rewarded and accorded power, while those men who fail to live up to ideals are frequently excluded from positions of power and prestige. An example of an attempt to articulate the most influential masculine stereotypes and ideals of western culture is reflected in David and Brannon’s (1976) work in which they suggest four basic masculine imperatives: “no sissy stuff”, “the big wheel”, “the sturdy oak”, and “give ‘em hell”. These components

represent stereotypes and ideals that prescribe masculine behaviour as requiring: the avoidance of all things feminine, the importance of power and status; the unacceptability of vulnerable emotion; and the glorification of risky or vindictive behaviour.

The fourth component, gender identity, is a subjective and individual process; the “self-definition of gender to oneself” (p. 4). Gender identity involves the psychological and developmental tasks of coming to a self-definition involving one’s own masculinity. One’s gender identity is formed in response to reflective questions such as “what kind of man am I?”, and “What kind of man do I want to be?”. Gender identities are subjective and evolving self-definitions resulting from personal reflection and comparison to prevailing expectations, stereotypes and ideals.

### **3.3 Gender Role as Under Strain**

An understanding of the male role as a complex construct of various influences was extended by Pleck (1981, 1995) to more explicitly argue that the male role is comprised of forces that oppose one another. In, *The Myth of Masculinity* (1981), Pleck articulates a model of gender roles that moves away from a functionalist perspective, or any view that holds that the forces shaping masculinity are in harmony with one another, nature, or society. Instead he suggests an alternative model of understanding masculinity called the Gender Role Strain Paradigm. Central to Pleck’s model is the concept of pervasive and powerful masculine ideologies which involve “beliefs about the importance of men adhering to culturally defined standards for male behaviour” (Pleck, 1995, p.19). In this view, understanding the experience of men in respect to their

masculinity, involves examining their endorsement and internalization of cultural belief systems about the male gender. Masculine ideologies are said to be superordinate, organising belief systems which powerfully shape society from the individual to socio-structural.

Gender role strain also holds that there are different masculine ideologies and thus men experience competing standards for masculinity. Men are caught between opposing ideological pressures and they experience chronic role strain as a result. Men are constantly pressed to negotiate between contrary gender role constraints and masculinity becomes a phenomenon involving straining forces that individual males cannot successfully resolve.

Pleck (1981) outlines a series of propositions that capture the dynamic that makes up gender role strain. First, he posits that gender roles are operationally defined by stereotypes and norms. These gender role norms are contradictory and inconsistent and the proportion of individuals who violate the gender role norms is high. Violating gender role norms leads to social condemnation as well as to negative psychological consequences. Further, actual or imagined violation of gender role norms leads individuals to overconform to them. Pleck argues that violating gender role norms has more severe consequences for males than females and that living up to gender role norms can be problematic since many characteristics prescribed by gender role norms are psychologically dysfunctional (Pleck, 1981, p.9).

From these propositions, Pleck suggests that men can experience three distinct types of strain: *discrepancy strain*, *dysfunction strain*, and *trauma strain*. Discrepancy strain

results from failing to live up to an internalized ideal of masculinity. Difficulties arise when men perceive themselves as falling short of the dominant definition of a man. The discrepancy between what a man “should be” and how he perceives himself causes within him psychic distress.

On the opposite end of the role spectrum, dysfunction strain results from successfully fulfilling the requirements of traditional masculinity. Strain arises because many traditional masculine traits are said to be inherently dysfunctional to the individual and others. In this view, traditional masculinity is, by its very nature, problematic and those men who fulfill their traditional gender role inevitably experience problems.

Trauma strain is said to result from the ordeal of male role socialization. Pressures involved in “becoming a man” are said to be inherently traumatic particularly during childhood. For example, the ways in which boys are expected to conform to a gender role that emphasizes emotional independence from parents and others, and the aggressive socialization rituals of sport constitute repeated traumatic experiences.

Since Pleck’s original work, the gender role strain concept has been adopted widely and much work has been done to expand upon the original model. Along with the original three types of strain, researchers have suggested the existence of two other variations on strain. *Role stress* (Eisler, 1995) emphasizes the impact that competing roles have on men’s health, and *role conflict* (O’Neil, Good, & Holmes, 1995) focuses on the psychological impact of experiencing role demands that are in direct opposition to each other that occur as a result of life transitions. All five categories of role strain overlap one another arising mainly out of the fact that most researchers have tended to focus their

research on just one category of strain and then slowly encroach upon other strain types. Nonetheless, each strain type emphasizes a different aspect of a more complete understanding of gender role strain and its effects.

**Figure 3: Types of masculine gender role strain**

<b>STRAIN TYPE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
<i>Trauma Strain</i>	<i>Trauma that occurs as a result of normative male role socialization</i>
<i>Discrepancy Strain</i>	<i>Failing to successfully measure up to the masculine ideal</i>
<i>Dysfunction Strain</i>	<i>Adopting the inherently dysfunctions characteristics of traditional masculinity</i>
<i>Role Stress</i>	<i>Physiological stress as a result of competing gender expectations</i>
<i>Role Conflict</i>	<i>Psychological stress as a result of competing role demands arising from life transitions</i>

### 3.3.1 The Ordeal of Becoming a Man: Male Gender Role Trauma

Male gender role trauma results from the ordeal of male role socialization which is thought to be inherently traumatic. This is often believed to exist in the rigours of socialization of many specific groups of men such as male athletes (Messner, 1992), veterans (Brooks, 1990), or gay and bisexual men (Harrison, 1995). Pleck (1981) and other authors however contend that socialization driven by traditional masculine ideology is inherently traumatic for virtually all men. The contention is that the pressure

to conform to a masculine way of being inevitably leads men to experience the traumatizing negation of vulnerable and hurtful emotions beginning in early childhood.

The concept of trauma strain is premised upon a view that boys are born as whole and healthy individuals. Then, through the ordeal of early socialization at the hands of parents, as well as peers and school, the child suffers wounds that leave him fragmented and damaged (Clatterbough, 1997). Much of the literature on trauma strain is predicated on a psychoanalytic view of development taken from the work of Carl Jung and extended by Chodorow (1978). Chodorow describes the “typical” pattern of male infant development in which the mother is unconsciously influenced by the gender of her child. If the baby is a girl, she sees the child as the same as her and prolongs a state of “oneness” with the child. If however, the child is a boy, she experiences a sense of difference and subtly communicates that the baby is separate and “other”. The boy must, at an earlier age, separate himself intrapsychically and interpersonally and develop a more defensive firming of ego boundaries. Since the mother is central, the boy experiences himself as different. Therefore girls “grow up with a sense of community and similarity to their mother and a relational connection to the world” (Chodorow, 1989, p. 110). Boys, on the other hand, experience an early and wounding sense of loss and disconnection from others. This traumatic experience is then said to be compounded by the absence of a connected father.

This view of early masculine socialization is further articulated in the more recent and influential work of Pollack (1995, 1998). He argues that boys, having been “rejected” by their mother and finding father emotionally unavailable, are said to experience early

loss and abandonment making them more vulnerable to separation difficulties (Pollack, 1995). Boys experience the “traumatic abrogation of the holding environment” (Pollack, 1995, p. 41). This is said to leave boys with a fear of intimate connection without knowing the source of the original problem since the trauma occurs so early and is repressed. Boys have therefore “not only a more problematic course toward gender identity but a continuing need to defend against urges toward affiliation and intimacy because of the repressed trauma of shameful and premature separation” (Pollack, 1995, p. 41).

This developmental process is also used to account for what is seen as a normative developmental trauma that leads boys to become emotionally inarticulate and inexpressive (Levant, 1992; Levant & Kopecky, 1995). In respect to emotional development, Levant (1995) describes the process as involving the following steps: Boys start out life more emotional than girls. Mothers work harder to manage the more excitable and emotional male infants. Mothers go to greater lengths to ensure their sons are contented and to control their expressivity (Haviland & Malatesta, 1981). In contrast, mothers expose their daughters to a wider range of emotions than they do their sons (Malatesta, Culver, Tesman & Shephard, 1989). Fathers typically do not take an active interest in their children until the 13<sup>th</sup> month of life and then socialize them along gender-stereotyped lines. Both parents participate in gender-differentiated development of language for emotions. Parents discourage their son’s learning to express vulnerable emotions and discourage daughter’s expression of anger and aggression. Peer groups then reinforce these differentiations. Thus, the male child experiences trauma by his

mother who detaches early from him, an event often described as the “mother wound”. The child then experiences the emotional unavailability or emotional demand of his father, referred to as the “father wound” (Levant & Kopecky, 1995).

The theme of masculine socialization as inherently traumatic is also a major underpinning of the mythopoetic men’s movement. From a similarly psychoanalytic theoretical stance, Bly (1990) uses Jung’s notion of unconscious archetypes as the framework through which to understand early traumatic fragmentation (Clatterbaugh, 1997). Bly draws from the classic oedipal struggle and suggests that boys typically seek their mother’s affection only to find themselves in competition with their fathers. The competitive relationship with father results in a failure to have a masculine role model. The loss of connection with a male guide leads the male child to experience a profound wounding whereby he is separated from his “shadow” side, otherwise called his “wild man” from which all energy and creativity spring (Clatterbough, 1997). This is reinforced by a school system which is said to be largely feminine and a society which has removed all rites of initiation into manhood. The result is a socialization process that has “laboured to breed the fierceness out of men” and the consequent creation of a “soft man” who is “contrary to his true nature” (Bly, 1988, p. 17).

In general, masculine gender role trauma is said to be a virtually inescapable part of becoming a man. The trauma associated with socialization leaves men fragmented, vulnerable and emotionally underdeveloped. Men experience generalized emotional difficulties such as anger, anxiety, and difficulties with intimacy, but are unable to locate the source of these difficulties both as a result of their own lack of emotional skill as well

as because the traumatic events occurred so early in their lives. This leaves men feeling disconnected, confused and uncomfortable about who they are. In this view, men are born whole and healthy but experience multiple wounds that lead them to lose important aspects of their true and vital nature.

### **3.3.2 Failing to Measure Up: Male Gender Role Discrepancy**

Another type of strain involves role discrepancy. Masculine roles are described as being discrepant in two different ways. The first is the discrepancy between masculine gender ideals and the individual male's self perception of their "success" in fulfilling the ideals. This is the discrepancy between the individual male's gender identity and the gender ideal. Role discrepancy describes the strain that males experience attempting to live up to the ideals of "no sissy stuff", "the big wheel", "the sturdy oak", and "give 'em hell" (David & Brannon, 1976). Discrepancy and consequent strain inevitably occur since the ideals are unattainable. As a result, men are said to experience strong feelings of inadequacy and shame.

The second kind of discrepancy involves inconsistencies within the expectations of masculinity. Here discrepancies occur not necessarily due to the failure to measure up, but due to the shifting sands upon which masculinity rests. In this way, the ever-changing and inconsistent expectations related to the masculine gender role lead men to experience a sense of failing to meet a standard for masculinity since it remains forever unclear to them. The result is a similar experience of inadequacy, confusion, frustration and shame (Levant, 1995).

Masculinity is often described as involving ideals of behaviour that are unattainable. Anthropologist David Gilmore, in his book *Manhood in the Making* examined masculinity in a variety of cultures (Gilmore, 1990). Gilmore argues that females attain an irrevocable status of womanhood at the onset of menstruation. Males, on the other hand, do not have an event that declares their status as a man. Rather, “there is a constantly recurring notion that real manhood is different from simple anatomical maleness” (Gilmore, 1990, p.16). Manhood is a status that is strived for repeatedly and not achieved through a single event. The attainment of manhood is doubtful and dependent upon demonstrated prowess to meet “rigid codes of decisive action in many spheres of life: as husband, father, lover, warrior” (p.18). Gilmore also observes that there exist in all cultures few examples of masculinity fully achieved. Rather, masculinity is defined by negative examples of how men fail to measure up. Says Gilmore, the “men-who-are-no-men, held up scornfully to inspire conformity to the glorious ideal...force men to shape up...on penalty of being robbed of their identity, a threat apparently worse than death” (p. 21). According to Gilmore, manhood becomes what the Fox Tribe in Iowa call the “Big Impossible”.

In western society, the theme of masculinity as an unattainable ideal has been common in recent literature. Considerable literature deals with the impossibility of living up to the male ideal and the lengths that men go in attempting to do so. There is a consistent theme of confusion and frustration on the part of men as they strive to reach this unattainable goal. Susan Faludi, in her recent book *Stiffed* (2000), interviewed men who consistently reported struggling to live up to masculine ideals only to feel that they

had fallen short. She notes that, “when I talk with men who grew up during the baby boom, this mission to manhood shows up in their minds not as promises met but as betrayals, losses, and disillusionments” (p.27).

Role discrepancy strain has been linked to a variety of difficulties experienced by men including anger, depression, and chronic feelings of inadequacy (Levant, 1995). But perhaps the most dominant theme is guilt and shame. Shame is one of the most ubiquitous yet powerful emotions that underlie men’s experiences (Gratch, 2001; Krugman, 1995). Says Krugman, “fear of inadequacy and inferiority, of emotional neediness and insecurity, are part of every man’s experience” (Krugman, 1995, p. 93). The more the male standard is experienced as unattainable, and the more that the male perceives himself as not measuring up, the greater the degree of shame. Shame is also said to be a large part of the male child’s experience at the hands of parents (particularly fathers), as well as a powerful tool of peer play and role reinforcement (Lever, 1976; Macoby, 1990; Osherson, 1996; Paley, 1984).

Shame is rarely expressed or even acknowledged by most males since part of the masculine ideal is to avoid the expression of vulnerable feelings (Wright, 1987). However, because shame is such a key process in shaping acceptable male behaviours and attitudes, men are left “shame phobic” (Gratch, 2001). Many males go to great lengths to avoid further experiences of shame through emotional and social isolation, compulsive work, substance abuse and the use of aggression (Krugman, 1995). It is also postulated that many men attempt to mask deep feelings of shame by creating the appearance of control and substituting behaviours that externalize their concerns and

this can lead to pervasive characterological problems. For example, shame has been linked to problems of narcissism (Kernberg, 1986), antisocial-personality disorders (Cleary, 1987), depression and suicide (Lansky, 1992), and substance abuse (Horowitz, 1981). Even wife-battering is seen as a shame-driven interpersonal pattern in which feelings of dependency, abandonment, anxiety, and humiliation threaten men with psychological disorganization. They are unable to tolerate these feelings and use intimidation and violence to attempt to wield absolute control (Lansky, 1992).

Overall, masculine role discrepancy involves the strain between the individual male's gender identity and cultural ideals of masculinity. Men experience strain as a result of their inability to live up to an impossible image of masculinity that is beyond their grasp. The expectation to strive to meet the standard is powerful and men go to great lengths to do so. The pressure to conform is maintained through the use of shame which is initially used by fathers to socialize sons, and continues to be a force of social control throughout men's lives. Shame occurs both in the social form of humiliation to correct non-masculine behaviour, as well as the more internal experience of inadequacy and embarrassment. Men go to great lengths to avoid further experiencing shame and engage in a variety of often problematic behaviours to attempt to reduce feelings of role discrepancy.

### **3.3.3 Stunted Development: Male Gender Role Dysfunction**

Unlike discrepancy strain, where the male has failed to attain the ideal of masculinity, dysfunction strain arises from successfully fulfilling the requirements of traditional masculinity. Difficulties arise because many traditional masculine traits are

inherently dysfunctional to the individual and in relating to others. In this view, traditional masculinity is, by its very nature, problematic and men who fulfill their traditional gender role inevitably experience problems. The notion of dysfunction strain is an extension of trauma strain since the dysfunctional behaviour of traditional masculinity arises from the damaging process of male socialization. The two types of strain differ however in their emphasis. Dysfunction strain concerns itself less with the intrapsychic effects of masculinity, and more with how the traditional masculine roles can be problematic in relationships.

The concept of gender role dysfunction focuses on various ways in which males struggle to relate to others particularly in the realms of intimate relationships, friendships and parenting. Men are understood to be underdeveloped or stunted in their ability to relate in a full and functioning manner to others. Typically this is seen as “the way men are” and not something that men easily change (Gray, 1992), or primarily the result of faulty gender role expectations and therefore necessary to change (Levant, 1995). However, men’s ability to understand and express emotions in relation to others is viewed as dysfunctional.

Emotions have long been emphasized as necessary for healthy functioning (Goleman, 1995). However, the socialization of males, both through traumatic events and everyday gender role expectations, leads men to restrict and devalue much of their emotional experience (Balswick, 1988; Brannon, 1976; Levant, 1992). Men are systematically socialized to lack essential emotional skills. In fact it is contended that men’s socialization can often lead to the clinical syndrome alexithymia, meaning

“without words for emotions”. Alexithymic men are more prone to express anger aggressively, more inclined to hide or transform their vulnerable emotions into aggressive ones, are unable to tolerate emotional intimacy, and are more likely to prefer non-relational sexuality (Fischer & Good, 1997; Levant & Kopecky, 1995).

Fear of intimacy is another common dysfunctional result of traditional masculine role expectations (Fischer & Good, 1997). Here, men avoid close emotional contact with others and instead maintain a casual relatedness with friends or emotional detachment from partners. The inability to tolerate emotionally intimate relationships usually leads men to have great difficulty exchanging thoughts and feelings with a romantic partner and to connect with significant others in meaningful ways. Men also tend to have restricted social networks usually comprised only of a romantic partner or very few acquaintances (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987; Burda & Vaux, 1987). Men further avoid intimacy through shunting caring emotions through the channelling of sexuality (Brooks, 1995; Hudson & Jacot, 1991).

A third area of dysfunction is the restricted ability to fully empathize with others. Levant (1996) suggests that traditional men develop only a form of empathy called “action empathy” which enables the prediction of the behaviour of others. However, they do not develop “emotional empathy” which involves taking another person’s perspective and being able to know how they feel. Thus men are effective at predicting behaviour, but are less skilled at identifying the internal processes that occur in others and less able to know how best to respond to the needs of others.

A final area of dysfunction relates to how men deal with grief. Traditionally socialized men are limited in their ability to express and address grief in their lives (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 1996). This is due to the combined effect of unresolved emotional suppression and early childhood loss. Men suffer from chronically unresolved grief arising from the loss of having to pull away from their mothers at an early age. Grief is then compounded by their father's emotional unavailability. The "mother wound" and "father wound" leads men to avoid grief through strategies such as shifting their focus on action and achievement so as to ward off the pain and vulnerability of these losses. Men are said to continue to use these strategies throughout their lives and fear connection with others for fear of abandonment (Levant & Kopecky, 1995).

Male gender role dysfunction directly contrasts the traditional view of masculinity as necessary and functional. Traditional masculine gender roles are not only out of step with present day relationship expectations but are in conflict with them. Masculine socialization, rather than preparing males to fulfill essential roles in society, poorly prepares them for some of the most basic requirements of healthy relationships. Role dysfunction maintains that men lack skills in self understanding and self expression which are required to maintain close and enduring relationships with others. Men are therefore called to work at learning the "new skills" of greater self-understanding, emotional expression, empathy toward others and a more sophisticated approach to close relationships (Levant & Kopecky, 1995).

### 3.3.4 The Hazards of Being Male: Male Gender Role Stress

Gender role stress overlaps with the other strain types, however the term “stress” is used here to describe the connection between role strain and its effect upon physical well-being and health. Much of this work involves studying men’s physical reactions to stress-inducing situations to determine whether men who have traditional masculine orientations react differently. It is hypothesized that men who hold traditional masculine beliefs will tend to demonstrate greater stress reactions.

Gender role stress is most associated with the empirical work of Eisler (1995). His work extends theory originally developed by Bem (1981) who holds that men and women are significantly different in terms of cognitive processing. Bem proposes that masculine and feminine gender roles arise from an individual’s general readiness to encode and organize information about the world and oneself in terms of maleness or femaleness. She proposes that sex-typed attitudes and behaviours are learned when one is willing to process information according to society’s mandates of what is appropriate for one’s own sex and to ignore information associated with the opposite sex. Therefore men hold a cognitive schema that predisposes them to view a world and themselves through a masculine-tinted lens.

Masculine gender role stress arises from excessive commitment to and reliance upon certain culturally approved masculine schema that limit the range of coping strategies employable in any particular situation. This work is influenced by Lazarus in respect to his view of stress and how it can be measured (Lazarus& Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1990). According to him, psychological stress exists as a relationship between

the person and an environment that is judged as taxing or exceeding his resources and endangering his wellbeing. Therefore, the interaction between cognitive appraisals of situations and evaluations of one's ability to psychologically and emotionally manage the situations defines the stress process. While a variety of factors influence one's appraisal of a situation as challenging or threatening, one's vulnerability to a stressor is partly related to the strength of commitment to that event. Thus, if a man becomes extremely committed to being successful at a particular endeavour, his vulnerability to stress and emotional upset should be proportional to the strength of his commitment.

Eisler and Skidmore (1987) have taken these assumptions and developed the Masculine Gender Role Stress Scale (MGRSS) to attempt to empirically test stress in men. The 40 item scale measures five factors believed to reflect the commitment to traditional masculine expectations. These factors are measured as fears since it is believed that a higher degree of anxiety in relation to masculine expectations will lead to higher stress. Physical inadequacy is measured as fears of the inability to meet masculine standards of fitness whether in sports or sexual prowess. Emotional inexpressiveness involves fears of vulnerability in expressing emotions such as love, weakness or hurt feelings. Subordination to women includes fears of being outperformed by women in activities that men are traditionally expected to excel. Intellectual inferiority involves fears of appraisal by others as unable to think rationally or to be decisive. Finally, performance failure includes fears of failure to meet masculine standards in the arenas of work and sexual adequacy.

In correlation studies with other standardized inventories that measure difficulties, the MGRSS has found to be correlated with high scores on anger inventories (Eisler, Skidmore & Ward, 1988), and has shown a strong correlation between self-reported experiences of irrational fears, particularly social fears (Arrindell, Kolk, Pickersgill & Hageman, 1993). In using the scale to study stress reactions, men were compared between two conditions (Lash, Eisler & Schulman, 1990). One group of men were exposed to physical stress in which they were required to put their hands in cold water for several minutes. The second group of men were confronted by a female interviewer who challenged their academic performance or their ability to express themselves emotionally. In both groups, cardiovascular activity was measured as well as MGRSS scores. It was found that both cold water immersion and challenge by a female increased cardiovascular reactivity for high scoring MGRSS men, but not for low scoring men. In fact, the difference between the two conditions was indistinguishable for high MGRSS scorers. The study has been replicated with variations and has produced consistent results (Lash, Gillespie, Eisler & Southard, 1991).

In all, the research on male role stress supports the contention that traditionally masculine males are more inclined to find a wide range of events stressful. Further it is argued that these men tend to feel particularly stressed when attempting to deal with emotions they feel are more appropriate for women. They also respond strongly when they fear that women may best them in an activity at which men are expected to excel. These men are more likely to experience significant stress if they appraise themselves as not performing up to manly standards of achievement in the masculine spheres of work

and sexual performance. When these men are presented with tasks at which females are expected to excel, they did not show as much emotional reactivity (Eisler, 1995; Lash, Eisler, & Schulman, 1990; Lash, Gillespie, Eisler & Southard, 1991).

### **3.3.5 Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Male Gender Role Conflict**

Gender role conflict involves competing masculine role demands that arise during life transitions. Men who experience role conflict are unable to successfully meet both role demands simultaneously and therefore must either challenge these expectations, or experience the psychic and physical stress of failing to live up to masculine norms. The concept of gender role conflict overlaps with other types of strain, but can be separated here because it is associated primarily with competing demands that result from life transitions. These are events in a person's gender role development that produce profound changes in his or her gender role values and assumptions. O'Neil (1995), in his development of the Gender Role Conflict Scale (GCRS) suggests numerous role transitions in which men must demonstrate, re-evaluate, or integrate new and old concepts of masculinity. (O'Neil, 1990; O'Neil & Egan, 1992a; O'Neil & Egan, 1992b). Certain gender role themes such as power, success, or sexuality must therefore be re-defined as the gender role transitions occurs (O'Neil & Fishman, 1992; O'Neil, Fishman & Kinsella-Shaw, 1987).

Instead of specifically focusing on distinct life events, the research emphasizes four patterns of gender role conflict considered to be the most pervasive for men during life transitions. These are: persistent worries about personal achievement and competence, difficulty and fears about expressing feelings, limited ability to express

feelings and thoughts with other men, and conflicts between work and family. The research in this area has attempted to determine the traits that are associated with either successful or unsuccessful resolution of these conflicts. Over 70 empirical studies have been done with a wide range of associations found (O'Neil & Good, 1997).

Among the more prominent findings has been the connection in college men between low self-esteem and restrictive emotionality, restrictive affectionate behaviour, and work/family conflicts (Davis, 1987; Sharp & Heppner, 1991). Self esteem and restricted emotionality were also significantly associated with one another among middle-aged men (Cournoyer, 1994). A number of studies have found, in particular, that restrictive emotionality is correlated with intimacy (Chartier & Arnold, 1985; Cournoyer, 1994; Good et al, 1995; Sharpe, 1993). Other studies have found that restrictive emotionality and conflict between work and family correlates to marital unhappiness and relationship dissatisfaction. (Campell & Snow, 1992; Cournoyer, 1994; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991; Sharpe, 1993). Finally, for men who experience difficulty, the research shows that it is unlikely that they will seek out professional help. A number of studies found evidence of a strong association between gender role conflict and negative attitudes toward help-seeking (Good et al, 1995; Roberston & Fitzgerald, 1992; Wisch, Mahalik, Hayes & Nutt, 1993).

In general, the research in gender role conflict is extensive yet tends to be focused on narrow aspects of masculine traits. It is difficult therefore to reach conclusions about the difficulties for men inherent in life transitions. The literature does offer support for the view that men who are more traditionally-oriented toward work

and family are more prone to anxiety, depression and low self-esteem during periods of life transition. These men are also unlikely to seek or accept professional help during these periods. Overall, the research suggests that life transitions can pose significant challenges to men in respect to masculinity, and that there are a variety of attributes that can either assist or interfere with men's ability to successfully negotiate the transition (Cournoyer, 1994; Good & Mintz, 1990; Good & Wood, 1995, O'Neil & Good, 1997; Sharpe & Hepner, 1991).

### **3.4 Critiques of Role Strain**

Despite the popularity of the concept of role strain, it is not without its critics. Most of the criticism has been levelled at the use of the term role to describe the phenomenon under study. However, while some authors dispute the appropriateness of use of a role metaphor, few dispute the existence of gender strain or conflict in men. In fact, some of role strain's strongest critics share a similarly strong belief that men are experiencing a "crisis of masculinity" (Connell, 1995; Kimmell & Messner, 1989; Segal, 1990). Other authors dispute the idea that men are experiencing significant stress and instead suggest that academics have concocted concerns about role strain in an attempt to sell books and build academic careers (Hoff-Sommers, 2000).

The challenge that is most often posed to the role strain metaphor is that the term "role" insufficiently captures the complexity of the issues involved at both a personal and social level and still tends to cast the phenomenon in traditional terms (Kimmell & Messner, 1989). Continuing to use the term "role" fails to break out of the

confines of earlier essentialist and functionalist thinking and terminology. Some advocates of a social constructionist view of gender suggest that role is too narrow a construct and too intrinsically connected to internal individual processes rather than social forces (Connell, 1995). This attack is vehemently defended against by Pleck (1995) who argues that the role metaphor is by its very nature consistent with constructionism though he offers little in the way of supporting evidence (Connell, 1995).

In a related fashion, the use of the term role is criticized for falsely casting gender roles as universal and rigid phenomena. For example, Kimmel and Messner (1989) argue that roles are presented as “static containers of behaviours and attitudes, and biological males and females are required to fit themselves into these containers, regardless of how ill-fitting these clusters of behaviours and attitudes. Such a model is ahistorical and suggests a false cultural universalism, and therefore is ill-equipped to understand the ways in which sex roles change, and the ways that individuals modify these roles through the enactments of gender expectations” (p.8). It is argued that the term tends to inaccurately suggest that all males experience the same unswerving and universal role expectations and that these expectations are always described as those consistent with white, male, middle class heterosexuals (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985; Connell, 1995).

Critics also state that since the term “role” is still linked to structure defined by biological difference, the dichotomy of male and female, rather than a structure defined by social relations. This leads to the reduction of gender to two homogeneous categories. Sex roles are inevitably defined as reciprocal with polarization a necessary part of the concept. This leads to a misperception of social reality, exaggerating differences between

men and women, while obscuring other structures such as race, class, and sexuality (Connell, 1995).

From an entirely practical view, the term role has been challenged for simply being too logically vague. The term is used so widely and liberally that it leads to incoherence in the analysis of social life (Kimmel, 1987). Since the term can be used to describe an occupation, a political status, a momentary transaction, a hobby, a stage in life, and a gender, the term is too diffuse to allow for sufficient specificity. Thus the term should be abandoned simply due to its overuse and diffuse meaning.

As well, the use of role has been criticised for framing a discussion about gender and society that is devoid of discussions of power and patriarchy. It is argued that gender role strain is a model that ignores issues of power in gender relations and assumes a false equivalence in the experiences of women and men (Kimmel, 1993; Segal, 1990). It fails to locate masculine and feminine “roles” within actual power dynamics between men and women, or any other concrete social relations. Thus it is argued that “we are no wiser about the actual demands made on men, and certainly no wiser about the emotional and political dynamics of masculinity – why the majority of men not only endure their dysfunctional roles, but display extraordinary resistance to change” (Segal, 1990, p.69). As well it insufficiently accounts for men’s seeming unwillingness to change their roles and the fact that they tend to overconform rather than underconform to them. Without power and patriarchy as a consideration, there is no insight into why men fail to resist or transform roles that are said to be so dysfunctional. Males are put into categories of normal or deviant rather than seeing men who don’t conform as acting

politically to contest power (Segal, 1990). This way the role paradigm fails to generate a “strategic politics of masculinity” in which the structural forces of roles are better exposed so as to more effectively challenge the forces that maintain patriarchy (Connell, 1995).

While much of the criticism of role strain comes from a feminist analysis of masculinity and the political left, a different but similarly strong criticism comes from the political right targeting authors of popular books. This criticism argues simply that there is no evidence to show that average men experience role strain at all. On the contrary, men typically report high levels of satisfaction and fulfilment in their lives and that any evidence of role strain is vastly exaggerated and embellished by academics to gain media attention, make profits, or advance ideological views (Hoff Sommers, 2000). This criticism is particularly lodged at the role trauma and dysfunction literature in respect to young males. Role strain literature is part of the larger self-help wave in which many populations are portrayed as in crisis and in need of specialized help: “perhaps this fin de siecle fashion in identifying large groups as mentally infirm will soon wane – it has nothing left to feed on. With women, girls, boys, and now men all identified as stricken populations, the genre seems to have run out of victims” (Hoff Sommers, 2000, p. 149). The role strain view is criticized as pathologizing what for males is a normal way of being. It is blamed for cashing in on a nation-wide fear of violence, for exaggerating the problem, and portraying all boys as potential killers who require proper socialization to more feminine ways. Role strain therefore exists not in the experience of men’s everyday

lives but as a “crisis” that sells books, builds academic careers, and propels political ideologies (Nathanson & Young, 2001).

### **3.5 Chapter Summary: Men Under Strain**

The literature seems to reveal a mixed picture in respect to the existence of masculine gender role strain. However, there is evidence to suggest that at least some men experience tension and strain in respect to the fit they experience between their sense of who they are, their coping strategies, and their perception of the expectations placed upon them by society. Further, some men experience strain as a result of failing to successfully live up to culturally held ideals about masculinity. Still other men experience difficulties because the culturally held ideal is highly changeable and unclear. Some men are limited in their coping skills which inhibit their ability to successfully engage in close relationship at times. There is also evidence to support that men who adhere to an essentialist and functionalist view of traditional masculinity can be more prone to physical stress and more likely to fear failure, avoid vulnerability, and focus on performance. Over the life span men are called upon to change their attitudes and practices in relation to masculinity and the failure to adapt can lead to a range of intrapsychic and interpersonal difficulties. In all, there seems to be support for the idea that the place of men in society has changed and continues to change, and men are challenged to adapt accordingly.

However, the above observations are complicated by evidence that challenges aspects of the Gender Role Strain Paradigm. First, the strain phenomenon in question is

a complicated interrelation between internal and external forces and the role metaphor may indeed be too limited to capture this complexity. It is more likely that gender role along with gender identity, gender ideal, and gender stereotype better reflect the varied forces at play. However, even these constructs may continue to falsely simplify and dichotomize men's and women's relationship within society. As well, power and the social structures involved with the creation and maintenance of gender may continue to be under represented.

The second challenge is that certain aspects of the concept of role strain may be intuitively appealing or may be supported within theoretical models, but may or may not be born out in the real world. Discussions of gender and masculinity can be political, emotional and popularly appealing and thus easy explanations for complex social problems may be sought and too easily accepted. An example of this is perhaps best reflected in the trauma strain literature where it is contended that most, if not all, boys experience traumatic and crippling parenting and socialization processes. While the model reflects a logic that fits well with psychoanalytic thought and has captured the public's imagination, there is little if any actual support for the existence of widespread trauma in males. In fact much of the evidence is to the contrary (Hoff-Sommers, 2000).

In the end, the following observations can be made about masculine gender role strain. Masculinity can indeed be problematic for men. Masculinity is best described as a complex, contradictory and varied phenomenon. Masculinity changes over the life span and men are challenged to adapt accordingly to the new demands placed on them. Some degree of tension and strain exists for many men related to the fit between values,

attitudes, beliefs, practices, self-perceptions, cultural ideals, relational demands, and cultural expectations. This strain is not a fixed or universal experience but rather varies greatly between men and over time. The strain that men experience may be subtle and abstract, or may be immediate, powerful and have a significant impact on emotional and physical health. Strain is likely most present and problematic for men who have been socialized into a traditional masculine ideology or in some way straddle competing expectations of traditional and non-traditional masculinity. Finally, there exists the caution that any discussion or theory of gender role strain occurs within the culture that creates it, and thus it is influenced by the personal, political and cultural forces.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction

This study explores the ways in which men raised during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have experienced and negotiated tensions and conflicts in masculine gender role expectations. The aim of the study is to understand masculine role strain as a complex and dynamic phenomenon that exists in the everyday lives of men. As well, the study strives to shed greater light on the interplay between role strain and men's attempt to successfully negotiate the forces that shape it.

The study is premised upon a number of observations arising out of an analysis of the existing role strain literature. First, it is recognized that most research has assumed that role strain is a fixed and stable construct. Studies have readily adopted Pleck's (1981) Gender Role Strain Paradigm and have viewed role strain as a quantifiable experience for men. The majority of studies have examined strain through the application of established scales and have sought to reduce the experience to a minimum of statistically significant variables. The research has generated a lot of output, though few variables associated with role strain have been consistently found. Most research has not examined role strain as a dynamic system of changeable forces, but rather has narrowly studied men's strain as it relates to specific events or unique situations. Research has also neglected to examine the efforts by men to negotiate or reconcile role tensions. In all, the research has treated men as objects of strained forces rather than active and involved participants. Quantitative approaches have been limited by their oversimplification of the strain

phenomenon and tendency to strip away vital aspects of context when examining role strain experience (Connell, 1995; Kimmell & Messner, 1989; Segal, 1990).

Research on strain has also been limited by the chosen participants for study. Most quantitative work has examined groups of easily available male participants, usually university students of relatively similar demographic characteristics (Good & Wood, 1995; Levant & Pollack, 1995). Other studies have focused solely on men who are considered to experience extreme strain pressures so as to maximize the likelihood of finding significant variables (Brooks & Silverstein, 1995; Connell, 1995). A third area of research has tended to assume homogeneity across men in respect to role strain and has focused on comparing male participants with their female counterparts (Maccoby, 1990). Very few studies have employed a qualitative methodology to examine in depth the unique experiences of individual men (Connell, 1995). Surprisingly, masculinity literature suggests that role strain is a complex phenomenon, yet very few studies have undertaken a methodology that allows for appreciation of its complexity.

## **4.2 Research Questions**

This study examines role strain with much greater attention to its complexity and dynamic nature as experienced over time. Six broad research questions underpin the study (see Figure 4). The questions were developed to allow for a well rounded and developmental picture of men's experience of role strain and their attempts to cope. The first question limits the participants of study to men who have lived through the dramatic changes in gender of the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The question broadly

frames the phenomenon of interests as “conflicts and tensions” and recognizing also that these are likely to change over time. Question 2 makes clear that the purpose of the study is to better understand role strain through qualitatively exploring themes that underlie the experience of men. Question 3 directs interest to the efforts that men themselves have made to reconcile the tensions in their life so has to gain an appreciation for their interaction with straining forces. Question 4 links the experiences of the men interviewed back to the standing literature on masculinity. Question 5 specifically examines the fit between the role strain metaphor and the experiences that the men describe in respect to strain. Finally, question 6 examines the implications of the findings in respect to the ways in which masculinity might be better understood or associated difficulties better addressed.

**Figure 4: Research questions**

1. *How have men born and raised in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century experienced conflicts or tensions associated with masculinity? How have these tensions changed for them over time?*
2. *What themes underlie these conflicts or tensions?*
3. *How have men managed or attempted to reconcile these conflicts or tensions?*
4. *What might the different experiences of men say about how masculinity is experienced and constructed?*
5. *What might the different experiences of men say about whether role strain exists as an apt metaphor to describe the phenomenon in question?*

6. *What might the different experiences of men tell us about how conflicts and tensions associated with masculinity can be better understood and addressed?*

### 4.3 Research Design

The research questions require a design that will enable role strain to be explored as a construct that exists on a varied and shifting terrain upon which men have very different experiences yet share some fundamental commonalities. It assumes that role strain is not a fixed entity, but instead a phenomenon that results from the tensions between individual and social forces. To capture this complex and dynamic nature, the research design follows a qualitative phenomenological methodology.

Phenomenology is both a movement in philosophy as well as a qualitative research methodology. Phenomenology as a philosophy is attributed originally to Husserl at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was further developed as an existential philosophy by Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (van Manen, 1990). The subject matter of interest to early phenomenologists began with the nature of consciousness and experience. It was expanded to include the human life world by Heidegger, and then to include human action by Sartre (Kvale, 1996). Its primary concern is to describe the nature of experience without recourse to deduction, formal theory or assumptions from other disciplines.

Phenomenology as a research method was described in detail by Spiegelberg (1960), Giorgi (1974), and Colaizzi (1978). It is described as “the study of the structure and the variations of structure, of the consciousness to which any thing, event, or person

appears” (Giorgi, 1975, p. 83). Similarly, van Manen describes the phenomenological method as “the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meanings, of lived experiences” (1990, p. 11). Van Manen also highlights the importance of recognizing both similarities and differences when employing the phenomenological method. He states that “phenomenology consists in mediating in a personal way the antimony of particularity (being interested in concreteness, difference and what is unique) and universality (being interested in the essential). In differences that make a difference” (1990, p. 23).

The phenomenological method typically involves the exploration of complex but often ubiquitous phenomena that exist in the everyday lives of people. The method usually involves a small number of participants who are examined in depth around a specific topic of interest. Phenomenologist seeks to describe in detail differences and similarities between the individuals relating to the topic to better understand the topic’s complex nature.

The phenomenological method employed in this research is in keeping with this tradition and is particularly adapted from Giorgi’s (1974) original phenomenological design. Van Manen’s hermeneutical emphasis on the meaning of everyday life was used to frame the method for systematically examining role strain as a complex phenomenon (1990). Kvale’s work on interviewing as a collaborative process of meaning construction was used to provide a structure for the interview process (1996). Taylor and Bogdan’s (1998) in-depth interviewing strategy was used to inform the process of conducting the semi-structured interviews. The design involves six steps (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Research steps**

1. *Using purposive and snowball sampling strategies, invite men to participate in an in-depth, individual interview*
2. *Conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews with men regarding how they experience masculinity and role strain*
3. *Prepare the interview data for analysis through transcription*
4. *Conduct a thematic analysis of the interview material*
5. *Write about the themes using data for support and confirmation*
6. *Compare and contrast themes with existing literature*

**4.3.1 Sampling Procedures**

In order to be consistent with the questions under study, participants were sought who were in a unique position in the history of changes in sex and gender role expectations, but who otherwise would be considered “typical” men. In order to participate, the men needed to be born roughly in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such that they lived through the period of rapidly changing expectations of masculinity.

In order to be consistent with a phenomenological methodology, it was important to select participants who would allow for the exploration of similarities and differences in underlying structures and themes. The sampling strategy sought men who showed variation across different forces that influence masculinity, particularly where the construction or integration of masculinity may be under pressure. Participants were selected who showed variation and potential tension in relation to elements such as intimate relationships, sexuality, power and affluence, class, culture, and overall

differences in gender identity. In order to get demographic variation men were recruited who varied in terms of marital status, parenting responsibilities, sexuality, age, education, and employment.

Participants were recruited through a snowball sampling strategy in which the researcher contacted friends, acquaintances and colleagues through face to face, e-mail, and telephone contact to act as referral agents and to pass on a verbal invitation to participate in the study. These individuals were informed of the aims of the study, the interview process, the types of questions to be asked, and the criteria for selecting participants and then asked to relay the invitation to others. Copies of the Information Letter (Appendix 1) were made widely available to both potential referral sources for participants and potential participants themselves.

Interested participants were encouraged by referees to telephone the researcher for further information. As well, the names and contact numbers of interested potential participants were provided to the researcher by referees. The researcher telephoned potential participants once it was established through referees that potential participants verbally consented to receive an initial orientation telephone call. At all times throughout the recruitment process, potential participants were reminded of their right to terminate their participation in the study.

Men who agreed to the initial orientation phone call were contacted during a time of their convenience to be provided more detail in respect to the purpose of the study and roles of the researcher and participant, as well as further details regarding the content of the interview. The orientation telephone call involved ensuring that the

potential participant and researcher had no prior relationship or possible dual relationship that may result in a conflict of any kind in the present or foreseeable future. For example, students who were considering application into the social work program at Lakehead University were considered ineligible to participate. Also, potential participants were informed of the researcher's obligation and specific efforts to protect confidentiality and anonymity. Finally, with the verbal consent of the potential participants, men were informed of the categories of demographic variation sought and asked basic questions relating to these criteria to determine whether they reflected a unique interview participant. Potential participants were given opportunity to ask any further questions about the study. At the end of the orientation phone call, participants who expressed an interest in continuing were sent via the communication vehicle of their choice (i.e., fax, e-mail, land mail, or through their referee) the Information Letter and the Consent Form (Appendix 2). Participants were then told that the researcher would follow up with them in approximately one week's time to answer further questions and determine their willingness to participate in the actual interview.

This process continued until eight men of varying ages and backgrounds were selected to participate. The selection and interview process took place over a period of approximately six months. This allowed for the interview to be comfortably worked into the schedules of all participants. It also allowed for time to ensure that a variety of participants could be found. The demographic variation of the eight men who participated in the study is summarized in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Summary of basic demographic characteristics of participants

AGE	MARITAL STATUS	CHILD STATUS	EMPLOYMENT
39	<i>married</i>	<i>father of two male children</i>	<i>employed as a technician</i>
38	<i>single</i>	<i>father of one male child</i>	<i>enrolled as full-time student</i>
37	<i>Gay, single</i>	<i>no children</i>	<i>employed as a research assistant</i>
43	<i>married</i>	<i>no children</i>	<i>self-employed</i>
41	<i>divorced</i>	<i>sole parent of boy and girl</i>	<i>employed as family counsellor</i>
49	<i>single</i>	<i>no children</i>	<i>employed in broadcast industry</i>
29	<i>Single</i>	<i>no children</i>	<i>employed in retail</i>
48	<i>married</i>	<i>father of two male children</i>	<i>employed as educator</i>

#### 4.3.2 Data Collection

Individual interviews were arranged for each participant. A variety of times and locations for the interview were offered to the men. Only one man requested that he be interviewed in his home. The other seven agreed to be interviewed at the researcher's office at Lakehead University during the evening. This location was preferable to the men as it was centrally accessible and private.

At the outset of the interview participants were again encouraged to ask any questions pertaining to the aim, purpose or methods of the research. The Consent Form (see Appendix 2) was once again discussed and the signed form was returned to the

researcher. The researcher's commitment and obligation to confidentiality and anonymity was again clarified. The tape recorder was placed in full view of the participant. Participants were also reminded that they retained full control of the interview in respect to the content they felt comfortable answering. As well, they were informed that they could at any time request that the tape recorder be turned off either temporarily or to end the interview.

The interview was conducted using a semi-structured, interview guide approach (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). A wide range of questions (see Appendix 4) were designed to provide a thematic and chronological structure while at the same time allowing participants to focus on the subject areas of greatest meaning to them. The questions were developed from the masculinity literature and were organized in the interview around distinct life transition stages. Three pilot interviews were conducted with colleagues to test out the categories and related questions. The categories that guided the interview are summarized in Figure 7.

#### **Figure 7: Interview question categories**

1. **Demographic information:** *age, marital status, number, age and sex of children, educational background, employment status or type of work, educational status and type of work of spouse or partner, parent's education and employment history, birthplace and length of time living in thunder bay.*
2. **Early experiences:** *this involved areas such as reflections on growing up as a male, early experience with gender role expectations, and childhood interests.*
3. **Family of origin:** *this included descriptions of mother, father, siblings, family life, and*

*neighbourhood.*

4. **Adolescence:** *this included key events, socialization experiences, meaningful changes and struggles, and friendships.*
5. **Friendships:** *this involved discussion of historical relationships, key friendships, and changes-over time.*
6. **Intimate relationships:** *this included a wide range of past and present subjects including relationship history, key turning points, struggles, themes, and changes.*
7. **Parenting:** *this included roles, responsibilities, hopes for children, and parenting styles.*
8. **Household/family:** *this involved subjects such as division of labour, areas of conflict, and developments over time.*
9. **The workplace:** *this included work history, the meaning of work, work/family balance, and career aspirations.*
10. **Region:** *this involved reflections on living in region as it pertains to masculinity.*
11. **Masculinity:** *this included broad reflections on the past, present and future of masculinity and the male role.*

Not all questions were specifically posed to each of the participants in the same manner. However, all areas within the interview guide were addressed in each of the interviews in roughly the same order. The interview process was consistent with Kvale's (1996) approach to interview as conversation. A balance was struck between the imposition of a basic structure through open-ended questions as prompts and talking points, with informal and dynamic exploration of participant's ideas and experience.

Each interview lasted approximately three hours. At the outset, basic demographic information was collected and written down. Following this, no notes were

taken by the researcher. Each interview proceeded well with participants routinely commenting that time had gone by quickly or that they were surprised that they had so much to say. At the close of the interview, the tape recorder was turned off and time was allowed for a period of debriefing to enable the participants to disengage from the interview (Kvale, 1996). Participants were also offered an opportunity to ask further questions. At this point the interview ended, however participants were again reminded that they were free to call the researcher if they had follow up questions or concerns.

### **4.3.3 Data Analysis**

The transcribed interviews were analysed using a thematic analysis approach (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1974; van Manen, 1990). The analytic strategy used was particularly consistent with that outlined by Kvale (1996). Kvale observes that analysis begins in the interview itself. He recommends a method in which participants are invited to identify and discover new relationships during the interview. Consistent with this strategy, throughout the interview participants were regularly asked to comment on themes or underlying threads that relate to masculinity and role strain as they see them. As well within the interviews, preliminary themes were explicitly explored by the researcher interpreting the subject's statements back to them for confirmation or invitation for further discussion (Kvale, 1996). This method was used when unclear meanings needed to be clarified or contradictory meanings identified. Kvale refers to this as a "self-correcting" interview strategy (1996, p. 189).

The next step involved "structuring the analysis" to prepare and transcribe the data for qualitative data analysis (Kvale, 1996). A professional transcriber was employed

to convert the interview material into a typed word processing format. All interviews were typed in their entirety according to standard transcription procedures including pauses, sighs, laughter and other meaningful utterances (Kvale, 1996; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). In the occasional instance that a recorded word could not be accurately heard by the transcriber, she was instructed to mark the spot in the transcript. The researcher then reviewed the audiotaped interview to fill in any missing content.

Once the complete interview was in typed form, a formal data analysis occurred. Kvale's analytical strategy of meaning condensation, narrative structuring and meaning interpretation were used. Meaning condensation involves the "abridgement of the meanings expressed by the interviewees into shorter formations" (p. 192). Long passages were thus compressed into briefer statements so that the main emphasis of what was said was retained in a more manageable form. The result was the generation of a range of "meaning units" (p. 194) which reflected unique themes expressed by the men.

What emerged was content that could be divided into different categories pertaining to themes around role strain and significant life events. Many of these reflected the categories of questioning such as parenting, relationships and others. This helped organize the data to facilitate the development of "sensitizing concepts and patterns" (Blumer, 1969). It allowed for the preliminary selection of what appeared to be recurrent themes. It also helped to provide an initial sense of the severity and frequency of strain related to the various areas discussed. It generated propositions around emerging themes in terms of their potential meaning and facilitated continued reflection

on the data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). To this end, memos were continuously written to record preliminary ideas and perceived connections within the data (Charmaz, 1983).

Prevailing themes were sought in a manner consistent with Taylor and Bogdan's (1998) storyline approach, van Manen's holistic approach (1990), and Kvale's narrative structuring (1996). Each of these approaches recognize that themes and meanings do not exist as necessarily separate from one another but rather appear in the interview in an ordered and temporal way that is potentially meaningful. In this way, interest is also placed on the process of the interview along as well as its content. To this end, the entire interview was read repeatedly and themes were examined in terms of overall patterns of appearance in order look for meta-meaning such as overall narratives, storylines and patterns.

Finally, meaning interpretation was used to work out structures and relations not immediately apparent in the text (Kvale, 1996). Here the objective was to build a coherent understanding of the data and construct a logical chain of information that had overall coherence. Following de-contextualization from the transcript, meanings were then re-contextualized into a broader frame of reference. Text expansion was used to take statements and link them together in an attempt to respond to the original research questions posed (Kvale, 1996; van Manen, 1990).

These methods were particularly useful in guiding how the data was to be presented. It became apparent in working with the data that many of the coding methods used in which specific and narrow themes were extracted from the interview tended to remove the dynamic nature of the phenomenon under study. Also, coding

through meaning categorization simply generated too many meaning units. An overarching structure was required to justify the selection of some and exclude others. Therefore, the many themes extracted were re-examined in light of each participant's life history. An interpretation of each participant's story was then written in a narrative form (Chapter 5) so as to re-contextualize and link significant themes showing their dynamic interrelation (Kvale, 1996). Thus it became possible to present the data pertaining to each participant in a manner that showed how masculinity and role strain changed for them over time. These narratives allowed for better exploration of the reciprocal relationship between forces such as gender role, gender identity, ideal and stereotype. In the end, eight separate narratives were written, one for each of the participants. This enabled the uniqueness of each participant to be explored in depth, while also allowing a meaningful discussion of themes cutting across all participants (van Manen, 1990).

#### 4.4 Ethical Considerations

Every effort was made to ensure that all aspects of this study remained consistent with the three relevant bodies governing ethical guidelines for this research. These include the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2000); the Canadian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (1994); and standard qualitative ethical conduct guidelines (Kvale, 1996; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The areas of *informed consent*, *confidentiality*, *consequences to participants*, and the *role of the researcher* were considered throughout the study.

Informed consent entails informing the research participants about the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the research design, as well as of any possible risks and benefits from participation (Kvale, 1996). The purpose of the research was made clear to all potential participants at the outset. The Information Letter (see Appendix 1) and Consent Form (see Appendix 2) were made widely available. Participants who expressed an interest were also able to view the Interview Guide (see Appendix 4) prior to being interviewed. Participants were reminded that they could terminate their involvement at any time, as well as choose to not answer any questions posed in the interview. Following the interview, participants were debriefed in respect to their comfort with the use of their statements in the research. They were also given the option to choose not to include their interview in the study. No participants chose to request that aspects of the interview be excluded from the study and no participants requested to withdraw.

Confidentiality requires that any data that might identify the participant must be withheld from the final report (Kvale, 1996). It also requires that all information be obtained and held in a private and secure manner. All interviews took place in the researcher's private office, except for the participant who wished to be interviewed in his home. Tapes and transcripts were kept in a locked storage cabinet in a locked office. The data has been stored until completion of the research and then will be destroyed. The transcription of all interviews was done by a qualified professional transcriber who was paid for their services and signed a Confidentiality Agreement (see Appendix 3). No written notes were taken during the actual interviews.

Confidentiality was discussed with each participant. Their opinions were solicited in terms of potential identifying information that would need to be either excluded from the dissertation or altered to protect their identity. All identifying information was either removed or altered in the presentation of the data. All references to names, workplaces, specific locations, and events were removed, altered or converted to generic descriptions so as to protect the men's identities.

In respect to consequences to participants, research guidelines suggest that the risk of harm to participants should be the minimum possible and that the sum of potential benefits should outweigh any risk (Kvale, 1996). The nature of the interviews and questions posed were of relatively low risk with very little emphasis on material that might be considered potentially threatening or harmful. At the same time, some topic areas covered were potentially emotionally provocative for some participants. Every effort was made to ensure that the interviews were conducted in a respectful and sensitive manner. The researcher has 12 years experience as a clinical social worker and counsellor in the area of adult mental health with thousands of hours of experience interviewing a wide variety of people. Participants were informed that, in the event that they experienced difficulty, either during or as a result of the interview, the researcher would direct the participant to the appropriate resource and arrange for follow up. No participants requested a referral or reported difficulties of any kind as a result of the interview. On the contrary, most participants reported experiencing the interview as useful and personally satisfying, and that they appreciated having an attentive listener who was interested in their life.

The investigator's relationship to the participants was also carefully considered. Of particular importance was ensuring that participants did not experience undue pressure to participate, or that their participation placed them or the researcher in an awkward or potentially conflicting dual relationship. Participants were not remunerated in any way for their involvement. The only "reward" for involvement was the satisfaction of contributing to research and the opportunity to explore seldom talked about but everyday phenomenon in a structured and reflective manner. As stated previously, during the initial orientation phone call, the possibility of current or foreseeable problematic dual relationships were explored. Possible problematic dual relationships with potential participants' significant others were also explored since some of the interviews inevitably involved the discussion of relationship conflicts. As well, for potential participants who were students at Lakehead University, those who were considering entrance into the social work program or who were likely to have the researcher as an instructor were screened out at the beginning of the selection process.

#### **4.5 Limitations**

It can be tempting in qualitative research to simply state that the methodology is in such opposition to quantitative methods that expectations of generalization, reliability, and validity are unnecessary or inappropriate. However, while qualitative methods cannot be held to positivistic standards, they have standards of their own. In respect to generalization, two common standards can be used as a guide. The first is that the expectation of generalization can be moved to an expectation of contextualization

(Kvale, 1996). Thus, rather than a search for universal knowledge, the emphasis is on whether the data remains well connected with the context within which it occurred. To this end, a narrative presentation of each participant's response was included to provide the greatest degree of data transparency, while allowing the data to be presented in a manageable and organized way. Having said this, it must be noted that the narrative structure was written by the researcher based upon his interpretation of the data and the flow of the actual interview. Each interview was considerably longer than its respective narrative. Information was therefore inevitably excluded based upon the interpretive strategies used by the researcher and thus some degree of context was left out.

Given the small number of participants in the study, the results cannot be said to be generalizable to a broader population of males. However, statistical generalization can be replaced by analytic generalization (Kvale, 1996). Analytic generalization relates to whether readers of the research can make a reasoned judgement about the applicability of the findings in other situations. This is more likely done when the study provides detail in respect to specifying supporting evidence and making the arguments explicit. If the reasons and evidence are sound, then there may be reason to consider application in other studies (Kvale, 1996; Yin, 1994). It is anticipated that, within this study, sufficient historical, theoretical, and empirical background was provided, as well as extensive detail in respect to the data, such that readers can readily draw their own conclusions about its analytic generalizability.

Reliability pertains to the consistency of the research findings. Reliability covers a range of considerations throughout the study. It examines the extent to which the study

is undertaken in a fair, consistent, and logical manner (Kvale, 1996). At the same time, qualitative researchers warn that too narrow an emphasis on reliability may counteract creative innovation. This study has strived to demonstrate reliability by being as transparent in respect to the methods used as possible so as to allow the reader to draw their own conclusions. Also, it has made clear throughout—both to the participants in the interview, as well as throughout the discussion of the data—that all findings are the observations and interpretations of the researcher. Given this fact however, the study can only be said to seek to have internal reliability. Since the interpretations are that of the researcher, any replication of this study by other researchers may come to different conclusions.

Questions of validity can take many forms in qualitative research. The standard is that observations be well supported by the data, and that the researcher does not influence the participants, ask leading questions, or skew the results in any manner (Kvale, 1996). Given the political and often polarized nature of the topic study, it was essential that the researcher take care not to adopt a perspective or position in this regard at the outset. Throughout the study, the researcher regularly took measures to check for bias. These included reading and re-writing all aspects of the dissertation continuously to check for unintended position taking. The researcher frequently challenged the work through seeking alternative interpretations, competing viewpoints and often playing devil's advocate. As well, since multiple researchers could not be used, multiple methods of qualitative data analysis were used so that analytic triangulation could be regularly employed to check findings. However, just as in the case of reliability, the interpretations

and conclusions are entirely the researcher's. While the researcher made every effort to protect against the imposition of researcher bias, there remains the possibility that unintentional bias may have occurred.

A final limitation pertains to representativeness. It should be noted that the sample of men interviewed in this study is small and in no way can be construed as representative of men in general. While efforts have been made to select a varied range of men, the sample does not necessarily reflect the variation that occurs in the broader male population. While the experiences of the men studied here cannot be said to reflect the experiences of men in general, it is hoped that the detailed examination of a small number of men will generate observations that can be compared against a larger male population in future studies.

## 4.6 Chapter Summary

The study was based on observations derived from the existing literature on masculinity. The first was the dominance of the Gender Role Strain Paradigm as the accepted framework for both understanding men's struggle and directing their change (Levant & Pollack, 1995). The second was the seeming disappearance of a meaningful and engaged masculinity discourse following the turn of the century (Clatterbaugh, 1997). The third was the lack of qualitative research into the experiences of men relative to the preponderance of quantitative work that has tended to uncritically accept Gender Role Strain (O'Neil, Good & Holmes, 1995). The fourth was that Gender Role Strain

has been strongly challenged as an insufficient framework for understanding the complexity of masculinity (Connel, 1995; Segal, 1997).

This study was designed to attempt to better understand contemporary masculinity through exploring the lives of individual men who have lived through these changes. It has sought to re-examine assumptions about changes in men and masculinity using exploratory, in-depth interviews with a small group of men. Eight men were selected for interviewing through snowball sampling strategies. Men were included in the study based on their willingness to participate as well as how they varied across common demographic variables such as education, marital status, age, number of children, and employment. Each participant was interviewed using a semi-structured interview process that included a range of topics beginning in childhood and across the life span. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed according to the presence of dominant themes. The results of the interviews were compared and contrasted with the extant literature on masculinity and Gender Role Strain.

## Chapter 5: Data Presentation

### 5.1 Introduction

All of the men, who participated in the study showed remarkable openness and candour throughout the interviews. The interviews covered a wide range of topics across the lifespan. The semi-structured format allowed for each interview to have a coherent structure while leaving room for the men to speak at length about the topics most relevant to them. All interviews followed the same basic chronological progression beginning with a focus on childhood and family of origin and moving through significant life events up to the present. Participants had no difficulty following this format and readily identified meaningful events and challenges that occurred over their lives. The chronological structure also enabled the men to reflect on changes that had occurred over time and contrast different periods in their lives. In this way, the men were able to identify relevant issues related to masculinity at specific points, and were also able to reflect on patterns of struggle that recurred throughout the entirety of their lives.

The interviews took a substantial and often spontaneous form as the men recounted successes and struggles in relationships, careers, and family. Each interview continued until a natural and logical ending point was arrived at usually within three hours. The interviews were then transcribed which yielded approximately 50 pages per interview for a total of 400 pages of data. In presenting the data it was crucial to ensure that a minimum amount of information was lost through reducing the men's stories to a manageable size. It was also essential to attempt to maintain the flow and overall

coherence of each interview. Two strategies were used to maintain a transparent connection between the original interviews and the presented data. First, the interviews were re-written in a narrative form that preserved the chronological progression of the men's stories and mirrored the flow of conversation of the original interviews. Second, each of the men's stories was structured around an overarching theme that figured prominently in the interviews. Although the theme was identified by the researcher, in each interview a central theme was dominant that reflected the uniqueness of each story and gave each narrative an overall coherence.

In order to reduce the narrative to a manageable length, each transcript went through a successive process of paring down. A data presentation format that follows Kvale (1996) was chosen which involves the use of a minimum number of representative quotes from the participant, supported with the researcher's comments throughout. This process of quote selection involved beginning with the complete transcript and going through repeated edits to systematically remove repetitive or extraneous passages. Quotes were selected for best representing the issues raised by the participant and best exemplifying the participant's voice. Supporting descriptive information was provided by the researcher to include as much of the context of the interview process and content as possible. The intent was to provide the reader with the strongest possible impression of the actual interview and participants, as seen through the eyes of the researcher (Kvale, 1996). The narratives of each of the men follow:

## **5.2 Robert: I knew I couldn't stay the way I was or I wouldn't survive**

Robert agreed to be interviewed remarking that his wife suggested it might be a good experience for him. He requested that he be interviewed in his home on a day off from work while his kids and wife were out. He began the interview by recounting his morning's frustration trying unsuccessfully to fix his chainsaw. From the beginning, Robert was welcoming, talkative, and expressed opinions in a frank and no-nonsense manner. He expressed some uncertainty about the point of the interview and whether he would have anything of value to contribute. However he deferred to my "expertise" in judging this on both counts.

Robert is 39 years old, married, and has two sons, ages 9 and 12. He is employed as a technician for a power generation company. He joined the company after leaving high school—the same company that employs his two older brothers and employed his now retired father. His father is 83 and lives alone nearby to Robert. His mother died of cancer eight years ago.

Robert's story seems to be about his struggle between responsibility and irresponsibility. In many ways it is about him choosing between the "freedom" of the lifestyle carried over from his adolescence and the "pressures" of a devoted family man. Throughout, Robert describes his struggle to change the trajectory of his life and to devote himself to his family in a way that his own father never did. He seems determined to avoid the pitfalls of his father's absolute dedication to work. However, with no other model as an alternative, he struggles to find a different way to live as a man. After years

of abandoning responsibility, he began to make the difficult realization that he needed to shift instead to the more “satisfying” commitment to family. This is no easy feat for him. It means accepting his need to change his ways, becoming willing to accept the direction provided by his wife, and ensuring that he keeps his pride intact throughout.

Robert grew up in small hydro colonies in the far north of Ontario. There were no roads and no nearby towns. Robert’s mother had to take a train to the nearest hospital several hundred kilometres away to give birth to him. The hydro colonies were small mobile townships built around the construction of new projects. Families typically spent a few years in one place while the project was being built and then moved on when they were done.

Most of Robert’s childhood memories are of spending time outside in the “bush” exploring the wilderness and going fishing. Life was simple, often conditions were harsh and independence and ruggedness were highly valued. Without television or structured activities, Robert had to entertain himself. And, given a high degree of autonomy, Robert often had to fend for himself. His ability to take care of himself was often tested by his older brothers. Robert describes with pride and humour his ability to “take the abuse” handed out by his brothers.

*We didn't hang around together so much, other than my next oldest brother pounding the shit out of me for years...One time I can remember him knocking three teeth out of my head. Well, we got into boxing.*

Robert’s parents were traditional and typical of the setting in which he grew up. His mother stayed home and raised the boys. She was strict but loving. Discipline was

swift and physical often through the use of a wooden spoon or belt administered by his mother. His father worked most of the time and was rarely in the home. When he was home, he didn't directly involve himself in the lives of his sons. This was good as far as Robert was concerned because, despite mother being the disciplinarian, Robert feared his father. For the most part, his father was solely associated with discipline of a more severe form, although Robert remembers this threat was rarely ever carried out, save once.

*It's funny I can think back – “don't tell him, don't tell him” you know what I mean. I look back and I only remember him tuning me in once. But it was always this threat. I guess it would almost be like the boogie man you know what I mean “I'm gonna tell your father”. We'd all be going, “Oh Christ don't be doing that”.*

Throughout his upbringing life revolved completely around father's work. Every home and building in the colony was built by the hydro company. Every child's father worked for the company, and families moved on to new colonies when they were told to by the company. Work was at the centre of all aspects of family and community life. Children were peripheral in many ways. Loyalty to the company was central.

Reflecting on his upbringing, Robert points out that he was determined to turn these priorities around. Although a very difficult and gradual process, he wanted to make his work serve his family rather than he and his family serving work. The biggest difficulty for Robert was not so much divesting his loyalty from work. For him the “writing was on the wall” that times had changed and gone were the days that companies took care of their people and rewarded loyalty. The real challenge for Robert was

moving from being a single, independent and irresponsible young adult to becoming an involved husband and parent. This was a slow and difficult process and his struggle to make this shift became the focus of most of the interview.

*Gradually things start to change. And then it's just you and her and then kids come along, and then when kids come along it was probably a year or two years after our first was born. I mean, I don't remember the day that I went...you know you're no longer the entertainment committee, just wiping his ass and whatever. That I went "you know, I want to do everything with these kids all the time". And I would think that probably was because as I look at my own set up and go "that sucked". At the same time, I don't look at my dad and go "you prick". I know that's the way it was for lots of people. That was the culture back then, children were to be seen and not heard and go play and entertain yourself. Work was paramount and you followed the job and you know. But society is different now and I went "no I'm not going to do that, I want to be involved in my kid's life".*

However, it took him a long time to get to this realization. Throughout high school and well into his twenties, his life focussed on spending time with his friends drinking together and having fun. He did not involve himself in committed intimate relationships but rather hung around with a consistent group of "buddies" drinking heavily, engaging in risk taking behaviours and womanizing. There was little or no emphasis on education, careers, or long term relationships. He and his friends lived for immediate gratification and the shirking of all responsibilities

*I was looking for fun. Good naked fun and wasn't looking for a relationship and a life partner.*

*I had my buds and we had tons of fun. That was the guy thing.*

Throughout this period, he met his wife. They began to date periodically and he experienced a strong conflict between his life of no responsibility and his desire for stability and family. Although he wanted a consistent partner in his life, he struggled with “settling down” and giving up the spontaneity and irresponsibility of his old ways.

*So we went out for a long time. Even when we got married, I don't think that I was ready mentally to be married. I still wanted to go out and have fun. Looking back now, because I had been through some rocky times in the first couple years and basically that's what it was. Yeah, part of me wanted to go drinking with the buds and stay up all night and do whatever the hell I wanted and have no one bitching at me. The other part of me wanted to be married and have that. And the two don't co-exist very well.*

Robert's conflict continued for some time, but things came to a head when his first child was born. At age 26, he felt completely unprepared, immature, and terrified at the prospect of being responsible for the care of a child. At the same time, he had a strong belief that he wanted to be a different kind of father than his own. His wife was clear that she wanted him to be an involved father as well. She pressed him to change diapers, feed the baby, spend less time with his friends and cut back almost entirely on his drinking. Robert found both the change in lifestyle, as well as having to take direction from his wife, difficult. He wanted to be a different kind of father, but resented giving up his independence and deferring to his wife.

*She was instrumental in kind of pointing me in the direction of what I should do. It ended up where I should start here and you should be doing this and that. I can remember the day I said “fuck you and I've changed all I'm going to and now it's up to you. I'm not changing any more*

*and if you don't like that leave and don't let the door bit you on the ass on the way out". I've come as far as I'm gonna go. She has also moved a long way and you kind of meet in the middle you know wiggling around in the middle a little bit more as things go. No I would say that a lot of it has to do with her.*

Robert justifies his changing as a sacrifice for the sake of his boys. He says his willingness to grudgingly take direction from his wife was less about agreeing with her values and expectations and more about his devotion to his boys. In fact, he says, he continuously fought her expectations and took a stand of independence, while at the same time recognizing his need to change. He "didn't go down without a fight" and took a position of refusing to officially accept direction from her, while recognizing that he needed her to tell him what to do and how to be.

*I knew I had to change and what she was saying wasn't totally unreasonable. But initially it was up your ass. But then as you...you know.....maybe think about it more you're saying up your ass but at the same time you're maybe moving your position a little bit.*

Robert also justifies his decision to leave the partying life behind as one of necessity in terms of his well-being. Rather than a move toward a more domestic or feminine form of masculinity, he needed to change, or be tamed, because the life he was living was dangerous. He explains this with pride. He was on a path of self-destruction and was wise enough to realize that his days were numbered if he continued along the same path.

*I was just as bull headed as anyone. But then again like I say, you look at it and say I couldn't stay the way I was and I realize that. Shit I was in car accidents steady. I was breaking bones*

*in motorcycle accidents and you know wrecking cars and so on and so forth. I knew I couldn't stay the way I was or I wouldn't survive.*

Now Robert views his primary goal as raising his sons. He makes them the focus of his life and is determined to be involved in all aspects of it. He sees life as difficult, complicated and fraught with problems. He sees his responsibility to them as the person who will help them develop into strong, independent men who are “stand up guys”.

Robert also sees his duty as being there to guide them with a clear and no nonsense hand. He sees himself as someone who has made many mistakes, and has learned “the hard way” about what is important. While he realizes that his sons need to make their own mistakes, he wants to be able to impart the experience and knowledge that he has gained over the years. Much of this is in the form of ensuring that his boys don't go down the same path that he did. For him, life is black and white, where people are either winners or losers. He wants to make sure that his boys are on the winning side and he feels that he has a lot to offer to make sure that they are.

*I would be the new guy so you would have to fight to prove yourself. I was use to taking a shit kicking from my brother who was five years older than me. So when I was growing up there was no one I couldn't thrash. No one could hit as hard as my brother, so if I could just hang in there you always won. I remember how shitty it was when you moved somewhere new and got tormented and it would take about two months. So there would be six weeks until you finally snapped, beat someone up, and then you're everyone's friend. So with my kids that's something else..... like don't take any shit off anyone because my own experience was the more shit you take the more shit you gotta take.*

However, he sees that a certain amount of growing up as a male requires inevitable troubles, risk-taking and the need to prove oneself. He wants to protect his boys, but is also conscious of not wanting to stand in the way of them developing into their own person. He is willing to give them some degree of freedom so that they can experiment and learn on their own.

*It will be "hey if you need a ride ever" (and I have thought about this) and if I go pick them up and they're all hammered, I'm not gonna harp about that. I'm not because that's a stage that everyone grows out of. I shouldn't say everyone but most people do. So you don't want to discourage them from calling to say I need a ride, and then you go and pick them up and just bitch at him for being drunk. And the next day it's "I'm not gonna call you. I'll get a ride with Tommy who's hammered out of his mind". Hey everyone's gotta grow up and gotta go through a certain amount of shit.*

Overall, Robert recognizes that he has changed a lot over the years. He says this is largely a move from polarized thinking and impatience with others, to a more general willingness to listen to other opinions even if he doesn't agree. For him, life is full of competition and adversity and changing has often felt like giving in. However, Robert sees the changes that he has made as necessary and wise and not at all a concession. As far as he sees it, his changes have been driven by making tough but smart choices about what is really important. It is very much about avoiding thinking and acting like his father. It is about making sure that he doesn't fall into the same trap that he feels his father did. It is also about making sure that his sons don't as well.

Robert views men who continue to devote themselves to work as foolish. They are out of step with the times and haven't woken up to realizing how much they are losing by trading their families for their jobs. Although they may feel like winners in the short run, he believes in the long run they will lose.

*There is a price for everything. So you become the big titan, but you don't have any time.....You know, someone else is raising your kids. Someone else is sleeping with your wife. And then it's not too long until all the stuff that you accumulated; you are losing half of it anyway because you neglected what's at home. So big deal, you're a boss, but you are a loser in life. And I see that. You know management guys that are there all the time; I'm making more money than they are. They have to be there all the time and don't get compensated for it so on and so forth. But they get to call themselves the boss.*

Robert's changes have been difficult and certainly far from complete. He admits that he and his wife continue to have many differences. He continues to resent taking direction from her. He struggles with whether he is involving himself too much in his boys' life. But he also feels tremendous pride that he has managed to carve out a different path than was set for him; a different path than the one he sees other men often mistakenly take. He is pleased that he hasn't fallen for the empty exercise of defining himself through his work and is pleased that instead he finds his greatest satisfaction and security in his family.

*Yeah, good for you. Keep your title, and I'll keep my money and benefits thanks—and my family.*

### **5.3 Greg: You grow up thinking that you don't matter, so you figure that you don't matter to this kid. But you do whether you want to or not.**

Greg is 38 years old and enrolled full time at university in the engineering program. He had completed an engineering technologist diploma at college in his twenties and had always intended to advance to university to get his degree. Now he is finally in school. He is far from home, away from his seven year old son, and struggling to get through.

At the outset of the interview, Greg summed up his experience as simply "always feeling invisible, like I don't matter". This statement is in striking contrast to his appearance. He is well over six feet tall and cuts an imposing figure. Yet, he is quiet, introspective, and soft spoken. His answers are typically brief and understated. He often pauses in mid thought as if drifting off. His physical size begins to seem less daunting as he speaks. His figure may be imposing, but his withdrawn and disengaged manner makes him seem less present and substantial.

Greg's story seems centred around fatherhood; particularly about not feeling important to his father and his struggle to recognize his importance to his own son. It is about his struggle to have a sense of purpose and value in his own eyes, as well as in the eyes of others. Throughout much of Greg's life, he has felt a strong sense of betrayal and worthlessness. Much of his efforts have been toward understanding these feelings and

recognizing their impact upon him. In Greg's words, it is about overcoming invisibility, and feeling "visible" through realizing that he really does matter.

Greg was born to parents both of whom worked outside the home. His father had various jobs and ended up teaching high school. His mother worked as a receptionist. Greg has a sister who is a year younger with whom he has little contact. He grew up in a small town north of Toronto. He describes his upbringing as traditional and middle class. He describes himself as a quiet boy, a good student, and a loner. His mother worked hard and took care of the household. His father, he says, was rarely around and largely uninvolved. Looking back, Greg says that he realizes that his father's lack of involvement and failure to follow through on promises affected him more than he ever thought. Greg is torn between realizing that things could have been worse and recognizing that things should have been better.

*I thought my parents were alright because they never beat me. He womanized but...I couldn't figure out why I didn't have this strong connection with my Dad... I realized damage had been done just by being ignored. He never got to know me... The invisibility thing is feeling that you don't matter. He never kept his word. He didn't get that all you are on this planet is your word.*

Greg says that his childhood was uneventful. However, he always felt that he had very little connection to his parents. They seemed to him caught up in their own busy lives and day to day worries. Greg was a quiet child and rarely got into trouble and therefore required very little attention. This was not to say that Greg was doing fine. On the contrary, by adolescence he was drinking heavily and regularly staying out of his

home until the early morning. His parents provided little in the way of structure or discipline and he began to take less interest in school and spent increasing time drinking with friends.

*I found it quite stressful. If I could go back and do it again I would do it differently. I got into the hardcore party guys and the long hair. Excessive drinking. I did okay in school but I don't know if I was rebelling against my parents. Looking back I needed more structure or discipline.*

Greg realized that he could have tremendous freedom provided that he didn't draw attention to himself. He began to live a double life; one involving drinking with friends and the other at home putting on false front. As long as he didn't get into trouble and completed his household chores, he could come and go as he pleased. However, given his lifestyle, trouble was virtually unavoidable. On more than one occasion, he had run-ins with the law. These were not small events. Once he was involved in an incident with a friend who brought a gun to school and pointed it at other students. In fact, the incident didn't occur at Greg's school, it occurred at the one that his father taught at. Greg was arrested and had to appear in court. The court provided consequences but Greg's father never acknowledged the incident.

*He was supposedly pretty upset but he didn't talk to me about it either. He didn't even know the whole story--the media had reported that we had gone in with balaclavas and guns. That got blown out of proportion. My guns got taken away from me for a long time after that. But I thought I should have been grounded or something but he never talked to me. I think subconsciously I was trying to get his attention of something.*

Greg's only connection with his father was through doing work around the house and he particularly enjoyed landscaping his family's yard. In fact, this was the only activity that he periodically shared with his father and something that he genuinely got satisfaction from. Renovating the house and working on the yard were the only activities in which Greg felt part of his family.

*We did more dad-son bonding working around the house. Not carpentry, but landscape work.*

*That was an ongoing thing for years.*

Greg's father continued to be rarely at home. He frequently made business trips and spent most of his time at work. Greg's parents argued frequently and he often overheard accusations that his father was having an affair. Greg didn't give it serious thought until an extended family member decided to investigate his father's behaviour. It took several years to determine but, by the time Greg was 19, his father had been caught in the affair. At first, his father denied it, but slowly the truth came out. All of the business trips and late nights had been lies; they were all meetings with the other woman. To make matters worse, Greg's father eventually admitted that the affair had been going on for twelve years, beginning when Greg was seven. This was a tremendous betrayal to Greg. Greg realized that most of what his father had said and done over the years have been deceptions in order to cover up the affair. However, getting the truth out didn't provide Greg with any relief. On the contrary, Greg's father never spoke to him about the affair and Greg was left feeling an even deeper sense that, throughout his childhood, his father never considered his feelings and never thought that he mattered.

*His excuse was that the kids wouldn't understand. He just wasn't a communicator. That's the irony—that he was a teacher.*

Greg viewed all of his father's behaviour as lies and empty promises. Even the landscaping and house project that had been Greg's only connection to his father was turned upside down. He realized that his father wasn't renovating the home to provide a future for his children and grandchildren. Rather he was fixing it up so he could sell it when the kids left.

*We worked so hard on that house thinking that would be the final place and he wasn't thinking that way. He was getting ready to sell it. By the time I thought it was done and looked great to settle into, that was when he told my mom he was leaving.*

Greg had been drifting aimlessly before news of his father's affair. After finding out, it seemed to solidify his experience that life was pointless and that he didn't matter. Greg barely managed to complete high school after being first kicked out and then allowed back in on probation. His marks were poor but he graduated grade 12 and found work in an autobody shop. He hated the work. It was dirty, and repetitive. His father had always exhorted the value of education and had regularly offered to support him financially, but when Greg was old enough to attend college, his father never followed through with financial support.

*He was always worried about whether or not he had to pay for my school. He didn't want to pay for my school. When my parent split, that was when I went to college. He would promise to help pay but then not.*

He moved out and on to college receiving government assistance. He scraped through school, describing himself as a follower of others. He partied a lot but managed to maintain acceptable marks. He desperately wanted to be in a relationship but found the idea terrifying. He began to date women but not seriously. Instead, he competed with friends to see how many women they could sleep with. He says that he never got close to anyone and that much of his twenties he describes as drifting around in a “fog”.

*I was in a fog. It was hard to remember. I didn't have any plans. I was never really interested in getting married. Commitment was scary.*

As he got into his later twenties, he had longer term relationships. Some of the women that he dated had children and he remembers distinctly feeling jealous of the attention the children received. He realized for the first time how little attention he had received when he was a child. This led him to want to change his situation. He increasingly had fantasies of a better life, with a stable relationship and a career, but had no plan to get himself there. Then, by chance, a friend signed him up for a personal growth weekend seminar. The seminar was run by a large, national personal and professional development company that promised “more effective relations”, and “greater productivity”. To appease his friend he made a down payment for the weekend, but didn't plan to attend. A year went by and things got worse for him. Increasingly unhappy, he remembered his down payment and decided to attend the seminar. He went to the weekend and he says it changed his life. He adopted the philosophy of the program. He even began dating one of the coaches of the course and they soon moved

in together. For the first time, Greg began to feel that he could have control over his life, and that his fate was determined by his choices rather than his past.

*They showed you how you are your own worst enemy. Doing stuff and not knowing why you do it. And choices. You can go through your life thinking that you are a victim of circumstance, or you can go through life based on the choices that you make. They say be responsible, you know response-able -- choose! And this shit about blaming your parents for everything. That was a turning point.*

It was through the weekend seminar and follow up sessions, as well as his relationship with the coach, that he attributes starting to set a direction for his life. He describes the fog lifting for the first time. He began to feel as if he, and the choices he made, actually mattered. He describes the experience as a breakthrough, utterly transformative, as if he was born again. He explains that, before the weekend, self-help strategies seemed like empty clichés, but afterward he began to believe that he was in charge of his life. He realized that he needed to become responsible. He needed to make decisions and follow through with them rather than blame others. He says as well that he realized that his opinions mattered and that he was only invisible if he lacked principles or direction. Since the weekend eight years ago, Greg still continues to draw heavily upon the ideas that he learned. He says they are his primary source of guidance for everyday life.

A second momentous change occurred in Greg's life that was to be similarly transformative. This was the unplanned birth of his son. The relationship with the coach had ended and Greg had a series of casual sexual relationships. One of the women ended

up getting pregnant. Greg believed strongly that she had got pregnant in order to trap him into marriage. He was resentful and initially refused to even sign his name on the birth certificate. But as the baby grew from a newborn to a toddler, Greg realized that the baby was more “tuned into his surroundings” than Greg thought. He also realized that he was simply repeating the pattern of his father by refusing to be involved. He was determined not to be an invisible father, and decided instead to play an active role in raising his child. Striving to be different than his father became a significant driving force in his relationship with his son.

*I have this competition too that I have to treat him better than my dad treated me. Like no matter what I will put him through school. I believe in higher education, my dad does too just as long as it doesn't cost him anything. So there is this competition, you remember what you got from your dad and try to do better.*

His son is now the sole focus of his life. This is despite the fact that he is not involved with his son's mother and lives far away from both of them. It has been tough for him. Maintaining contact has meant regularly travelling thousands of kilometres. He has also had to go to court to gain access to his son, but realized that this was all part of his responsibility as an involved father.

*Plus, I realized it takes two to make a baby. This was part of the responsibility thing. And people who try to screw the system. And not pay child support. I had done so many other screwing things that I thought I wasn't going to screw my kid up. I still didn't know how to be a dad but I didn't want to screw him up.*

Greg says that he continues to marvel at how much he actually can contribute to the raising of his son. Greg still struggles with feeling invisible, but his son constantly reminds him that his presence matters. Greg is aware that all of his actions in many ways influence his son. He uses this realization to remember that, despite his own feelings of invisibility, he is responsible for the life of another person.

*Yeah, I am always conscious of what I am saying to him. I want to not undo what his mother does either. They remember all the little sayings that you have and he remembers better than I do. I didn't get how you grow up thinking that you don't matter, so you figure that you don't matter to this kid. But you do whether you want to or not.*

Overall, Greg still struggles with feeling disconnected and unimportant. However, he is heartened by having a purpose to life in the form of his son, and a belief system that helps remind him of his value. He realizes as well that many men share his struggle with responsibility. He tries, when he can, to share what he has learned with other men. But most of all, Greg says that he just tries to remember that what he believes and what he does amounts to who he is in the end. He tries to remind himself that his actions matter and set his destiny in place. Greg tries to view invisibility as no longer determined by his childhood, but instead determined by the choices that he makes.

*Once I realized I should make a decision - a plan - you know I heard all of these cliché things all of my life but I never got the meaning of them until that weekend. Everything changed then. Once I made a plan to return to school that changed things too. Once I also made the decision to move out of my relationship and out of my place that helped too. But, out of the fog, probably,*

*when I decided that I was going to be a dad and not screw my kid over, I was upset with myself for not wanting my kid. But deciding to be a dad and deciding to be a student that changed things.*

## **5.4 Mark: My parents probably figured I was gay right from the very beginning**

Mark is 37 years old. He identified as being gay from the outset of the interview although quickly added that he might not be a typical gay man, if such a person existed. He indicated that, regardless, he would probably be an interesting and unusual “case study”. Mark appeared comfortable throughout the interview. He spoke openly and seemed relaxed throughout. He showed remarkable candour and never seemed to look for sympathy in the telling of his story. From time to time he expressed surprise at how forthright he was being but seemed committed to representing himself as honestly as possible. Having some background in conducting research, he expressed both an appreciation for the need to be thoughtful and honest, as well as curiosity about what it is like to be on the other side of the interview.

Mark has defied easy categorization throughout his life. From his earliest memory, he failed to conform to familial and social expectations of what it meant to be a boy. He displayed none of what was considered to be the usual healthy male behaviours. Growing up in a working class, traditional home and a working class town, this lack of fit was profoundly disturbing to his parents, peers and teachers. Mark was subjected to a campaign of conformity in which his lack of success in “acting like a boy” was constantly

drawn to his attention and corrected. With only male and female categories to judge his behaviour, his actions were regularly labelled as feminine.

Despite Mark's attempts to conform, he rarely measured up and was left with a profound and chronic sense of feeling that there was something very wrong with him. It led as well to a deep sense that there was no place for him in the male world. To some degree at least, he found short term comfort acting like the "girl" that he was so often accused of being. While finding some comfort and connection in the world of girls and women, Mark was left feeling no connection to the world of men. As a gay man, this became a confusing and paradoxical situation in which the very sex he was attracted to was a world that was foreign to him.

Mark is finishing his graduate degree while working part-time. He has held a number of jobs most of which have been unsatisfying and felt below his actual ability. He is in a gay relationship that has lasted for three years although he is uncertain about its future.

Mark was born and raised in Thunder Bay. His mother stayed home throughout his childhood. His father was employed as a construction worker. Mark is the first born and has two younger brothers. He describes his family as very traditional and working class. He reflects on how totally unprepared they were to have a son like him.

*I was a very feminine boy growing up in a working class family that really valued masculinity B traditional masculinity. Basically my experience is that my parents sensed very early on, actually when I was a toddler, actually they decided or I'm not sure if they decided, or they just observed, that I was not like the other boys that they knew. I was the first boy born. There was some*

*certain expectation as to what I would be like. So they really went on a campaign actually of trying to change me. They did that with a lot of shaming and that sort of thing.*

From his earliest memory he was identified as different from other boys. Mark recalls wanting what was considered “girl toys”. Mark says that he was drawn to this type of play naturally and paid a hefty price for it. His parents quickly identified this behaviour as problematic. Through teasing and ridicule, Mark was made to feel ashamed although he recalls not understanding what he was doing that was wrong.

*Well this is sort of a joke in our family; everyone thinks it's very funny. But when I wanted a toy vacuum cleaner when I was about a year and a half old or whatever, or just whatever the age was when you start requesting specific toys. I guess I was following my mother around the house and she had her grown up vacuum and I wanted the toy one. Well they thought this was scandalous. It was terrible. This is really one of my earliest memories is sort of being reprimanded for wanting a vacuum.*

Play was categorized as either appropriately male or inappropriately female by his parents and other adults. In order to correct his female behaviour, his play was regularly categorized as wrongly acting like a girl and corrected. This was not lost on Mark, he quickly realized what was considered to be male play and what was female. However male play held no interest for him. Also, he says that he was increasingly internalizing his reputation as being “like a girl” and being very different from everyone else.

*I remember being told that I held a baseball bat like a girl. One time our family was playing baseball with another family and my father was the pitcher and I was up to bat. I remember*

*him yelling at me in front of everybody that I was holding the bat like a girl, whatever that means. Which is an insult to girls.*

Most of Mark's memories of these early years are distant and very troubling to him. He says that most of his childhood is repressed and he wants to keep it that way. What he does recall, and feels deeply, is that he had a profound feeling that there was something seriously flawed about him. His parents' campaign of making him act like a boy continued through his childhood but Mark didn't change. With every failed attempt at boy's activities, he was left feeling more like a failure as a male.

*Well I think what it was like was that I just knew or the way I interpreted it was that there was something wrong with me, something very wrong with me. Boys behaved in certain ways and somehow I just wasn't like that. I couldn't fake it. Actually I don't think I really tried. You know I was put in hockey for instance and I had to play hockey for three years. It was just terrible and I dreaded every minute of it. When hockey didn't work out then they put me in soccer. And of course when soccer didn't work out, then I was sent to the basketball camp for the summer. But it was always the same sort of thing, any team sports. Hockey to this day is very important to my family. My family is like hockey nuts.*

Mark's difficulties were compounded by his family moving a lot and the frequent switching of schools. With a low self-esteem, he was very shy and found it difficult to make friends. In school, at least early on, Mark did fairly well. As a naturally creative and imaginative person, he wrote plays and had his classmates perform them. His teachers were supportive of his interests in the early grades but less so as he got older. As Mark got to be nine and ten, sports became the central defining activity of his male peers.

Mark found team sports humiliating. He was the smallest in his class and the last picked for teams. By this point in his life, he was generally referred to by others as a girl. Contrary to his parent's earlier efforts, Mark was allowed to have long hair and more feminine clothes. Mark says that up until he was 18, most people thought that he was female when first meeting him.

Being able to pass as a girl didn't make Mark feel any more comfortable. Mark never harboured desires of cross-dressing or changing sexes. Instead, he says, that he was trying to find some degree of comfort in a world that would not accept that he might be a boy. He played the role of girl for the sake of conforming to expectations, but it was not comfortable for him. Instead, it seemed that it was the only alternative available since it was made clear to him that as a male he was hopelessly incompetent.

*It affected me in a huge way. It was devastating to my self-esteem for one thing. Yeah I just really felt inadequate, like horribly inadequate in every way.*

Things went from bad to worse in high school. From being labelled a girl, he was re-labelled gay. He hadn't even considered his sexual orientation, and didn't know what the term gay actually meant. He became the target of constant malicious attacks. Most of the time he lived in fear enduring daily abuse by male peers. He was ostracized from the world of males.

*I was identified as gay way before I even started to think about that in grade nine. So you know, I was that one kid, you know the one that can't walk down the hall without people screaming "faggot" and threatening their life all the time. That was me! It started about mid-way through grade nine and I finally left that school after grade 11. I couldn't take it anymore*

*and I transferred ... It was really bad and I skipped out a lot...It was brutal. It was really, really bad.*

What would have been surprising to most of his male teen counterparts at the time was that, shunned from the world of males, he successfully found the company of females. He had a number of close female friends. This was not just companionship. As his sexuality developed, he began to have sexual relationships with females. He still hadn't really considered that he might be gay. In fact, he continued to see males as an unappealing and mostly mean-spirited half of the population who wanted nothing to do with him. So, he became emotionally close to females and had many relationships that included a sexual component. For him, it didn't seem contrary to his sexuality, he still believed that his nonconformity was more as a result of failing to live up to sex role expectations than his actual sexuality.

*What is very interesting though is that I had girlfriends all through high school. I think I had more straight sex in high school than all those other guys. Because I was in long term relationships with girls that I really cared about and we had a good time together, we had a lot of sex. So it is kind of very interesting. Actually at that time it wasn't really until maybe I was around 16 or so that I started to realize that I was gay. But it was really at least two years or more. Well I'm sure that my parents probably figured I was gay right from the very beginning.*

Mark didn't know what to make of males. Nor did he know in which category he actually best fit. Males were foreign to him. They were objects that he couldn't identify with. Even as he matured and started to feel a stronger attraction to males, he didn't seek intimate relationships with them. Since he never had any kind of meaningful relationship

with a male, and since the male world was something he was never part of, males were sexual objects rather than friends or partners. Whether the male was gay or straight, he may have felt a sexual attraction, but no meaningful connection. This difficulty has been a recurring struggle for him throughout his adulthood.

*It is very interesting because now I find, because I objectify men, I don't actually very often pursue friendships with men. I treat men as sex objects. I use men. It is very interesting for me because I think of men as more two dimensional. And when I really get to know them, I think "oh...". It's like a racist person who meets someone of a different race and thinks "oh, you're not like all the other people of that race". That's how I feel about men.*

It has been difficult for Mark to sort out his sexuality. He feels pressure to identify himself as gay, straight or bisexual. In many respects, he defies this kind of categorization. Mark feels that, of the available categories, he is gay. He doesn't feel bisexual because he sees the types of relationships that he has with men and women as qualitatively different. With males he feels a strong physical attraction and has to work at getting close. With females, the opposite is true. He feels close emotionally and then the relationship becomes sexualized.

*I fought it for a really long time. I actually came out twice. The problem for me is, I think it is very difficult to classify myself. A lot of men that I know who are gay have never had any interest in women whatsoever. It is very easy for them because there really is no other option. Myself, I have very, very good relationships with women. Most of my friends are female and I have very intimate and close relationships with them. And I have a tendency, which I have stopped myself from, from falling in love with them. What happened was I realized in high*

*school I knew that I was gay, but I didn't really admit it to myself. I continue to date women and have relationships with women. A lot of that actually had to do with my own feelings about myself. Because I felt that there was something so wrong with me.*

To date, the longest relationship that Mark has ever had was with a woman. He was involved in an eight year relationship throughout most of his twenties. He says that it was very comfortable but in many ways superficial since much of who he is was not brought to the relationship. He says that throughout, as well, he knew that he was gay, but felt that a relationship with a male was impossible. This was due both to his tendency to objectify men as well as his belief that men would find him unattractive. At the same time, he points out that he doesn't feel that his heterosexual relationships have been false in any way. Both gay and straight relationships are legitimate and satisfying experiences for him. If he had to distinguish between the two, he says that his relationships with women tend to be based on emotional closeness, while his relationships with men are based on mutual sexual attraction. However, after a great deal of soul searching, Mark felt that his fear of males kept him from attempting to be in a long-term gay relationship, and in many ways he was hiding out in relationship with females.

*I had done a lot of personal work in that time. I think that that really had a lot to do with it. When [my-ex-partner] and I got together I was drinking and using drugs a lot. And maybe for the first year of our relationship we partied like all the time. I quit drinking. That was very important to me and that I tried to work on myself and my self-esteem, plus I got a little bit older and just didn't care anymore so much. So I just really realized at the end of that relationship that I couldn't be in that type of relationship anymore. Just because I'm in a*

*relationship with a man doesn't make it like automatically any easier. It's still two people trying to live in a relationship and it's very difficult sometimes.*

For the last three years, Mark has been in a gay relationship. It has been a struggle to work things out. Mark says this is largely because he launched into the relationship without seeing what other potential partners were like. Also, he attributes his struggles to his ongoing difficulty of not wanting to get close to others. He is unsure about the future of his relationship but feels that he has made progress, although has much more work to do.

*Yeah, when I'm in a relationship I want out. And then when I'm not in a relationship I want back in. So for me, I'm just trying to think, yeah I don't know. I think that I would like a long term relationship, and yet at the same time because I just sort of came out so recently. I find it challenging being in a relationship. Many gay men, when they go through this sort of a long period after coming out where they just really go for it for like awhile. I probably should have done more of that. But when [my partner] and I met, we just wanted to be together so much that it was just sort of...you know what I mean. So I probably should have went through a bit more of that. But I didn't.*

Mark points out a final irony in his current identity. As a male who has always been seen as a female, now that he has fully embraced being gay, he finds that he is more traditionally masculine than ever before. He points out that this is not in a gay stereotype way, but rather what might be considered more like a straight male, at least in terms of behaviour and day to day interests. When he was in a straight relationship, he says he continued to be thought of by others as very feminine. Now that he is in a gay

relationship, he is more stereotypically masculine. He attributes this to finally moving beyond trying to conform to the expectations of others, and instead focussing on being the person that he wants to be.

*Well actually I'm more masculine now if I was to use general accepted definition of masculinity. I'm more masculine now and gayer now than ever in my life...Yeab. I guess it's just because I'm becoming older, just sort of becoming more me, I think in a lot of ways, whatever that means...I feel masculine because of my physical lifestyle, marathon runner. So I spend a lot of time with training and working out; doing things that I consider to be masculine things. Of course they're not.*

**5.5 Ken: I always wondered what that was but I could never find it. It was intangible to me. I couldn't define it. I didn't know what it was, how to get it, where to go and get it.**

Ken is 43 years old, married for ten years with no children. He is a quiet man who gave brief and uncertain answers to the questions posed. He is pleasant, polite and straightforward in his manner. He admitted from the outset that he has given little thought to his own struggles or the place of men in society. However, he decided to participate out of curiosity and the hope that the experience would prove useful in some way either to himself or others. Throughout the interview, Ken gave the impression of a man who is loyal, hardworking and single minded, but also someone who has struggled with self-confidence and direction.

As a child, like many young boys growing up in northern towns, Ken dreamed of becoming a professional hockey player. From the beginning, he stood out as a determined and dedicated young player who spent hours on the outdoor ice practicing long after others had left. He worked hard to figure out the skills required to be successful in hockey and then strove to master them. Lacking the natural aggression to be successful, he tried to make up for it in determination. He came very close to getting to the NHL, but not close enough. Despite his efforts, in his late teens, he had to come to the difficult realization that a future in professional hockey would not happen. Even now, years later, he feels that he could have done something more, somehow working harder to reach the goal that eluded him.

Ken's story is framed by his preoccupation with performance, about determining what needs to be done and then working hard to do it. Ken describes always having some external set of standards to which he measures his performance, yet never feels that he has successfully measured up. For Ken, the difficulty seems not that the standards are changeable or contradictory, but that they are elusive and perplexing. Ken describes that he is aware of a set of standards for success, an "it" that others seem to achieve. Despite his work ethic and determination, he never seems to attain the "it" himself. Much of his life has been guided by external things such as hockey, religion, business, or his partner. In fact, Ken traded in his devotion to hockey, to a devotion to God, and to his business. Yet whether it is in hockey, religion, business or, relationships, Ken describes feeling that there is something that is always out of his grasp, something

elusive that he can never quite reach. He is left feeling that he can never quite measure up.

Ken was born in a small town north of Thunder Bay and then moved into the city when he was young. He is the middle child with two older siblings and two younger. Ken's father worked at a local pulp mill and his mother worked as a waitress. Despite both parents working, he describes his parents as very traditional with his mother doing all of the household duties and most of the parenting.

Ken describes himself as a shy kid who largely kept to himself and who liked to be outdoors as much as possible. He took to sports immediately and, despite his father's lack of interest in hockey, started to play at the age of three. His life quickly began to revolve around the game although he did not naturally excel at the competitive aspect of hockey. He played for the fun of it, but soon realized that competition and winning was what mattered, at least to the adults.

*As far as I remember, the name of the game, as much as people always tried to nice things over, was always to win. If I'm going play, I'm going to win. So over a long period of time, I guess they say that your testosterone level drops and things change. But at a young age you can read between the lines of what the coach is saying and know that you are expected to win.*

Realizing that winning was what mattered, he worked hard to be successful. His equipment was poor, his skates several sizes too big, and all of his practice and games were on outdoor rinks in frigid conditions. However, hockey gave him something to focus on and he did so with absolute dedication. He stayed on the ice continuing to practice well after his friends had gone home. He devoted himself to hockey despite

having very little support from his parents. Unlike the fathers of most of his teammates, Ken's father had never played hockey and was not a fan. On the occasions that his father would attend one of his games, his father would be drunk and unruly. Ken was deeply embarrassed by his father's behaviour and would seek emotional distance through vowing to stay angry at his father. Yet despite his determination, Ken found that by the next day he couldn't stay focused on his anger and would forget what happened. This pattern of embarrassment, anger, and forgetting was a common cycle in his relationship with his father. However, Ken sees his father now as someone who cared but couldn't express it.

*I see my father as a man's man, not so much emotion; in fact my father never said I love you.*

*But clearly, he was a family man, devoted to his family. He loved his family, but I don't think he knew himself how to express that, because his father was a very rough man. My dad was out working at 14 years old bringing money home to their dad.*

In contrast to his father, Ken describes his mother in glowing terms as a dedicated and almost saintly woman. She held down a stressful and thankless job while managing the household and making ends meet despite having little money to raise five children. Ken always felt very close to his mother. Even as a young boy he says that he had an appreciation for how hard she worked and how much she cared. He would buy her small gifts such as perfume or flowers whenever he could afford to. But as he got a little older, he realized that he needed to be less close to her and associate more with his father.

*As a kid I really bonded well with her. And then later I bonded more with my dad because I didn't want to be a momma's boy.*

Ken struggled in school. Learning did not come easily to him and he found it difficult to concentrate or sit still. To make matters worse, Ken says that he attended a Catholic school that continued to believe that left-handedness was wrong. The teachers refused to let him write with his left hand and he was continuously reminded of the wrongness of his ways. He ended up failing grade three, which he says had a significant impact on his sense of himself. Throughout school, he felt like a failure and devoted very little attention to academics. Ken says this began a strong theme of personal inadequacy and seeking ways to make himself feel better and find success.

*It wasn't a place I wanted to be. I had real feelings of inadequacy as a young fella. And I'm sure that has carried with me all through life. You think that everyone else is smarter than you are, know more than you do, and think that you won't be able to succeed in life. So in that sense I was driven to sports.*

Hockey was the place that he could forget about school, forget about his homelife, and feel a sense of structure and path to success. It took on greater importance and more time through his childhood. His hard work seemed to pay off. He was chosen to attend a national hockey school for elite players by the time he was twelve. He was picked for the all-star team and was one of the best local players. However, as he got older and better, he also started to play games outside of the city. He tried out for junior national teams and quickly discovered that there were many boys who were just as talented and just as devoted as he was.

*Oh yeah, there is a point where you figure, "I'm pretty good", rookie of the year and stuff, and I played for a while for the Oshawa Generals. I was 16 and tried out. Went back at 17 and played a couple of games. But you find out that there are lots of kids who are as good or better. They are bigger, meaner and faster.*

The realization that there were so many good players, many of whom were possibly more talented, made Ken all the more determined to work hard. He recognized that he lacked aggression and size but it didn't occur to him that he might not make it as a professional. He simply figured his lesser performance was due to his lack of willingness to work. So he decided to work even harder at honing his skills to compensate for what he felt was lacking in natural size or ability. Ken believed that success was simply a matter of how hard he worked.

*I worked harder. Skated as much as I could on my own. I knew that I could get better; it was just a matter of working harder. Although I didn't really have the killer instinct. I figured if I could skate faster and have sharper skills then I could make up for it.*

His playing continued to improve throughout his teens, but at 16 he experienced his first rejection. After trying out for a semi-professional hockey team, he was cut after 10 games. The following year he tried out for another professional team, but lasted only a week before he was let go. He was devastated. He blamed himself for not training harder, not building himself up physically more than he had, not practicing his skills more. By age 18, Ken hadn't made it to the NHL. He played for a few more years when he had to face that he was never going to make it as a professional hockey player. He

dropped out of hockey and says that he was utterly lost. There was a void in his life that he didn't know how to fill.

Hockey had given him a purpose, the rules for success, and the promise of a better life. Without hockey, Ken wandered from job to job with no plans and no direction. However, this all changed for him in a chance encounter with an old friend. Ken had not been particularly religious, but seeing that religion had provided a sense of purpose for his friend, he had a profound experience. Ken traded his devotion to hockey for a devotion to God.

*I bummed around for about 5 years. I quit school in grade 11, then I went back to finish my grade 12 and I wandered around the world for about 5 years. I worked at a job here, a job there. By the time I was 22, I began to ask those questions, "Who am I, where do I come from? What is going to happen to me when I die?" I didn't have a focus anymore. And so a good friend of mine who was an excellent baseball player was playing in the states for a Christian baseball team. He told me that he had given his life to Christ. I saw a tremendous change in him when he came home. I could see how different he was. He said to me, "Would you like to invite Christ into your life?". At that point in time, not in an audible voice, God's spirit spoke to me, and I said, "yeah I would." So I went home after that, and the spirit of God came into my room, came on my bed. I lost all track of time. That makes sense because in the presence of God you would lose any sense of time. And for about three months the presence of God was with me.*

Ken gave his life to Christ. He soon embarked on a career as a chaplain. He enrolled in university, devoted himself to his studies, socialized very little and finished a

degree in divinity. He entered into the field of palliative care working with dying cancer patients. Ken says that he was drawn to working with the dying because he felt the greatest sense of purpose and meaning. He also hoped that through working so close to death he would better understand his own reason for living. However, practical considerations got in the way of existential ones. Ken found that, with such a specialized area of expertise, there were few vacant employment positions available and found himself unable to make a living.

With few employment options, Ken made another career turn and started a retail business with a friend. He says that he had no idea what he was getting himself into and never considered how much time and energy the business would consume. He worked around the clock building the business and expanding it over a period of a few years. At present, his business has remained afloat for ten years though has not been particularly profitable. He says that he has kept the business going through sheer will and determination and is constantly looking for ways to make it more viable.

With all of the time spent pursuing hockey, his studies, and business, Ken has devoted relatively little time to his social life. Ken describes always feeling awkward and out of place socially. This was particularly strong throughout his teenage years. He recalls vividly that, despite his success in hockey, he never felt successful as a male. He never felt like “one of the boys” and always had a strong sense that there was something about masculinity that he didn’t have and couldn’t figure out how to get. For Ken, it seemed an external thing, something about how the other males carried themselves or behaved. He didn’t know what “it” was but felt strongly that he didn’t have it.

*In terms of my masculinity, in many ways I felt that I never had it. I was never one of the boys....I thought they did, but I'm not sure. Like in high school, the boys lined up along the breezeway checking the girls out and I was never part of that crowd. I never felt like a man. I mean I never felt like a women either but I never felt like a man.... I always wondered what that was, but I could never find it. It was intangible to me. I couldn't define it. I didn't know what it was, how to get it, where to go and get it. Maybe it was just the presentation of themselves, the way they acted, if they were a bit more on the rougher side. They were big strong strapping guys. I think it was that kind of thing. I never looked at it as internal. I think it was an external presentation of what a man was.*

Ken says that his deep lack of confidence led him to avoid relationships with the opposite sex. He felt very lonely but pushed the feelings aside and instead focused on his external goals. For many years he felt strongly that he didn't have anything worth offering to a potential partner. He believed that he first needed to accomplish something worthwhile that would make him attractive to the opposite sex.

*I didn't give people much of an opportunity to get to know me. I didn't allow people to know me very well. I think I still wasn't very comfortable with myself. I didn't feel manly and stuff. So I kept a lot of my inner self hidden. But you know I didn't think a relationship would work because I didn't have it.*

It wasn't until he became religious that he first experienced a sense of being valued or valuable. The idea that God valued him simply as a person was reassuring and novel. The possibility that he could be intrinsically worthwhile, and that his value was not based upon successful accomplishments, was a profound realization for him. For the

first time, when he was in his twenties, he considered the possibility that he was important regardless of the seeming value of his achievements.

*When I began to recognize that there was a God, and I must be important. And I recognized that I was loved. I started to think about who I am, and not about how society defines me as a man, but more how God defines me and how important you are to Him. I used to have it totally reversed. It used to be about how I thought I should be.*

Religion gave Ken both a guide to behaviour as well as the reassurance that he had something meaningful to contribute to the world and that this could be on different terms than hockey. This enabled him to have the confidence to start to date and in his early thirties he met his wife. Since she too was a Christian, Ken says that they had a lot in common in terms of values and beliefs. Nevertheless, he found it very difficult to be in an intimate relationship. He was not skilled at opening up. He had never shared his life with anyone before and continued to feel a strong sense of unworthiness.

Since getting married, Ken has worked hard at learning to be in a relationship. He has taken marriage courses through his church and studied tapes on communication between the sexes. He has made progress in opening up and has relied heavily on his wife for guidance around relating to others. He finds communication a difficult balancing act between the sexes. He says that the hardest part is that there is the expectation of vulnerability and openness while at the same time strength and certainty.

*Well, if you saw a hundred men in a room and they all began to cry. If there were women who saw it, they would laugh. I think women want someone who is strong. They don't really want someone who whines and cries. But they want men to share something. So what I realize, you*

*have to share some, but not all. So they feel part of your life. You need to show some vulnerability, but not too much.*

Today, Ken still struggles with feeling successful. He realizes that he has intrinsic worth but still evaluates himself in terms of his accomplishments. He still believes that he could have become a professional hockey player if only he had worked harder. He struggles as well with maintaining a clear sense of direction in life. He relies on his wife for guidance but feels that, since men and women have fundamentally different values, relying on the opposite sex for direction can often create more confusion than clarity.

## **5.6 John: I've never let anyone in to know me**

John is 41 years old, divorced with sole custody of two children, ages 9 and 12. John expressed enthusiasm about participating in the interview. He said that he had “great stories” that were amazing and unbelievable. Throughout the interview John spoke easily and at length. He had perhaps the most difficult past of all participants but told story after story with a great deal of animation and candour.

Unlike some of the other participants who struggled to gather their thoughts at times, John had a wealth of anecdotes from his past at the ready. These had distinctly recurring themes. John seemed to figure in the centre of each story as the character who was struggling to “do the right thing” in the midst of dramatic and often tragic situations involving good and evil. He usually played the part of either the rescuer or the rescued. Loyalty and betrayal also figured in his stories. Each story had a classic heroic plotline

involving extreme conditions and tough choices. The stories were believable but seemed oversimplified or greatly polarized to increase the dramatic tension.

The stories were entertaining and impressive but, at times, John seemed more like a character in a tragic play than a real person. It was difficult to get a sense of his vulnerability and dimensionality. It seemed that he was trying to convey a particular image of himself as an exceptional, heroic and sympathetic person who constantly finds himself in remarkable circumstances. The reaction that his stories were meant to engender in others seemed clear: that he would be viewed with a heroic mix of sympathy, wonder and admiration. John seemed very willing to share the events of his life, yet despite what might have first appeared as openness, it was difficult to get a sense of the real John behind his heroic tales.

John grew up in a small town in Southern Ontario. He is one of eight children. His family was traditional. The household was sharply divided along gender lines: boys did all of the physical labour on the farm, while the girls did domestic duties around the house. He describes himself as not at all fitting into this arrangement. He didn't conform to the traditional male stereotype mostly because he enjoyed reading and other creative pursuits. This was contrary to expectations and caused problems from the beginning.

*You played sports and you worked hard and you cut down trees and you worked on farm and fed the animals and fished. You did guy things and that was ok. You didn't dance and you didn't write. God help you if you were writing poetry....it was a bad thing. You didn't read, guys don't read.*

He describes his dad as a “John Wayne-type”: loud, large, hard drinking, heavy smoking and strict. For a living, his father drove dump trucks, graders and operated other heavy equipment. His mother was a “Lucille Ball-type”. She was good humoured and fun, although submissive to her husband. She worked in a looming mill. When John was very young, his mother left home and did not return. John provided little explanation about when exactly this occurred or the circumstances surrounding it.

As a child, John says he was very active and difficult to handle though was well liked by everyone. He gives the image of an energetic and loving child who was the subject of much physical abuse but remained vibrant and involved.

*I was the kind of kid that they would put me in a dog harness and connect it to the clothes line. I would be ADHD now, I would be on medication. Always busy, never kept my mouth shut, always cracking jokes, always in trouble, always getting punished by anybody in the family that was sick and tired of me bopping around. My old man was pretty violent, drunken man. He put me in the hospital a few times; he was a pretty aggressive fellow. I was one of those very busy, chatty, always in trouble kind of kids.*

He says that he was always a “clown” and enjoyed entertaining others. This saved him from getting into serious trouble at school and he soon discovered that making others laugh got him positive attention. He says he also realized early on that he was different from others in his family. He describes himself as very sensitive and not at all aggressive like his brothers. He is the youngest male, younger by twelve years, and he credits the age gap to creating room for him to be different. He also attributes his greater

sensitivity to the close relationship that he had with his live-in grandmother. She was his closest parent figure and they shared a special connection.

*My grandmother, my dad's mom, who was like my best friend growing up. We all called her Mammy. She lived with us at the time and she said that I was a lot like her brother. I had some of those characteristics. I think I got my gentle side, I don't know how to explain it, I think I got my gentle side from her, from Mammy. We had a really tight relationship and we spent a lot of time together. She had this little spot in the back of the house. I would go into her room and sit on the foot of her bed. We would chat and talk.*

As a child, John was conscious of being different in a way that needed to be hidden. His father and brothers were swift to correct anything perceived as softness with physical abuse. John spent much of his time avoiding his family. Instead, he escaped into books. An avid reader, he spent hours hiding alone lost in the world of children's adventure stories.

John says most of his childhood is difficult and unpleasant to recall. There was a great deal of neglect and abuse. He was hospitalised several times for injuries from his father's beatings. By age 10, John was regularly running away and spending more and more time living at friend's homes. He started to abuse drugs and alcohol regularly as well. At age 12, having been away from school and home for three months, he was caught by the child welfare authorities and placed in a group home. This turned out to be a positive event. He was provided care and support and his interest in reading was recognized and encouraged. He says in many ways he was rescued by the adults who ran the home.

*I would say that was the periods of time that I recognized these parts of my personality are ok. That it is not a bad thing to be well read. The guy who ran the group home, I'll never forget him, great big man, long beard, big hair. He taught me how to play chess. He is the one that kept feeding me books all the time, "Well then you gotta read this book". I would read a history text books cover to cover. Like, I would absorb anything. Him and his wife really allowed and promoted me to write. They would give me books to write in.*

John says that he flourished in this environment and stayed there for a year. His self-esteem greatly improved, he took up writing and read constantly. For reasons unclear to him, he was then returned home to his father. Things had gotten much worse in his family. His grandmother was very ill, one of his brothers had committed suicide, and his father was constantly violent. John didn't stay long. He ran away again and this time went to Toronto and never returned home. He lived the life of a street youth. He had no particular home, sold drugs and did whatever he could just to get by. He abandoned his literary interest and focussed on simple survival. Living on the street meant getting tough.

*Oh yeah. We were just bad guys. If I saw that kid now today, the kid that I was then, obviously I would be a very dangerous switch blade carrying man.*

At 17, a fortuitous event occurred. He happened to meet a couple who invited him to live with them. He says that it was not typical for them to bring stray teenage males into their home, but they saw something in him that made them intervene. They were a middle class couple with young children and once again John thrived in stable

home-like environment. For the first time in his life, he had parent figures that were healthy and concerned. He was rescued yet again.

*I loved it. I really wanted that, I liked that better than I liked all the rest of that stuff, I just loved it. I liked to be liked. I've always liked being liked and I have always pretty well been liked by everybody. When I asked them "Why did you do that?", their answer to me is "That you're such a nice guy. You know you're fun, you're fun to talk to, you are always interesting, you had such a sad look about you and we just wanted to help you".*

John describes the couple in particularly heroic terms. At 17, John continued to stay out late, regularly abuse drugs, and seldom go to school. Yet the family remained loyal to him, patiently tolerating his behaviour and seemingly believing in him no matter what he did.

*I can remember being there for several months and saying "Is this still ok?". You know, because I was still doing drugs then. I would still go out and get high with some of my friends and come back at 4 o'clock in the morning just really stoned out of mind thinking should I really be walking in the door here. They are married and they got kids and they really want me. I would open the door and one of them would be up, "Got coffee on - want a coffee?". I've just done a whole bunch of strange chemicals, are you sure you want me to come in "Yeah come on in, sit down and relax", "Ok". They just accepted who I was and took real good care of me.*

However, despite their support, John started to feel constrained by the predictability of his environment. He wanted a greater degree of independence. As well, he says that the couple were starting to get to know him and he was feeling anxious that

they were getting too emotionally close. So, one day he abruptly announced that he was leaving and he returned to the streets of Toronto.

*I got up one day and said "I gotta go, I gotta leave". I don't know what happened. It was nothing that they did, I just had been settled and got feeling anxious like I have to go somewhere and do something. I went back to Toronto.*

John admits that he has never allowed others to get to know him and has usually distanced himself from them whenever they start to get close. He attributes this to two problems. First, he simply doesn't trust others. He has a difficult time believing that their intentions are good. The other is that he finds it difficult to believe that others would actually like him, particularly over the long run. He says he is confused about what makes him likeable. He also seemed to express some concern that once they got to know the "real" him, they would find him much less appealing.

*It is pretty funny what I'm going to say when you look at all the things that have happened to me in my life. Lots of people have been very faithful to me for no reasons other than they like me...I'm not very faithful of people; I've never been very trusting. And, I never understood, I never could get why would you like me. Why would you want to date me or have a relationship with me? I mean I know who I am what kind of man I am. I'm not a very nice guy, why would you want to hang out with me?*

He kept all potential friends at arms length and didn't date. He preferred to think of himself as a rugged loner who needed no one and was probably not good for others anyway. He didn't want friends, a partner, and especially not the responsibility of children. Ironically, at 23 he found work in a children's group home. With no formal

education, he was able to use his experience as a street kid to win the job. At the same time, he continued to use and sell drugs regularly. His life began to stabilize a little once again but he felt that he was going nowhere. Out of sheer desperation, he says, he decided to date and then marry a woman who was actively pursuing him. He describes this in remarkable terms. He had little feelings for her, was against having children, but decided to marry her to try to improve his life. Contrary to his tendency to keep people away, he says he threw himself into the marriage with a absolute dedication.

*Well I think, there was a five month period of time where I was pretty drunk and I sobered up and looked around and said wow I'm 25.....alright let's try this.....I've tried everything else, I may as well try this. So I just decided I would be a husband and try and be the best husband that I could. I put as much energy into being a husband as I did a family counsellor or a drug dealer or a writer.*

The marriage did not last long. She had mental health problems and her weight reportedly ballooned to over 300 pounds. Nevertheless, they had two children together. John says that he did everything he could to maintain a happy marriage and good home despite her being a poor mother to the children. John did not have plans to leave her, and instead says that she suddenly abandoned them. John however knew that she was incapable of caring for the kids properly and fought to retain full custody of them.

*She was in the hospital for like three weeks. So what do I do, it's summer vacation and I'm taking my kids down to see my family. They hadn't met my parents and we're going. She got sick just before that and we went. I packed the kids up in the car and drove away. So when we came back she was gone, she took everything. She came home one day and said I'm here to get*

*my kids and I said well sorry, you can see them and have them every weekend. I get up everyday and we eat together, they go to school, I go to work. We come home and have supper together and we do homework together. I know that we can do that the three of us and I know you can't and you know you can't so no you can't have them. After four years and twenty thousand dollars later I have them and she gets them two weekends a month.*

Having kids, and particularly being a single parent, was a major turning point in his life. He describes his relationship with his son and daughter in ideal terms. He says that he has never had any trouble allowing himself to get close to them. He says that it wasn't particularly difficult avoiding the pitfalls of his own upbringing. He just devoted himself to be the best father that he could be and things have turned out well. He provided many stories about the remarkable relationships that he has with his kids. Being a parent to a boy and a girl has meant having to draw on different aspects of his personality as well. Particularly with his daughter, he says that he has had to be more sensitive and open.

*She required lots of hugging, lots more foot rubbing, more stuffies and she required more emotionalized relationships. So it is just different so I had to learn all those things. I'm learning how to be a dad to a daughter everyday. She's very special.*

In all, John describes his life as very good, particularly considering his background. He says he has terrific friends, and is well respected in his work as a counsellor. His kids are growing up to be responsible young teenagers. The only thing missing is a partner. After his marriage ended, John never dated. He says he didn't want to complicate the lives of his children by bringing women into it. However, recently, to

his surprise, he has met someone. For the first time in his life, he has let another adult start to get to know him. This is a scary and exciting prospect but one that he now believes he is ready for.

*They are safer, kids are safer for me for the longest time it is easier to love kids. And now I have started a relationship a real one. I know it's a real one because we are equals. This is someone who is at least smarter than I am. She has a university degree. She's got a great job. She is very wonderful. I have told her from day one, "I've never let anybody in to know me". But I've never met anybody that ever wanted to. "I do and I will let you". We laugh. I guess it just took me 40 years and 12 years of parenting to get over whatever that was that was stopping me from being loved by somebody.*

John sees his story in many other men. He believes that, like him, many men are holding back, keeping others out and losing out in doing so. He feels that men are cheating themselves by staying within the artificial confines of male expectations. If only they could get past these expectations and open themselves up to others more, John believes that men could live up to their real potential.

*Men....my perception, my personal belief is that I don't think that men are aware of their own potential because we don't want to be a whiner. I think men are oppressed in some respects. I don't think we allow ourselves to really tap into our full potential. What we really could be if we really let ourselves be, and if we just had permission to be. I love being a father; being a father is the best thing that's ever happened to me in my entire life. It changed me totally because I allowed it to change me. I wanted it to change me. It gives you permission to love someone. It*

*gives you permission to be hurt by that love and not take it personally. It gives you permission to actually have compassion and empathy, all those things that men don't like to have.*

## **5.7 Gary: Always use your head, never your heart**

Gary is single, 49 and works in the broadcasting industry. He grew up in a small mill town along the shore of Lake Superior. He is university educated and holds several undergraduate degrees. Gary agreed to the interview having had previous interest in “men’s issues” and having been a long time member of a men’s group.

Gary is fit and looks ten years younger than his age. He is articulate and reflective. Gary related the events of his life in an even keeled, thoughtful manner. He tended to play down any dramatic events and was quick to point out that he has been very fortunate. Gary said that he has thought a lot about “men’s issues” but wasn’t sure ultimately where he stood or whether he would have anything worthwhile to say. He was curious in fact about what he would end up saying.

Gary’s story is unique in that, up until age ten, his life was a virtual stereotype of normalcy. His father worked at the local mill, and his mother was a nurturing “housewife”. However, at age ten, Gary’s life was turned upside down when his mother was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. Much of her time was spent in hospital several hours away. Gary’s father was unequipped to parent alone and retreated into alcoholism. Gary and his brothers were given little in the way of support. His father, perhaps typical of the time and culture, believed that all expression of emotion would only make things worse. Emotion was the source of pain and confusion, the intellect was the only reliable

source of stability. As Gary's life became more painful and confusing, any outlet for emotional expression became closed.

Feeling close to others became increasingly difficult as he became well practiced at burying his grief and maintaining intellectual detachment. Much of Gary's life has been about following, and then trying to undo, his father's prohibition against emotion. His struggle to connect with and express emotion has been a constant theme. It wasn't until he made a conscious and dedicated effort to actively develop his emotional expressiveness and seek out the intimate company of others did he begin to feel better about his life.

Gary describes his childhood as typical and traditional. His family lived in a small working class town and virtually everyone was employed by the town's single lumber mill. The town was several hours away from any larger city and with only one television channel available and no outside radio stations, it was insular and isolated. Gary describes his father as intellectual, bookish, private, and independent. Gary's mother was the opposite. She was athletic, outdoorsy, and social. They were a complementary pair: father an emotionally distant but steady provider, and mother the devoted and loving nurturer.

Gary's mother's health started to deteriorate quickly. She was diagnosed with a progressive form of M.S. and spent most of the remainder of her life in hospital. Very little was said to Gary about his mother's condition or her prognosis. He sensed that things were bad but really had no idea what was going on with her.

*Yes, it was an unusual situation. I didn't know at the time, well it was one of things that you didn't talk about "How is your mom - My mom's okay, How is your dad - My dad's okay". It was hard as a kid to really know what was going on with mother. I knew my mother was really sick and I didn't want my mother to die. But we didn't sit down as a family.*

Instead, his father said nothing about the truth of her condition. He became increasingly withdrawn, quiet, and drank constantly though never to the point of losing control. He never spoke about his feelings. He never asked Gary about how Gary was feeling. In fact, no one in the immediate or extended family, or even neighbours, inquired about Gary's mother at all. The only direction that Gary got from his father was to stay strong, "use your head" and things will work themselves out. Gary could see that things weren't working out, but knew no other way of coping with the family's grief.

*Yeah, I think if we weren't acting strong my father wouldn't know what to do. Use your head, figure it out that way. Obviously he couldn't, because the sicker my mother got, the more he drank and that's how he dealt with things. My brother and I would just look at my father, he was going down. I mean he kept his job and all that sort of stuff, but he smoked and drank a lot and never talked about it. Of course we didn't talk. We learned that really well. We didn't talk about it.*

In reflecting on these events, Gary still struggles with his reaction. What the "right" or appropriate reaction would have been remains unclear to him. He knows that it was a difficult situation, but doesn't want to overly dramatize it or look for sympathy. Overall, he feels he coped well in that he didn't get into difficulty and even remained a good student. He wonders if therefore things really weren't that bad for him.

*When I think back on it, sometimes I think I may be over dramatic because I'll tell people that and they'll think "Oh my God". It's traumatic and at the time it was what I was going through, I dealt with it. I got through high school and I did very well. I managed to get through university and all of that sort of stuff. I mean I did okay given that trauma. My sense is that I got 10 good years out of two what I would call fairly traditional parents at that time.*

His two brothers, however, didn't fair as well. Both had run-ins with the law, abused drugs and alcohol, and struggled academically. Gary remained the one considered responsible. Despite a tremendous amount of latitude as an adolescent, he followed his father's focus on remaining detached and intellectual, behaved conservatively and focussed on school.

*I think when I saw myself, I was the responsible one. I mean I smoked, I was careful not to go overboard. I saw kids that I thought were from wonderful families who ended up overdosed in the hospital or in jail or whatever. I think to an extent I still have that sense of responsibility in me.*

Throughout his mother's illness, Gary's father remained private and emotionally withheld. It was painfully obvious to everyone around that his father was deeply grief stricken and entirely unable to cope with even basic day to day tasks, yet his father never asked for help and never spoke about his internal feelings.

*I think he was very disconnected from his heart. I remember at my mother's funeral he just said "Don't cry, we are going to get through this", that sort of a thing. Of course I didn't cry, I didn't grieve mother's death for about 15 years after that.*

Gary's mother died when he was in his late teens. He drifted from job to job and from relationship to relationship not knowing what he wanted to do. He was involved in many intimate relationships but somehow they never seemed to work out. Gary says that they progressed to a point and then he started to find himself disengaging from the relationship. Gary always believed that he just hadn't found the right person and that she was due to come along soon. However, after dating through his twenties and thirties, he was left with wondering why all of his contemporaries seemed to be getting married and he seemed to be going in circles. He says that he had to begin to recognize that he had a pattern of avoidance and detachment that was the real problem. It was difficult to admit that, in some ways, he had become very much like his father and he might meet the same lonely fate.

*I would say, in my twenties, into my late thirties, early forties, I started to look at what was actually going on here, patterns that were repeating, "Why don't I get married and settle down.....What's the problem". A lot of it went back to a host of things from I think my early childhood, just in terms of grieving and getting over the death of my mother, dealing with family things. I'm just becoming more human—growing up in a sense. I think in a lot of ways it sort of scared me because I was like my father in a lot of ways. In terms of my relationships with other men, they tend to be very casual and not specifically deep. And with women, they tend to be a little deeper but not that committed.*

Gary recalls the very day that he realized that he was depressed and that he needed to make major changes in his life. He was speaking to a colleague who had commented that he had been looking down lately. Gary says that suddenly he became

determined to do something about his life, turn things around and make a concerted effort to change his ways. He had no idea what to do but believed strongly that if he didn't do something, he would follow in his father's footsteps.

*Yeah, I needed to do something different. I knew I wanted to grow. I knew I wanted to change, but I didn't know how to do it, I really didn't know how to do it. I wanted to just tell somebody that I needed some help, but I didn't have the tools to do it. I think in that respect maybe I was like my father. But my father, instead of asking for help, just reached for the bottle every time those feelings came up or those fears or those whatever. I think, after awhile, he just gave up maybe worrying about them. I didn't want to settle.*

In his forties, he went to see a counsellor to talk about his mother's death for the first time in his life. He says that he had no idea how much his mother's death and his father's detachment continued to affect him in his adulthood. Most importantly, he says, he got over strong feelings of shame about himself and he was able for the first time to start to open up to others. Gary then made a commitment to connect with others. He joined several social clubs, attended church, participated in personal growth programs, and decided to join a men's group that he had heard about. He says that all of them helped tremendously. Particularly though, Gary found the men's group illuminating. In the group, he discovered that many men shared similar struggles, perhaps for different reasons, but the effects were the same. He says that themes of shame, fear, and grief were common to all of them and the group became an important mechanism for helping overcome these feeling as well as became a support network that he never before had. Gary continues to attend the men's group to this day.

*One time or another, I think everyone in that group has gone through a pretty deep emotional thing. I came into it just coming out of all the turmoil that I had gone through of being able to talk about where I was at and what I wanted to do, the struggles I had. It was a good place for me to be at that time, to have that place. The dynamics of that group, I was ready to just dump everything. Other people there just sat and watched and said very little. And that is still the dynamic of that group, there is still some men that sit and listen and some men that go and talk. It still meets a need for me.*

Gary says that things have changed dramatically in his life. He now makes a conscious effort to continue to put himself in new situations in order to stretch himself socially and emotionally. He says that he has seen the payoff of connecting with others and is determined to keep it up as well as encourage other men to do the same. From being a closed person, he says he is now quite open with others about the changes that he has gone through. Feeling ashamed is no longer a barrier to relationships and he shares his experience in the hope of giving other men permission to change as well. At the same time he continues to hear his father's words in his dedication to "figure things out" but it no longer is a constraining philosophy but rather a hopeful one.

*Yeah, I see the pay off of doing it and I don't feel bad now. I mean I have friends and I tell them to go for counselling and that's not a bad thing. I said, "If you can't figure it out on your own and it's causing you a lot of grief, go for counselling that's not a big deal". For me once upon a time it was. But now I say, "Do the best you can". I mean you don't want to be in a counsellor's office. I think we have infinite ability on our own to figure things out. I'm sounding like my father here, but through emotionally and intellectually trying to figure out our own lives.*

*That's why we need help. To go and get it is not a gender thing. I think it is a human thing no matter if you are male or female. Go get the goddam help and be a better person for it.*

Gary has also made a committed effort to change his pattern of intimate relationships. He has moved from being emotionally distant and sexually promiscuous, to what he terms becoming sexually responsible. His focus has switched to developing more female friendships and less preoccupation with intimate, and particularly sexual, relationships. He says that focussing on developing friendships with women and moving very slowly, if at all, to include a sexual component to the relationship allows him to make more healthy decisions about what he really wants. He says that he is very aware now of his vulnerability in relationships. As an attractive, eligible and child-free bachelor, he has often found himself in the position of acting the part of rescuer to unhappy, divorced women. He recognizes that this makes for available sexual opportunities that are easy to exploit. However, he says he knows now that these situations become complicated and unsatisfying very quickly and is not at all what he wants in the long run. Now he is honest and up front with women in respect to what he can and can't provide to them.

*Well that's where I have to be open and honest and assertive in what I want. Before, the way I would get sucked into those would be through sex. It would be without any discussion before you hop in the sack. Nobody says anything and then all of a sudden there is this unsaid expectation. It just never turns out well. In my experience they never turned out well, they don't work well. Whoever said that there is no such thing as free sex was right unless you go and pay for it.*

And while Gary used to feel pressure to get married, he says he rarely feels this expectation now. His focus is friendships and social connections rather than a single lifelong intimate partner. He has filled his life with work, social activities, public service and an array of male and female friends. He says that these are not meant to replace a lifelong partner; rather he sees it as the arrangement that is ultimately more realistic and healthy for him.

*You know my life is full and I'm happy. I do miss physical...I miss the sex. There is no doubt about it, but I am going to stick by being responsible with my sexuality. I'm not going to go to places where I know emotionally I can't handle it or don't deal with it very well, so I just don't do it.*

In all, Gary says that he has been fortunate to carve out a very satisfying life for himself. However, he also acknowledges that it has come as a result of a lot of continued effort. He still struggles with the balance between his head and heart, but is aware that he is probably fairing better than most men of his generation. As his life has become more stable, he has become increasingly concerned about the lack of support there seems to be for males to express vulnerability and avail themselves of help. There seems to him to be few options for males who want to find new ways of relating to others. He worries about the new generation of males as well who, in his eyes, are growing up with as much or more restrictions placed upon them in terms gender expectations.

*But there are other men that feel the same way I do. It hasn't been expressed. I mean a lot of the guys I know we have sat down and if we ever had a discussion like you and I did tonight I'm sure that a lot of them grew up in somewhat similar situations, the stoic father, not*

*expressive, and then how do I come out of that, how do I not become my father, or what is the old man what is man and all that sort of stuff.*

### **5.8 Jeff: It just got to the point where I was more interested in the little world that I could create or be involved with than the real world that was unpleasant**

Jeff is the youngest of the men interviewed at 29 years old. He seemed pleased to be interviewed though warned me in advance that there was much about his childhood that remained foggy in his memory. He added that what he did remember was chaotic and probably hard for others to believe. Throughout the interview Jeff spoke thoughtfully and in a detached, unemotional manner. Jeff responded at length to the questions posed, often stopping midway to reflect on his answer or catch himself in a contradictory statement. Jeff's interview is in some ways reminiscent of John's, in that both stories are of extraordinarily chaotic childhoods. As well, both seemed particularly self-conscious and aware of the image they were striving to project. However, Jeff had none of the dramatic tendencies of John. Jeff was distinctly non-sensational in the retelling of his life and instead seemed to strike a continuously philosophical and reflective pose.

Much of Jeff's story is of his uneasy and often overlapping relationship between reality and fantasy and his constant striving to be as unlike his father as possible. From an early age he created imaginary worlds in which to escape and create for himself new and more appealing identities. Growing up, reality was harsh, often the place of abuse,

unpredictability, loss and profound feelings of not measuring up. By his own admission, he has spent a good deal of his life lost in imagination re-interpreting reality or escaping it altogether. The central focus of avoidance he says is his father. He is driven to be as unlike his traditional, working class father as possible and all that the image of his father embodies. What is striking about Jeff is that, while he is clear about the type of man he doesn't want to be, he seems lost in respect to realistic alternatives. In so doing he gives a sense of drifting about life with only vague and noncommittal plans. He seems emotionally detached from the world and others around him while projecting a self-conscious though superficial image of a modern male. He is conscious of his disconnection from others but this doesn't seem to distress him particularly. He seems to be more concerned about how to be better skilled at avoiding judgement by others and honing his image, rather than embarking on a genuine searching for a deeper identity. Much of his comfort continues to come from imaginary activities and immersive fantasy games where he can have a fleeting sense of power, purpose and acceptance. He admits too that the time spent immersed in fantasy could be more productively spent but again seems resigned to his fate.

Jeff works as a middle manager at a large national retail chain. Despite his considerable intelligence he only partially completed university, dropping out after doing poorly and lacking any direction as to a field of further study. He began working at a succession of fast food restaurants and retail stores and moved through the ranks to a middle management position. He feels unchallenged by his job and concedes that there seems little to no future in his current position. He has vague plans to return to

university but finds it financially prohibitive. In terms of his personal life, he has few friends but has been involved in an intimate relationship for the last two years. He has neither plans nor expectations of where the relationship might lead. He says that he finds the relationship satisfying but can't predict the future.

Jeff grew up with his younger brother and sister in a small rural farming community in Southern Ontario. In the early part of his life, he lived with both parents on a farm about 30 kilometres away from the nearest small town. He describes his parents as bohemian and eccentric folks who wanted to live away from the city and get back to basics.

Jeff was a very bright student who shone early on in school and quickly skipped a grade. A loner and avid reader, he spent much of the time on his own lost in books. Not being particularly athletic, or at least not comfortable with team sports, he preferred instead to be at home in the company of his mother. He recalls riding the school bus into town and experiencing the stigma of being a country kid with little money or seeming sophistication. Even as a young boy, he says that he felt like a misfit.

At age seven, his world turned upside down and any consistency that was in his life was gone. His parents split up. Although his memory of the period is poor he says that he knows that his parents fought often. He has flashes of memory of heated arguments and at least one occasion of his mother threatening his father with a shotgun. His father moved out and provided little or no child support which required his mother to seek work. Being somewhat adventurous and a risk taker, she went into the restaurant

business with a friend. Things seemed hopeful at first to Jeff but his mother's irresponsibility and poor judgement started to create problems.

*Things went to hell in a hand basket pretty quickly actually.... I remember at the time when my mom was part owner of this restaurant. This made me a pretty popular kid at school because I could go to the restaurant for lunch and they would always want me to come back with ice cream and stuff for them. So superficial. Because I was allowed to leave the school for lunch I had candy and stuff like that. These were very fair weathered friends that I had at the time. But anyway, what ended up happening after my mom and dad got divorced, my mom kind of hooked up with a member of a biker gang ... So she would let the biker gang come to the restaurant and they would use the restaurant as kind of a biker hang out. This was a problem with the other ladies in the restaurant.*

Things went from bad to worse. His mother started to show more signs of instability. Her constant contact with bikers led to her losing her job and this in turn led to Jeff and his siblings to become homeless. This period of time was both profoundly unsettling for Jeff as well as publicly humiliating, as the events unfolded in view of his peers and everyone in the local town.

*I remember around Christmas of '81 or '82, after my mom had lost her job, our house burnt down in a fire and there was a lot of rumours going around that my mom had actually set the fire. To this day I still don't know. The house burnt down and one of the memories that I will always have is... one of my teachers saying that [my] house had burned down and if anyone had clothing they could donate them. I know that the teacher was doing the right thing, but I felt awful at the time. So that was a pretty rough patch, and then once the house burned down we*

*lived in a succession of foster homes. They weren't really foster homes. I remember over Christmas we stayed at a shelter.*

His mother was increasingly unable and perhaps unwilling to care for them. Jeff attended school sporadically, was often poorly dressed and became more and more self-conscious of the rift between his life and the life enjoyed by his peers. He wore the same clothes daily, rarely had lunches, and was considered to be a virtual untouchable. By age nine, things had got to the point where his mother had largely given up caring for them altogether. Finally, after offering the kids to their father, who refused to care for them, she gave them over to Jeff's aunt and uncle. Jeff's mother wrote them a note to say that she could no longer take care of them and he never heard from her again.

*I guess at the time we were on welfare... I remember being left home a whole weekend by myself. I guess my mother had kind of assumed that I could take care of myself. There definitely wasn't a lot of food to go around. There were a couple of times where there was no heat, a very Dickensian arrangement. That was probably rock bottom because around May my mother said "I can't raise you kids anymore" and she ended up asking our aunt and uncle to come and pick us up. Things went on an upturn from there basically. That was actually the last I had seen of my mother.*

In Jeff's estimation, this led to a distinct upturn in his life. His aunt and uncle by comparison had a reasonably stable home. Jeff remembers his enthusiasm and hopefulness at moving in with them. At the same time, with the chaos of simply getting through each day behind them, the damage that the previous years had done to Jeff

began to be revealed. By then Jeff had spent so much of his time in fantasy that he felt very little connection or interest in reality beyond material comfort.

*I was kind of confused, but at the same time I was happy that I was going to live with my aunt and uncle because the few times that we lived with them.....I mean they were pretty much solidly middle class. But to me they were like the richest people I knew. They had everything. But of course coming from a burnt down house and all the rest, to me it was that we hit the jackpot basically. I was very excited to go live with them because I perceived that they were rich and well off and stuff. As soon as we went to live with my aunt and uncle we were whipped into therapy. We had a lot of issues that we had to deal with. We didn't emerge from that whole situation with our childhood unscarred. I was quite deep into fantasy land if you want to call it that.*

For the previous few years Jeff had been retreating further into fantasy as a way of coping with feelings of fear, insecurity and loss. His fantasizes took on many forms from losing himself in books to constant daydreaming. His mother had also introduced him to the role playing game Dungeons and Dragons. This became immediately appealing to him giving him a completely immersive experience where he could take on a powerful identity of his own choosing and control an exciting and adventurous world.

*I guess I like the aspect of being in a fantastic world where you know I didn't have to.... Well it kind of consumed my mode of play rather than playing organized sports and stuff. I was always killing monsters and stuff. I played this Dungeons and Dragons because at the time I liked puzzles and this was kind of a puzzle playing and stuff like that. It just got to the point where I was more interested in the little world that I could create or be involved with than the real world that was unpleasant. I didn't have to worry about not having the right clothes. I*

*know I keep coming back to clothes but I'm not like that anymore. You know, I didn't have to worry about real world concerns; I could just lose it all in this fantasy world.*

Despite the fact that Dungeons and Dragons is designed to be a game with many other players, Jeff acted it out it alone. He spent most of his waking time immersed in the characters that he had created. Through it, he could experience a sense of fitting in, of personal power and importance, as well as some degree of predictability and adventure. Soon, his aunt and uncle concluded that Jeff's extreme social disengagement was the result of his constant fantasizing and they took on a concerted program to rid him of his escapist games and involve him in real life.

*My aunt and uncle made a real effort to try to integrate me to do "normal things". Their solution eventually was to take all the Dungeons and Dragons material I had when I was getting too involved with this and burn them. So they took that away from me, but it was kind of like I was a junkie sort of speak. Ironically even, I didn't really play with anybody. Because it is a role playing game but it is somewhat social. But I was more just reading the books over and over again and imagining....anyway. So they tried to get me into Scouts and boys clubs, sports and things like that. The problem was that I was so awkward with the sports and I was awkward socially that it didn't really take.*

The efforts of his aunt and uncle weren't particularly successful. He was enrolled in therapy and pushed to involve himself in social activities but he continued to feel outcast and powerless in the real world. As an adolescent, he was desperate to fit in, and acutely aware of his own inadequacies. However, he felt helpless to make any real changes and continued to remain socially isolated, emotionally detached and lost in

fantasy. The relative stability in his life was rocked again by the marital break-up of his aunt and uncle. After a brief and unsuccessful attempt to live with his father, Jeff moved back in with his uncle. His uncle became his surrogate father and Jeff was grateful to be able to live with him. However, his uncle had problems of his own and Jeff's difficulties continued. Jeff did poorly in school and became obsessively involved with video games and computers. He was lost and unhappy and but entirely unable to reach out even to his uncle. Things culminated in a suicide attempt.

*At the time I think I thought that suicide was the only option. I think a lot of adolescents go through that where they get to a point where suicide is the only option. That was just one very brief stint. He was never aware of the stuff because I never told him about it. As much as I respected him as a father figure, and I do respect him, I was never ever forthcoming with any of my feelings about that kind of stuff. I didn't really talk to him about what conflicts I was going through. I wasn't really open about that kind of stuff. Inside there was deeper issues.*

Throughout this time Jeff never heard from or saw his mother. She had become literally a thing of the past. His father however, did have semi-regular contact with Jeff and in fact, Jeff's younger brother and sister permanently moved back to stay with him. Through his adolescence Jeff made attempts to see his father, but he found time spent with his father intolerable. It seemed to Jeff that he despised everything his father said and did. He felt no connection with his father. On the contrary, he was entirely unable, or perhaps unwilling, to see any common ground between them. This absolute disdain of anything associated with his father became a prevailing force in his life and identity. To this day, Jeff evaluates all ideas and activities in reference to his father. Anything

associated with his father is completely intolerable and in its place he seeks to be the absolute opposite.

*I think with my real father, if you had to sum it up, I wanted to be as different from him as possible. I didn't like anything about him and so I didn't want to be like that. He was kind of a hippie, he is more down to earth literally. I would love it if where I lived now was sterilized. One of those futuristic hollow white places all clean and sterile. He is not shy about being open with his feelings and stuff like that and I am much more guarded. It is like I took everything that I saw in him and inverted it and said I'm not going to be like that... I think that the influence of not being like my real father is stronger than any other influence.*

In fact, since moving out and living on his own through his twenties, Jeff has worked hard to create a life free of anything associated with his father. This has grown to include an avoidance of all values and related activities that he considers to be typical of his father and men like him. Jeff concedes that the list has grown fairly long and doesn't always make sense. However, in general he sees the criteria as embodying a traditional, working class, outdoors-oriented man. Among the activities that are off limits are such things as fishing, hunting, most forms of manual labour, aggressive or team sports, meat-eating, getting dirty, any form of violence, and uncontrolled emotion. Jeff also admits that his greatest fear is that he might become like his father and therefore avoids these activities to ensure that he isn't drawn into his father's way of being.

*Yeab I am sure that there is lots of things that I've denied myself. But I think it was for the greater cause. I know that sounds kind of strange but I think it is. If I open myself up to all these other pursuits than I would turn out to be like him.*

Jeff recognizes as well the irony, and contradiction, in the city in which he has chosen to live: a northern city so often associated with the very values he is seeking to avoid. It serves, he says, as a vivid reminder of the lifestyle that he has contempt for and helps him strive to be its opposite. Jeff remains vigilant to see that he doesn't inadvertently adopt these values or is ever perceived by others to hold them. He sees himself as non-traditional and intellectual, yet has difficulty defining what this means for him. He remains acutely aware of the persona that he projects and evaluates it constantly.

*Definitely, it's like when I have an answer or position I have to think of the traditional male answer, stereotypical male answer, and then the right answer so to speak. I don't mean it that strongly. But sometimes I have to go against my traditional thinking and put forth the point of view that is more I guess not necessarily political. I don't want to say politically correct, but a more balanced way of thinking I think.*

This approach helps Jeff avoid becoming like his father, but leaves him with uncertainty. He seems to lack any sense of clear purpose or direction. He concedes as well that there may be good things about men like his father that he may be denying himself but he feels pressure to quash them and ensure that they are never expressed outwardly. He recognizes also a desire to have a stronger sense of a masculine self but struggles with what it might involve.

*If I had more confidence, if I wasn't trying to be as careful as possible, yeah. There's been lots of times in the past where I said "well this is a male's perspective" and went out on safe ground with statements and things like that. Yeah, there has been times when I said things from a male*

*perspective, and then there's been times when I have made great pains to be gender neutral. In the ideal world you wouldn't have to make decisions based on gender, or shouldn't have a male perspective or female perspective, it should just be a personal perspective. But that's like a total gender neutral fantasy which will never happen.*

In all, Jeff gives the distinct impression of a man divided into two worlds. His outer world, the world that he presents to others, seems characterized by a self-conscious and detached orientation to life and a determination to be something different than his father. He is passive, fatalistic and hesitant to involve himself in the lives of others. He seems to know what he doesn't want, yet is unclear about what he does want. Much is therefore relegated to his fantasy world. In his fantasy world, he has a strong sense of control, competence and direction. In this world he allows himself behaviour that might be considered traditionally masculine and reminiscent of his father.

### **5.9 Michael: Men take on a lot of stress just to make money.**

**This is not just the stress of work, but the stress of accomplishment. It is business stress. Heart-attack stuff**

Michael is 47 years old. He has been married for 15 years and has two sons, ages 8 and 11. He holds a doctorate degree and is an educator. Michael agreed to be interviewed and seemed intrigued by the topic. Throughout the interview, Michael was well spoken and talkative. He was often opinionated and yet had a reflexive self-deprecating quality. Many of his responses seemed a paradoxical mixture of arrogance and self-doubt. On the one hand he would remark on an accomplishment in a manner

that was almost boastful, yet he would immediately follow up with what seemed to be a self-conscious statement such as, “well, that meant nothing, really”.

Michael can be considered as having the highest social status of the men interviewed. He grew up in an upper middle class home, was successful in school and is now well established. By all accounts he is successful. He has a position of relative seniority, has a good income, has a solid marriage and is an involved father. What is striking about his story is that, despite his apparent success, he does not experience himself as being particularly successful. Michael’s job gives him a lot of discretion in terms of how much he works, where he devotes his time, and how much income he ultimately generates. This poses a unique dilemma to him. With no pressing priorities, he struggles to identify what constitutes meaningful accomplishment. He is torn between the materialistic values and lifestyle of his father, and seeing these pursuits as ultimately meaningless. On the one hand, Michael expresses interest in material comfort, income, power, and status, yet on the other hand says he recognizes that these become empty and endless pursuits that swallow up his time and identity. This at times leads Michael to pursue activities having deeper meaning to him, but only to a point since they don’t bring in greater income. He feels pressure to provide for his family and ensure that they have a high standard of living, but also recognizes that doing so involves working in areas of less satisfaction. This leaves him only vaguely ambitious since his accomplishments rarely bring him contentment. With no clear direction or standard for success he feels as if he is on a treadmill of production that is ultimately meaningless.

Michael was born overseas. His father was a successful businessman. His mother originally worked outside the home, but stayed home once her children were born. Michael has one older brother. They grew up in a wealthy neighbourhood where everyone lived in large homes and had extensive live-in hired help.

Michael describes himself as a bright, curious child who was often experimenting with mechanical devices or playing with the chemicals that his father brought home. He started school young since he was considered intelligent and was tall for his age. Being the youngest among his peers and being physically larger, Michael felt more capable than others. However, he says that he was not like other boys. Instead of rugged play, he liked creating things, making model airplanes and various inventions. He was viewed within the family as the child who liked to fix things as well as the one who got into trouble for dismantling things. He describes being an introvert who preferred quiet, creative pursuits and spending time at home with his family.

*I was also influenced by my Mom and interior decorating. I remember being in scouts and they were going camping. I didn't want to go because the Ideal Homes show was on and I didn't want to miss it.*

Michael's father was 47 when he was born. His father was viewed as highly intelligent and successful. It was important to his father that Michael and his brother be similarly intelligent, which took precedence over sports. His father was not a physical man, nor intimidating. However his father could be very critical. His father was often around the house but rarely was directly involved with his child. This was typical of his father's time and class where men worked hard and then came home to relax.

*Two things about my dad that were very defining is that he was beyond belief very good at math. He was a calculator. He was unbelievably fast at adding and subtracting He was also extremely good at English. His vocabulary was incredible. But if I look now at my dad, his lifestyle was incredible. He did bugger all. He would come home in the evening, clean the pool, drink a beer, eat supper that had been provided to him, and then read. He would pick up a novel and read a book a night. He read a book a night his whole life. He read very quickly. He would get dozens of novels a week and just chow them down.*

In many ways, his mother was the opposite. She was an employee in his father's business when they first met and 16 years younger. While Michael's father came from an upper class background, his mother came from an alcoholic and abusive home. She grew up in relative poverty and left school early to make ends meet. Michael says that she carried with her a strong sense of never really measuring up and that this caused her a lot of social anxiety. She had an explosive temper and could be physically abusive to her children. She was not cruel or malicious, just volatile and the boys learned to keep out of her way and avoid her when necessary. In fact, avoiding Mom became like a game to the boys as they got a little older. She would chase them in anger around and they would jump in the pool to get away from her.

*My mom was wild.*

Despite the differences between them, Michael says that his parents got on well. However, their martial and parenting arrangement were different than today's standards. They had hired help to do all of chores and make meals so there was little tension around domestic duties. Both parents also took an arm's length approach to parenting.

In fact, Michael says that much of the real parenting was done by his grandmother who lived in their home. Unlike his mother, she was “nurturing, spoiling and maternal”.

Michael’s describes his childhood as an ideal one. He was successful in school and, apart from it being unchallenging, school was peripheral in his memory of growing up. He recalls mainly that his family lived in a beautiful semi-rural neighbourhood surrounded by nature. He was given a great deal of freedom and had many friends. His memories are filled with stories of aimless and carefree hours wandering with friends through fields and forests.

Academics came easily to Michael and there was never any question about whether he would attend university, just what he might do once he gets there. At university, he dabbled with different areas but found many of them tedious. However, he was always fascinated by people and curious about “what made them tick”. Despite his father’s lack of support, he decided to go into the social sciences. He continued directly through university until he got his doctorate never once doubting his ability. He says he was always aware that he was smart, even at times arrogant. Rather than doubt himself, he feels he coasted through university though never really worked up to his potential.

*I was a arrogant student. There was no question about getting into the honours degree, which was highly competitive. Most of my co-students are now professors around the world. It didn't enter my mind that I wouldn't do it or couldn't do it. I didn't think for a second that a PhD was beyond me...And I have to say that it is not that hard...I knew if I put in the effort I could do, I didn't always put in the effort though.*

While in university, he started dating though he did so very casually and felt no pressure to get serious or work toward getting married. He says he rarely thought about the future and lived more for the present. Toward the end of his schooling he met the woman who would be his wife. They had an immediately comfortable relationship although Michael was still not necessarily thinking about marriage. Instead he was considering emigrating to Canada. Many people in his circle were talking about it, so he decided to apply and simply “see what happens”. He had no real plan in mind and thought instead that he would go through the process and let fate take him.

*There was a lot of comfortability. We dated and it was much like any other relationship. There was not special intent, but I decided to emigrate. I always had a vague notion to see the world. So I put in an application and within six weeks I had been accepted.*

Michael suddenly found himself alone and in Canada. He hadn't necessarily planned to but he was single, mobile and felt there was no future where he had been living. Earlier in the relationship, Michael had asked his wife-to-be to marry him. She had refused but they continued to date right up until he left the country. They remained in contact and he tried to convince her to emigrate as well. She finally relented and reluctantly moved to be with him. Together in Canada, and finding themselves alone with each other, their relationship became more committed and they decided to marry. Michael says that this start to their marriage continues to pose an undercurrent of tension even to this day some 15 years later. Michael's wife made a “sacrifice” to be with him and he feels forever grudgingly in her debt. She left comfort and affluence behind and he feels a duty to provide as good as, or better, life in order to repay her. However,

the view of the partnership that he held early on in the marriage has changed. He says he originally thought they were building a new life together, but now feels that he is called upon to shoulder most of the responsibility for providing. Rather than developing new expectations in respect to marriage, he says that she has increasingly imported traditional expectations from her home country.

*There was a sense that working and doing things was something she wanted to do. She was finishing her Masters thesis. There was also the feeling of participation in the community. She was sort of active, actively looking to be involved. As things have progressed, it feels she has hit a time clock saying things like, "I want to be retired. I don't want to keep on working". In fact she wants to retire now. That seems to be the built in image she has now as a mother. She will always be involved, but she will do things like volunteer. It is not an activity level thing, it is a lifestyle thing. It is exacerbated by people she knows. Most of the people that surround her, the women don't have to work. It becomes a status thing, where they say, "Well, I don't have to work".*

As their marriage has evolved, and their two children were born, his partner has gone from being initially ambitious and career-minded to wanting to stay at home. This was originally to take care of the children, but now that they are of school age the rationale has change. Michael says it has now become a matter of status in which his wife feels she shouldn't have to work and Michael feels pressure to provide a sufficient income to allow work to be optional for her. This has been a significant source of strain on their relationship. Michael says that he feels great pressure to work harder to make money and at the same time he resents that the responsibility now falls mainly on him.

To complicate matters this expectation is rarely talked about explicitly or even acknowledged between them. Instead it sits between them as an underlying pressure and constant source dissatisfaction.

*She feels hard done by that we both have to work. Historically, I imagine that not working was negatively viewed, whereas now if you are in a good situation, you don't have to work. All of her brother's partners work, but in a way they dabble. They don't work because they have to, they work as dabbling. They work very little and not for the money.*

Michael says that he feels tension between making money to bolster their standard of living and pursuing interests that are intrinsically meaningful. He knows that making more money would take pressure off him but he would feel greater resentment at having to make this his main focus. Recently he has carried effectively two different jobs and has managed to double his income; however this has come at a price. He says that he feels constantly exhausted and consumed by his responsibilities. He also feels disconnected from his family and that the work that he is doing is ultimately without any intrinsic value. He is therefore caught. Making more money decreases his guilt in respect to being a good provider, but gives him no sense of purpose. Pursuing interests that are more meaningful brings some satisfaction, but insufficient money to support their lifestyle.

*I feel tension between earning money and doing things for fun. I'll do the truly academic thing that is good for my career, but it doesn't necessarily bring in money or is it that much fun. There is a drive to have a better CV. I would like to do things that feel like an accomplishment but it doesn't necessarily bring in money.*

Another tension that Michael describes is between pursuing money and spending time with his children. Since he has a flexible job he is able to spend more time with them if he chooses. Michael strives to be with his children often though again he is caught between priorities. Michael says another reason to resist devoting himself to pursuing money, is that he knows that he can easily get caught up in work at the cost of spending time with his family. He says that he doesn't want to become like his father whose role was only as a provider.

*If I worked harder, I would feel compulsive about it and it would take over. I could be there - where nothing else mattered but this and there would be no time of space for anything else.*

Despite feeling pulled in several directions, Michael is productive and has exceeded most of his colleagues. However, in this domain as well, he struggles to have a consistent focus and belief in the meaning of his work. He says that he isn't proud of the work that he does since it doesn't represent his highest effort. He doubts that his work represents a meaningful contribution and at times dismisses it as "academic fluff". In his estimation this potentially leaves him as a weak academic, relatively uninvolved father, and usually earning below his capacity. He feels strongly that he could, and therefore should, do better. However, he is not able to choose among the various priorities in his life and instead feels that he bounces around unsatisfied with his performance in all of them. The problem, he says, is not that he can't make up his mind, but that he cannot get clear on what success really is. He says that every time he gets close to feeling successful, he realizes that success was not what he thought it was.

*Success is a moving target.*

He describes his fundamental problem as lack of clarity in respect to where to place his efforts and focus his energy. This leaves him moving back and forth between competing expectations never really feeling clear about which to pursue. He says he feels frustrated, unsuccessful and entirely without meaningful direction

*My brother has a word for it; it is called GUAVA—Grown Up And Vaguely Ambitious.*

*There is a measure of ambition somewhere, but it is not foremost in my mind.*

In reflecting on his difficulties and those of men in general, Michael says that the problem is not in resisting traditional masculinity. He boils the barrier to change down to a simpler difficulty. He says that the struggle to break free of the patterns of their father is not because men don't want to change. He argues that most men want to spend more time pursuing personal interests and being at home with family. However, he says that the pressure on men to continue to earn well is too great to allow them to do this. He says men are constantly preoccupied with earning more money which becomes the chief source of stress in men's lives. Enabling men to change requires freeing them from the pressures to be the sole successful breadwinner.

*Money is the issue. The conflict is not in their traditional identity. Men can spend lots of time at home with family and they never feel inferior or feminine for doing so. Instead their constant worry is money. Money, money, money is always there. The definition of the masculinity is not troublesome per se, but finding enough money is troublesome. Men take on a lot of stress just to make money. This is not just the stress of work, but the stress of accomplishment. In so many of the couples I know, men take the strain of earning money. It is business stress. Heart-attack stuff.*

## 5.10 Chapter Summary

Each of the stories of the eight men is unique. Some of the men tended to focus most of their attention on certain points in their lives while others gave equal emphasis to all periods. Some men focused on specific issues that they continue to struggle to resolve while others recounted past successes in dealing with problems. Some men showed strong feelings and opinions throughout the interview while others remained more emotionally detached. However all of the men demonstrated a great deal of thought and concern in the care they took to respond to the interview questions. Each of the men had much to say and took the time to express their thoughts as clearly as possible.

Despite their differences, the men had many similar concerns. Many of the men raised the same issues even though their actual experiences were very varied. Themes such as adapting to imposed change as well as undertaking self-change seem to be readily noticeable in the stories of men. Also, struggles to conform and the desire to break way from the expectations of the previous generation also figured clearly. In all, a great deal of data was produced by the interviews. A brief summary of the participants is provided in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Summary of Participants**

NAME	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	CHILD STATUS	EMPLOYME NT	THEMES
Robert	39	married	father of two males	employed as a technician	<i>I knew I couldn't stay the way I was or I wouldn't</i>

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					<i>survive</i>
Greg	38	single	father of one male	enrolled as full- time student	<i>You grow up thinking that you don't matter, so you figure that you don't matter to this kid. But you do whether you want to or not.</i>
Mark	37	Gay, single	no children	employed as a research assistant	<i>My parents probably figured I was gay right from the very beginning</i>
Ken	43	married	no children	self-employed	<i>I always wondered what that was but I could never find it. It was intangible to me. I couldn't define it. I didn't know what it was, how to get it, where to go and get it.</i>
John	41	divorced	sole parent of boy and girl	employed as family counsellor	<i>I've never let anyone in to know me.</i>
Gary	49	Single, never married	no children	employed in broadcast industry	<i>Always use your head, never your heart</i>
Jeff	29	Single, never married	no children	employed in retail	<i>It just got to the point where I was more interested in the little world that I could create or be involved</i>

Michael 48 married father of employed as  
two boys educator

*with than the real world*

*that was unpleasant.*

*Men take on a lot of stress*

*just to make money. This is*

*not just the stress of work,*

*but the stress of*

*accomplishment...It is*

*business stress. Heart-*

*attack stuff.*

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## Chapter 6: Data Analysis

### 6.1 Introduction: Talking About Being a Man

Before embarking on the analysis, it is important to recognize that responses among interview participants can be influenced by a variety of elements associated with the interview process. Factors such as the location of the interviews, attributes of the interviewer, and structure of the interviews themselves all potentially shape how and what participants say (Kvale, 1997; van Manen, 1990). This influence may be more pronounced when interviewing men about their personal lives and experiences in respect to masculinity. Prior research suggests that many men find responding to question about themselves and their views on masculinity to be threatening (Balswick, 1988; Cochran & Rabinowitz, 1996; Eisler & Skidmore, 1987). Talking about personal concerns and struggles often creates discomfort, since the interviews themselves can place men in a potentially role straining situation. If weakness and vulnerability are to be avoided by men, then they may be inclined to react to questions that bring about these feelings. For example, it is likely that some men will respond by de-emphasizing their feelings of vulnerability or may emphasize their lack of concern so as to reduce the possibility that they may be perceived as struggling (Good & Wood, 1995, Mintz & O'Neil, 1990, Shay, 1996).

## 6.2 An Overview of Prominent Themes

As is the case in most qualitative phenomenological research, the interviews yielded a large amount of data with many themes emerging (Kvale, 1997). In order to organize all of the information and provide a logical method of both collecting and discarding themes, the interviews were analyzed in relation to the original research questions and the existing masculinity literature. In organizing the main themes, it became clear that it was possible and made sense to categorize most themes under the existing five role strain types. While the experience of the men did not necessarily support the presence of these types, this structure allowed for greater comparison and contrast with the existing literature.

Prominent themes were organized into six main theme categories. The main theme categories and related sub-themes can be seen in Figure 9. The first major theme, *Different Than Dad*, refers to the frequency and variation with which the men expressed a desire to define themselves as different from their father as possible. This proved to be an enduring and overarching theme that framed many of the interviews and took on a range of meanings. The second major theme, *Growing Up Male*, contains sub-themes associated with Gender Role Trauma and the gender socialization experience of the men in general. Third, *Measuring Up to Masculinity* contains themes pertaining to Role Discrepancy and relates to the men's experience of understanding and achieving some standard of success as a man. The fourth main theme, *Masculinity in Relationships*, is associated with the role strain subtype of Role Dysfunction and includes sub-themes pertaining to success and struggle within relationships. Fifth is the major theme,

*Masculinity in Transition*, which includes sub-themes connected with Role Conflict and Stress and difficulties associated with changes in gender expectations across life transitions. Finally the sixth theme, *Reconciliation and Change*, is not directly associated with role strain types, but is included here to contain themes involving the undertaking of change in respect to the men's beliefs and behaviour.

**Figure 9: Prominent themes**

MAIN THEMES	SUB-THEMES	EXAMPLES
<b>1. Different than Dad</b>	a. Not like dad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father is a negative role model</li> </ul>
	b. Dysfunctional masculinity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Masculinity of father's time is unfulfilling and dysfunctional</li> </ul>
	c. Not the good old days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role expectations and opportunities are much less limited today than for the previous generation</li> </ul>
<b>2. Growing Up Male (Gender Role Trauma)</b>	a. Separating from mother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No report of traumatic individuation from mother though some awareness of pressure to separate</li> <li>• Mother is a positive and nurturing influence</li> <li>• Mother is not responsible for difficulties in childhood</li> </ul>
	b. The unavailable father	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father is distant, seemingly uncaring and punitive</li> <li>• Father's role as disciplinarian/ provider</li> </ul>

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|--|--|---|
|  | c. The disconnected boy                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persistent sense of isolation occurred through childhood</li> <li>• Struggle to connect with others</li> </ul>   |
|  | d. Conforming to the masculine and hiding the feminine | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong pressure to conform to masculine stereotypes</li> <li>• Elusive sense of masculinity</li> <li>• Masculinity is based in physical performance</li> <li>• Vulnerable emotions are feminine and important to hide</li> </ul> |
| <b>3. Measuring up to Masculinity (Gender Role Discrepancy)</b>  | a. Living up to the impossible                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Masculinity is an ever elusive and impossibly high standard of performance</li> </ul>  |
|  | b. The moving target of success                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Masculinity involves contradictory and constantly changing expectations</li> </ul>   |
|  | c. Coping with falling short                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Men fail to feel successful and need to cope</li> <li>• Men struggle with guilt, shame, inadequacy</li> </ul>  |
| <b>4. Masculinity in Relationships (Gender Role Dysfunction)</b> | a. Feeling unequipped                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feel as if they are unprepared for demands of relationships</li> <li>• Strong sense of needing to learn skills, unlock mystery and catch up</li> </ul>   |
|  | b. Restricted emotions                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tendency to downplay emotion</li> <li>• Struggle to seek emotional connectedness</li> <li>• Holding back on vulnerable emotions</li> </ul>   |
|  | c. Friendship and Independence                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Struggle in intimate relationships</li> <li>• Dissatisfaction with restricted social networks</li> <li>• Connections felt through fantasy</li> </ul>   |

5. Masculinity in Transition (Gender Role Conflict and Stress)	a. Intimate monogamous relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intimacy versus independence</li> <li>• Freedom versus responsibility</li> </ul>
	b. Birth of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fatherhood as transformative</li> <li>• Children as central figure that give purpose</li> </ul>
	c. Moving into mid- life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Struggle for sense of meaning and purpose</li> <li>• Struggle for meaning of work</li> </ul>
6. Reconciliation and Change	a. Avoiding the mistakes of the past	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driven toward change to avoid mistakes of the past –their own and their father’s</li> </ul>
	b. Adopting an external guide to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Men seek alternative through adopting an established set of values</li> <li>• Men seek alternatives through following a person who they emulate</li> </ul>
	c. Developing an internal guide to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop meaning and values through introspection and personal change</li> <li>• Prolonged identity questioning</li> </ul>

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### 6.3 Different Than Dad: An Overarching Theme

Despite the latitude that the semi-structured interview format provided, the men showed a remarkable consistency in the frequency and manner in which they referred to their father. In fact, almost all of the men interviewed seemed to centre their responses around the central theme of father as they repeatedly referred to specifics about him and his life. Throughout the interviews, father seemed to take on both literal and figurative meaning becoming a consistent and powerful point of reference against which men compared themselves. When father was referred to by the men, it was used in three

distinct ways. Some discussions of father involved literal and concrete references to the qualities and character of the actual fathers and usually occurred when recounting a specific memory. At other times, father was used in a more abstract sense to represent a way of being not just of father but of men of that period in general. Still other times, references to father was used to embody a time and place in history. In this sense, father was not just a specific individual, or type of masculinity, but meant as well a circumstance in a social and historical context that men of the time found themselves within.

The dominance of a father theme is noteworthy given the relatively small body of prior research that has explored the relevance and meaning of father for men. Prior research has tended to focus on the changing roles and responsibilities of fathers, rather than the tensions associated with men's identification with their own fathers (Parke & Brott, 1999; Lindsey, 1990). The various ways that the men refer to father, as well as the consistency with which this reference is used in the negative, seems important both for the prevalence in which it occurred, as well as the near uniformity of its use among the men. For example, whether father was used as a specific reference to the individual, or included the more abstract references to a way of being and time in history, for all but one of the men interviewed, references to father were almost exclusively negative. When referring to father, almost all men viewed the individual, the way of being, and the time in history as problematic, often harmful, and in need of reform. Whether it was Jeff or Greg's dogged determination to be as entirely unlike their father as possible, or Robert and Gary's dedication to building a very different life than their father, they felt strongly that both the man and the times were in dire need of change. The enduring message

seemed to be that father – whether the man, the way of being, or the place in society – was something to be as different from as possible. For the men, change seemed to be a constant theme, but always away from the “traditional” and rarely toward a clear alternative. Given the negative orientation to the past, the men tended to express a strong belief of what was to be avoided, but rarely seemed clear on alternatives to be emulated.

### **6.3.1 Not like dad**

It is widely held that chief among the important roles of fathers is to mentor their sons (Osheron, 1986). However, none of the men viewed their father as a mentor. On the contrary, most men interviewed spoke about using their father as an example of how not to be. Only Michael spoke positively about his father who was unique in being significantly older, intellectual, and physically non-intimidating. Michael expressed dissatisfaction with his father’s general disengagement from the family, but had a strong appreciation for his father’s intelligence and work ethic. Unique among the men as well, Michael’s mother was volatile and abusive, while his father was emotionally steady even if detached. In further contrast to the other men, Michael was nostalgic for, if not envious of, the seemingly uncomplicated and leisurely life that his upper-middle class father enjoyed.

For the rest of the men, there seemed to be little about their father that they strove to pattern themselves after. The men varied in terms of the degree of negativity expressed ranging between apathy and pity to bitter resentment. However, on the whole, the men seemed to find little of their fathers’ character or behaviour to admire. At best,

the men viewed their fathers as distant and one-dimensional. At worst, the men saw them as cruel and abusive. Rather than viewing father as a positive role model, most reported a determination to re-define themselves as entirely distinct. For men like Robert and John, it meant being as different from the fathers as possible. For Greg and Jeff, it meant using father as an explicit example of how never to be. They took this sentiment the furthest by striving to be their father's polar opposite. As Jeff clearly points out: "I took everything that I saw in him and inverted it and said 'I'm not going to be like that'."

### **6.3.2 Dysfunctional masculinity**

Most of the men seemed to extend their negative view of father to all of the men of the time. They seemed to share the belief that the "type" of male embodied by their father was severely limited and outdated. Whether within the realm of relationships, parenting, or work, the men generally viewed this masculine way of being as problematic and obsolete. There seemed to be a ready tendency to view men of the previous generation as practicing a homogeneous and dysfunctional form of masculinity. In so doing, the men didn't just strive to demonstrate that they were different than their father, but also entirely unlike the era of men who came before them.

### **6.3.3 Not the good old days**

While negative toward the "type" of masculinity, the men also placed it within the context of the time. They were inclined to view the previous generation as a pitiable product of their place in history. This view perhaps helped in some cases to mitigate the responsibility that they perceived their fathers as having in respect to dysfunctional and

abusive behaviour. However, the degree to which the men felt sympathetic varied considerably. Jeff and Greg both remain estranged from their fathers and continued to feel angry. Others, such as Gary and Robert, viewed their father as pathetic and hopelessly unequipped to cope with the complexity of life. They tended not to continue to feel angry at their father, just grateful perhaps that they themselves turned out differently.

Most men seemed to agree that the life handed to their father was a narrow and unsatisfying one in which men were typically relegated to the limited roles of provider and disciplinarian. Overall, the men seemed to share a view that the “old days” were anything but good for men, and that the contemporary situation, although more complex, was preferable to the past.

## **6.4 Growing Up Male: Themes Relating to Gender Role**

### **Trauma**

A second major theme category relates to the existing Role Trauma literature and associated themes of gender socialization throughout childhood. As outlined in Chapter 3, previous literature has frequently contended that men have a troubled and tension filled course toward gender identity. It is argued that boys suffer strain and trauma from a variety of events beginning with pressure to emotionally separate prematurely from their mothers. They then face an emotionally unavailable, if not abusive father, followed by repeated emotional injuries from pressures to conform to a rigid sex role stereotype.

This pattern is said to be normative for males and typically leaves most men “wounded” (Chodorow, 1989; Pleck, 1981; Levant & Kopecky, 1995; Pollack, 1998).

For the men interviewed, their experiences, though varied, seemed less dramatic and less profoundly injurious than the literature would suggest. The presence of early trauma as a result of premature separation from mother was not emphasized by the men. Most men described having a father that was emotionally unavailable, though this seemed to be a source of disappointment to them rather than trauma. Pressure throughout childhood to conform to masculine expectations was a constant theme though masculinity was more of a mystery to them than an ideal. One of the strongest themes in this category is the frequency with which the men described feeling lonely and disconnected from others.

#### **6.4.1 Separating from mother**

The literature suggests that men suffer as a result of pressure to emotionally detach from their mothers (Chodorow, 1997). There is little evidence of this within the men’s reported experience. It could be argued that these men experienced the trauma on too deep a pre-conscious level and too early in life to recognize its impact. However, the majority of men did not speak of feeling prematurely separated or pushed away from their mothers, nor any abiding sense of abandonment. Men did describe a close affiliation with their mother and some degree of awareness that growing up meant dissociating from her; however this did not seem to result in prolonged psychic injury.

Ken’s experience comes the closest to that suggested by the literature but still falls short of amounting to trauma. He described himself as having been a “momma’s

boy” often buying her small gifts and generally eager to show his devotion. As he became more involved in the culture of hockey, he says he became conscious of what felt like a feminizing closeness to his mother. He intentionally began to distance himself from her and attempted unsuccessfully to find common ground with his father. Ken recounted that the result was not traumatic, but did lead to a saddening sense of disconnection from both parents.

In respect to other themes associated with mother, the most prominent among the men was the tendency to describe mother in glowing and idealized terms. All of the men, except Michael whose mother was abusive, seemed to portray their mother as someone consistently loving and without significant fault. The men tended not to blame their mother for events in their childhood but seemed to see them as similarly suffering. A striking example is the one that Jeff provided. Jeff and his siblings were abandoned by their mother when he was nine and he never saw or heard from her again. However, while Jeff feels strong animosity toward his father, with whom he remained in contact, he tended to portray his mother in a more sympathetic light ascribing good, if misguided intentions to her actions. In general, the men seemed inclined to view their mothers as bearing little direct responsibility for the difficulties that occurred throughout their childhood and were more apt to see them as similarly powerless to make change.

#### **6.4.2 The unavailable father**

In stark contrast to mothers, fathers were viewed by most of the men as distant, uncaring, and at times intentionally punitive. The literature suggests that, in childhood, most males find their fathers emotionally unavailable and that males experience a wound

as a result of turning to their fathers only to find no meaningful response (Levant & Kopecky, 1995). As with mothers, it is difficult to find evidence of a wound in the men's experience. However without exception, the men described their fathers as detached, distant, and sometimes fearsome. Again, the individual experiences ranged considerably.

For example, Michael viewed his father as a strong provider whose emotional detachment was benign even if disappointing. In a similar but more problematic manner, Gary described his father as distant and entirely incapable of coping with the death of Gary's mother. Gary viewed his father as not abandoning him, but rather as a sympathetic, if hopelessly unhappy and unavailable man.

Many of the men described a more palpable sense of abandonment and betrayal. For example, Greg described experiencing a chronic feeling of invisibility in the eyes of his father despite his repeated attempts to gain his attention. For Greg, the final betrayal was when he discovered that his father had been maintaining a long-term extramarital affair and spinning a web of lies for years.

Continuing along the spectrum of abandonment, a number of the men described fathers whose behaviour went beyond passive neglect and involved actions that were intimidating and abusive. These fathers were objects of fear for the men and, rather than seeking connection with them, they were to be avoided altogether. For example, Robert spoke about regularly staying away from this house and avoiding any connection with a father that he rarely saw and viewed only as a source of punishment. For both John and Jeff, their fathers were domineering and frequently abusive and at all times associated the threat of violence.

It is difficult to make conclusions about the effect these events have on the men. It is unclear as to whether the term “wound” best describes the result of their experience. What can be said, perhaps, is that fathers tended to live in the background of the men’s lives playing the roles of provider and disciplinarian. Fathers were not sources of support or direction, but rather marginal figures who had little involvement in the men’s day to day upbringing while maintaining a constant aura of threat.

#### **6.4.3 Conforming to the masculine and hiding the feminine**

Socialization is said to be rigorous pressuring boys to live up to a rigid and high standard of masculinity (Pleck, 1981). Again, the men described varying experiences in respect to pressures to conform. All of the men recounted a strong awareness that conformity was important but many described unclear criteria for evaluating successful masculine performance. Most men described feeling that “acting” masculine was important, but were vague or stereotypical as to what successful masculinity actually involved. A common theme across the men involved striving toward a vague definition of maleness, while working hard to avoid anything that might be associated with femaleness.

Ken’s situation provides an example: As a young and enthusiastic hockey player aspiring to become a professional, he was thrust into a world of masculine expectations that can be more rigid and pronounced (Messner, 1992). Ken described a view of masculinity that seemed a powerful but mysterious external image. As a young player he wasn’t naturally aggressive or competitive but soon realized that this was a strong expectation and pushed himself to live up to a new and high standard. The pressure to

be successful dominated his life. As he grew up he became increasingly preoccupied with living up to expectations and discovering what “it” was that made some males more masculine than he. Even in adulthood, he seemed to continue to search for a formula for masculine success in a variety of other domains whether religion, business or relationships.

While the pressure to conform to a masculine ideal was influential for some men, avoiding behaviour that might be considered feminine was more dominant. For many of the men masculinity was more strongly defined as behaviour that was anything other than feminine (Segal, 1997). Mark’s experience is a tragic and glaring example: Mark described a “campaign of conformity” in which parents and others routinely used shame to try to “correct” his “feminine behaviour”. Interestingly, he noted that he was attacked not because he was thought to be gay, but because he was perceived as feminine. Throughout childhood the pressure and repercussions for acting in a manner considered feminine got worse for Mark. The pressure to conform was so great that Mark’s repeated failures to “act masculine” led him to abandon hope and assume more fully the feminine identity that he was accused of having. In a striking irony, after coming out as a gay man, this pressure to “act feminine” decreased whereupon he found himself naturally engaging in more stereotypical masculine pursuits.

#### **6.4.4 The disconnected boy**

Perhaps the most consistent theme among the men in respect to growing up was an abiding sense of aloneness and disconnection from others. This experience is supported in the literature (Pollack, 1998). Most of the men recalled feeling a strong

sense of separation from others. For example, Robert described spending hours alone “in the bush” skipping school to spend the day fishing. Jeff’s is a particularly striking example of disconnection. He experienced a profound sense of detachment from parents and peers and used fantasy to escape his surroundings and find some approximation of connection and acceptance. Similarly, Greg described a disconnection to the point that he came to believe that his actions had no consequence. He began to feel invisible and developed a chronic sense of living in an entirely separate world from his parents who took no interest in his behaviours even when he resorted to criminal activity. As well, Mark’s experience demonstrates the greatest and most devastating sense of disconnection of all the men. He rarely, if ever, experienced acceptance and was regularly and harshly reminded of his difference from others.

Many of the men related images of childhood that, on the surface, seemed idyllic and cliché images of boyhood. Stories of wiling away hours at a fishing hole, reading adventure novels in bed, or practicing hockey long after everyone has left all seem romantic and classically masculine. Yet, for the men, these were not times of idleness, reflection or achieved masculinity. On the contrary, they seemed all too often times of retreat in response to feeling unaccepted, unsuccessful and forgotten.

## **6.5 Measuring Up to Masculinity: Themes Relating to Gender Role Discrepancy**

Gender Role Discrepancy describes the tensions associated with failed attempts to live up to the ideals of masculinity in adulthood. Tensions occur when the individual

perceives a lack of fit between their gender identity and their perception of gender expectations (Pleck, 1978). Role strain is said to result from struggling to measure up to an ideal that is unattainable, often referred to as the Big Impossible (Gilmore, 1990). Strain also results from trying to measure success based on a changing and elusive set of gender expectations (Segal, 1997). The result for many men, it is argued, is often an abiding sense of inadequacy and shame, along with extremes of coping behaviour and a host of other psychological and behavioural problems (Gratch, 2001; Krugman, 1995; Wright, 1987).

Themes related to role discrepancy were present for the men interviewed. The strongest theme was in relation to confusion in respect to successful masculinity, rather than a sense of falling short of a clear standard. The experience of the men shows uncertainty about the criteria with which they might consider themselves successful. However, maintaining an image of successful masculinity was important for them. When the men experienced themselves as missing the mark, they often reacted strongly and turned to strategies to compensate.

### **6.5.1 Living up to the impossible**

Most of the men seemed to have a mixed, dynamic sense of what a successful male was rather than a singular “big impossible”. However, for some of them, there remained a strong experience of the existence of an external, enduring standard. Again, Ken’s experience is illustrative of this view. Beginning in childhood, his image of masculinity was dominated by external performance standards more clear than for the other men. This orientation seems to have continued through his life. The external “it”

that eluded him in hockey, and in high school, seems to represent a template for masculine behaviour that he continues to seek outside himself. Whether in hockey, fundamentalist religion, business or the beliefs held by his wife, he seemed to continue to seek a clear standard for masculine behaviour even as he continued to find himself falling short.

### 6.5.2 The moving target of success

A more prevalent theme among the men was not a view of a “big impossible”, as much as a view of masculinity as a “big confusion”. Michael provides an example in his experience of masculinity as a “moving target”. Michael’s story is a striking one: As an educated, accomplished professional, he is, by all accounts, well established and successful. With a good income, a comfortable home, and a high status job, he seems to have made it. Nevertheless, he says he feels the constant “stress of accomplishment”, a chronic dissatisfaction with his achievements, and discounts what he has done to date offhandedly saying “it has meant nothing”. He described feeling lost within various possibilities all of which are of value to him but none of which take absolute priority. For example, at various times he wants to be a highly involved father, or more accomplished author, or wealthier, or simply pursue activities of intrinsic interest. He describes, not so much feeling torn about which route to choose as unclear about how satisfying any of these options might turn out to be. He is caught within these possibilities feeling that he does none particularly well because he is incapable of seeing one route as more inherently fulfilling than another. At various times, each seemed to give him the greatest immediate satisfaction, yet later he finds his accomplishments

hollow and lacking in meaning. Even when he does do something that he initially believes is of value, his shifting standard for evaluation makes him “change the bar” and undermine his own accomplishments. The result, he says, is a lack of satisfaction, the vague ambition of a GUAVA and little sense of an enduring direction or purpose.

### **6.5.3 Coping with falling short**

Prior research suggests that, since the requirements for feeling successful as a man are beyond reach or irreconcilable, many men are potentially left with a chronic sense of gender inadequacy (Pleck, 1981; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991). In order to protect themselves from feeling inadequate, men are said to go to lengths to improve their perception of measuring up (Cournoyer, 1994; Eisler, Skidmore & Ward, 1988). The most logical way of achieving a sense of masculinity in the face of failure is to make fundamental behavioural change toward a clearer standard of success, or even to challenge the beliefs associated with the standard altogether. However, as will be discussed in a later section, meaningful and enduring change is a difficult undertaking.

However, like Michael’s experience, the literature argues that many men don’t necessarily make change in order to measure up, but instead find themselves in chronic cycles of failed attempts to feel successful. In so doing men are said to experience repeated feelings of incompetence and inadequacy as well as shame and guilt for not more successfully fulfilling the gender expectation (Cochran & Rabinovitz, 1996; Faludi, 2000; Fischer & Good, 1997; Gratch, 2001).

There is evidence in the experiences of the men interviewed to support the presence of repeated feelings of inadequacy and guilt related to their success as a man.

For example, Greg and Ken expressed ongoing experiences of feeling badly that they were falling short. These feelings seemed to leave them despairing at times and full of self-doubt. Robert was particularly quick to react to feelings of inadequacy with defensiveness and anger. He struggled to accept direction from his wife even when he knew that he needed it. Mark is a glaring example of a lifetime spent struggling with feeling less than other men. His sense of failure and hopelessness was such that he turned to alcohol and drug abuse, as well as attempted suicide.

In an interesting variation on coping with inadequacy were the experiences of John and Jeff. Studies have suggested that some men will go to great lengths to cover up or avoid feelings of shame or vulnerability (Gratch, 2001; Krugman, 1995; Lansky, 1992). The studies contend that men can be “shame phobic” and will develop substituting behaviours to avoid these feelings (Krugman, 1995). This can lead to persistent patterns of problematic behaviour such that they become entrenched and unconscious. This might account for John’s tendency to recount stories in which he portrayed himself as heroic or tragic. He repeated what seemed like exaggerated themes of either struggling to be a great man in the middle of terrible events, or finding himself lost, then rescued by someone who saw his remarkable potential. In either case, there was a dramatic unreality about his stories that seemed to keep him arm’s length from real feelings.

Jeff, on the other hand seemed to escape feeling inadequate through engaging in fantasy. He recounts spending much of his time lost in daydreams of imaginary role-play situations. The *Dungeon and Dragons* example that he provides shows how he takes on the role of an idealized male perhaps to compensate for what he feels is lacking in him during daily life. In fact, Jeff himself seems to agree that his fantasies are powerful

vehicles through which he can feel better about himself and his life. In his fantasies, he experiences excitement, danger, risk-taking and a sense of competence that he rarely finds in reality.

## **6.6 Masculinity in Relationships: Themes Relating to Gender Role Dysfunction**

Gender Role Dysfunction is said to occur for men as a result of successfully conforming to traditional masculine role expectations. The literature suggests that the normal socialization of most men fails to adequately prepare them for healthy functioning in relationships (Levant & Kopecky, 1995). For example, men are believed to routinely perform poorly in areas such as emotional awareness and expressiveness (Balswick, 1988; Levant, 1992); comfort with emotional intimacy (Fischer & Good, 1997), and the ability to accurately express empathy (Levant, 1996).

Within the experiences of the men interviewed, there seemed to be three key themes expressed by the men. Many men described feeling poorly prepared to be in relationships. There was a strong sense among the men that there existed “tools” that they simply hadn’t gotten. A second common theme supported the contention that men struggle with emotions and the inability to express them. The third supported the finding that men have difficulty maintaining comfort in intimate sexual and nonsexual relationships. In all, the men seemed concerned that they were ill-prepared to be successful in relationships. However, contrary to the literature, the difficulties described by the men were viewed by them as resulting, not from their conforming to traditional

masculinity, but rather their confusion in respect to their own expectations of relationships.

### 6.6.1 Feeling unequipped

Most men related stories of struggle to understand and meet the demands of relationships. Most seemed to have a genuine belief that somehow they just didn't know the rules, nor had all of the skills required. Almost all of them expressed a feeling that what they were doing had not been working. Much of their understanding of this struggle was framed as lacking in information or skill; as if they had not been told or taught some vital secret for relationship success. However, their struggle was also complicated by their own inability to clarify the expectations that they had of relationships. Most of the men wanted to be successful in relationships and wanted a lasting intimate partner, however many showed confusion about what kind of partner they valued the most and uncertainty as to how to make the relationship work.

In response to these feelings many of the men avoided intimate relationships, even friendships. For Greg, this has meant living life "in a fog" where others are seen as distant and detached outsiders. For John it has meant maintaining a façade of competence while keeping others from getting emotionally close. For Gary, it has meant giving up altogether on having a lasting intimate relationship. For Mark, it has meant dividing sexual relationships from emotionally intimate ones; having sexual encounters without emotional closeness and companionship without sexual involvement.

The other common response among the men to feeling unequipped has been to seek out the skills necessary or adopt a formula that will show them how relationships

are best done. The men varied in terms of their strategies, from seeking relatively quick weekend seminars to lengthy processes of reflection and personal psychotherapy. In Ken's case, he seems to have searched for a complete blueprint for how life should be lived trying on various philosophies and expert guidance. For Robert, it has been grudgingly taking direction from his wife. However, for many of the men, such as Mark and Gary, it has meant embarking on a lengthy journey of self discovery. Rather than simply looking for quick fixes, a number of the men determined that they needed to decide for themselves what it is that they believe in and are looking for in their lives. This longer term approach demonstrates that many men weren't looking for a simple update on how to be a man, but rather undertook a prolonged period of sorting out confusion and uncertainty in respect to their own masculinity.

### **6.6.2 Restricted emotions**

The role strain literature makes much of the contention that a large part of men's inability to successfully relate to others is a result of emotional underdevelopment (Balswick, 1988; Goleman, 1995; Gratch, 2001; Pollack, 1999). It is difficult to make conclusions about the men's relative emotional literacy from the interviews. However, many of them describe feeling emotionally disconnected at times and express a belief that they need to get better at understanding and expressing themselves. This belief seemed to coincide with their dissatisfaction with many aspects of their lives and their determination to improve their skills required for relationships. However, many of the men also seemed acutely aware of the stereotype of traditional men that portrays them as emotionally immature or underdeveloped. Many of the men seemed to share a

conviction that they were not going to live up to the stereotype. Like their determination to be different than the previous generation, they were determined to demonstrate that they valued greater emotional awareness. Thus the men's belief that their emotions were restricted seemed driven in part by actual experience, but also a desire to be seen as taking a contrary position to that of traditional masculinity. Gary is a striking example of this. Gary went to great lengths to undo the imperative "use your head, not your heart" so often repeated and demonstrated by his father. Gary joined a men's group, entered into therapy and has dedicated himself to being emotionally open while encouraging other men to do the same.

A theme that also figured prominently across most of the men supports the recent literature on masculine emotions. Increasingly an important aspect of emotional health is considered to be emotional literacy or the ability to use emotion-driven passions and convictions to focus goals and priorities. Here the channelling of emotions is used to maintain a sense of direction and priorities (Goleman, 1995). Maintaining a sense of focus and emotional conviction was difficult for them. Many showed uncertainty in respect to a strong sense of direction or purpose. Like Greg's feeling of being in a fog, or Michael's vague ambition, they seemed unable to draw upon strong and clear emotions to motivate themselves and set priorities. Emotions were focused only for brief periods and rarely amounted to enduring convictions. At other times, beliefs could be espoused, but the men lacked the emotional consistency to turn the beliefs into behaviour. The result was often a vague and changeable sense of direction and ambition.

### 6.6.3 Friendship and independence

For many of the men, struggle within relationships went beyond sexual partners to include all aspects of social networks. Most men expressed that they had few satisfying relationships of any kind in their lives. In particular the men reported having few male friends to which they felt close. A number of men seemed nostalgic about their adolescence and noted that this was the last period in their lives in which they felt close to other males. Willingness to seek out new friendships seemed to involve mixed reactions. The men wanted friendships, but were also concerned that having friends might require giving up independence and compromising autonomy. There seemed to be a sense that entering into friendships was difficult because they had little in common with other males that went beyond traditionally masculine activities. There was a sense that in order to connect with other males they would have to engage in stereotypically masculine behaviours. There was also uncertainty as to what friendship with a male might involve if not traditionally masculine activities.

Robert is a good example of this experience. His friends from adolescence still live close to him and he has occasional contact with them. He desires male friendships but doesn't want to have relationships on the same terms as when he was a teenager. However, he seems unclear and pessimistic about what other terms for friendships might exist. In the end, he is caught between the desire for new types of friendships and the belief that such relationships aren't possible.

## 6.7 Masculinity in Transition: Themes Relating to Gender

### Role Conflict

The expectations of men do not remain static throughout their lives. It has been long understood that gender expectations change as a result of significant life transitions. Men are said to be required to re-evaluate old concepts of masculinity and integrate new ones as the central values of gender identity are fundamentally challenged (O'Neil, 1990, O'Neil, Good, & Holmes, 1995). This is particularly difficult for men who hold a more rigid gender identity and hold stricter views on masculinity (O'Neil & Good, 1997).

The men interviewed described a variety of life transitions that posed challenges to their priorities, values and gender identity. Their experience seemed to support the significance of life transitions, but reflected a more complex and ongoing transition process than a simple struggle to let go of an old way in order to adapt to the new. Rather than abandoning a clear and traditional identity, transitions tended to create a greater urgency for men to clarify an uncertain gender identity. Difficulties arose when there were pressures to move from a stage in which an unclear gender identity was more acceptable, to stages in which there were greater pressures to clarify gender expectations and commit to a set of related priorities and behaviours. Although there were a variety of events in the men's lives in which transitions can be said to have occurred, three periods stand out as particularly challenging and meaningful. These are: (1) *committing to an intimate, monogamous relationship*, (2) *becoming a parent*, and (3) *moving into mid-life*.

### 6.7.1 The intimate monogamous relationship

Many of the men resisted involving themselves in a committed, intimate relationship until well into their adulthood. It is often argued that men in general perceive such relationships as requiring the giving up of independence and autonomy, as well as having to take on a less carefree, more responsible life (Gratch, 2001). To a limited degree, the experiences of the men support this contention. For example, Robert describes his struggle to let go of a life of “good naked fun” in exchange for what he perceived to be a more satisfying but mundane life of maturity and compromise with his wife.

Most of the men did not describe their experience of entering into a relationship as requiring the giving up of a valued way of being. The struggle for the men in respect to intimate relationships seemed not because it involved loss, so much as involved wading into a territory where the uncertainty of expectations threatened their identity. They were not resistant because they were required to stop behaviour that they valued, but instead were uncertain of the relationship’s terms which left them feeling awkward, unsure and intimidated. For example, Ken, Greg, and Michael all expressed stress associated with not knowing the expectations of intimate relationships. Particularly, they seemed to struggle to be clear and comfortable with the place that they held within the relationship. This uncertainty went beyond roles and extended into a more complex sense of values, priorities and meanings within the partnership.

In all, for the men who have tried to commit to a monogamous, long-term relationship there seems much about their place within it that they needed to clarify. This

lack of clarity is compounded by having to work out these expectations with another person. Negotiation could be difficult and threatening. Robert's example is striking in the approach and avoidance pattern that he seems to demonstrate in relation to his wife. He begins by seeking her direction and approval, and then becomes adversarial and critical of her judgement and "controlling" manner. He seeks a closer, more harmonious relationship with her, then becomes uncomfortable and resists it. For Robert, the territory of relationships seems so unknown that he is overwhelmed by feelings of incompetence as he gets closer and then reacts by aggressively putting up barriers.

### **6.7.2 The birth of children**

For the men who had children, this was the most dramatic and transformative event of their lives. The birth of a child tended to create an urgent need to re-evaluate expectations, but also created a more fundamental crisis of identity. The men were faced, in a very literal way, with the urgent task of demonstrating that they were different than their father. They were thrust into having to quickly abandon traditional masculine expectations, but in leaving these behind were left with utter uncertainty. However, as much as the birth of a child was disorienting, the child provided a clear sense of purpose and direction to the men. Despite the fact that the men found the birth of their child to cause upheaval, it also gave them a singular sense of direction and purpose. Children became the central and defining focus of their lives.

Robert demonstrates this in his panic that followed the birth of his first child along with his transformation to making children the central priority in his life. He described going from feeling entirely incompetent where parenting was concerned to a

powerful devotion to his sons and an absolute sense of responsibility and protectiveness over them. Greg is a similar example. Initially he was fearful and resistant to becoming a father, especially since the birth was unplanned. However, he struggled to adapt and realized that with his child came a profound responsibility to not repeat the mistakes of his father. His son became the central focus of his life. John's story is along similar lines. In fact John's centrality of focus to his children is such that he has virtually no other relationships in his life.

Contrary to the stereotype of traditional masculinity, being an involved and dedicated father quickly became the highest priority in the men's lives. Children created an urgent crisis for the men in respect to parenting expectations, but children also provided a clear focus and a concrete way of enacting their determination to be a different kind of man.

### **6.7.3 Meaning in mid-life**

Among the older men interviewed, there seemed to be a greater tendency to articulate their struggle in broader terms such as a search for meaning and identity clarity. They seemed more inclined to ask fundamental questions, undertake prolonged periods of introspection, and frame their struggle as ongoing rather than urgent and situational. Along these lines, there seemed to be a greater tendency to think more about who they would like to become, and increasingly less about moving away from the past. For example, Michael took a more detached and philosophical approach to understanding his struggles and saw them as ultimately involving having to decide what gives his life meaning. Gary also seemed to view his struggles as involving an internal exploration

rather than a search for answers outside himself. Even Ken, who has been among the most inclined to look for solutions from outside sources, seemed to begin to develop his own view of who he is and how he would like to be.

For the men, the period throughout their 20s and 30s seemed to be characterised by establishing a life for themselves according to perceived external expectations. There seems greater emphasis on conforming, rebelling, or simply trying to cope. For men such as John and Jeff there seemed less inclination to ask deeper questions in respect to themselves and their lives, and instead focus their energies on acquiring a degree of stability and material comfort. However, as the men moved toward mid-life, there seemed a greater tendency to experience uncertainty and more explicitly question basic assumptions about masculinity. Along these lines there seemed less sense of urgency to resolve situational struggles and an increased awareness of the complexity of life. This led the men to be more intentional and considered in questioning the things that gives their life meaning and purpose.

## **6.8 Reconciliation and Change**

Although there is a great deal of emphasis in the masculinity literature on the need for men to change, there is little information about how men have gone about trying to make meaningful change in their lives. While the literature focuses on what men should change, it assumes that men accomplish change through the predictable processes such as participation in therapy or in consciousness-raising groups (Gratch, 2001; Levant, 1990; Levant & Kopecky, 1995). There is little research on men who have initiated and undertaken their own change. This is surprising given that self-changing is

the most common strategy for men, particularly since most men are loath to attend counselling or groups (Robertson & Fitzgerald, 1992).

Virtually all of the men found themselves in the position of wanting to change away from a previous ways of being but had little in the way of alternatives. In effect, they knew what they did not want to be, but were confused about other possibilities. This confusion is compounded by the masculine expectation to remain clear and certain in respect to gender identity. Men are caught dissatisfied with the status quo, but continue to feel pressure to accept it all the same (O'Neil & Good, 1997).

In examining the men's attempt to change, three themes emerged. The first theme was in respect to the driving force behind the change. As has been repeatedly emphasized, behind the need for the men to change has been their determination to avoid past mistakes. Most men felt that they had followed a way of being that had caused them to fail in the past and risk failure in the future. Their change efforts were frequently an attempt to ensure that the pattern was not repeated. The next two themes were related to one another in that they represent two different strategies relied upon by the men to guide their change through the unknown. One strategy was to seek direction for change through adopting an established set of beliefs. Since giving up old beliefs and behaviours left the men potentially bereft, adopting an authoritative set of beliefs provided immediate direction and some degree of security. The second strategy, though less commonly used by the men, was to develop their own beliefs through trial and error and lengthy introspection.

### **6.8.1 Avoiding the mistakes of the past**

As has already been discussed, much of the men's drive to change was precipitated by wanting to avoid past mistakes. These included mistakes that they had made, as well as mistakes they believed their fathers to have made. Each of the men showed ample evidence of this thinking: Jeff avoids anything that reminds him of his father, whether it is eating meat, camping or the expression of anger; Greg struggles to prove that he has a visible presence in his son's life unlike the disengagement of his own father; Robert has given up seeking status through his job and instead strives to make his family his central focus; Gary struggles to be open and expressive unlike the emotional detachment of his father; Mark struggles to commit to an intimate relationship on his own terms instead of avoiding intimacy or pretending that he is someone else. All of the men are engaged in moving away from the past, even when their future seems difficult and uncertain.

### **6.8.2 Adopting an external guide to change**

Moving away from traditional beliefs and behaviour is difficult. Even if old patterns are problematic they remain familiar and provide some degree of structure and predictability. The most common strategy among the men was to give up old behaviour through attempting to replace the behaviour with a pre-established set of values, beliefs and behaviours. These could take many forms from comprehensive systems to somewhat piecemeal ideas, from experts and authorities to partners and mentors. Regardless of the form, many of the men gravitated toward this strategy. Rather than leaving themselves bereft of guidance, and rather than risking more mistakes by seeking

their own guidance, many of the men sought guidance from external sources. Ken's experience is the clearest example of striving to find an established, external roadmap for successful behaviour. Ken went from the doctrine of hockey, to Christianity, to entrepreneurial business, and more recently looks to his wife for the path to success and contentment. Similarly, Greg became involved in a self-help program and adopted its philosophy and tenets to guide him. Robert, rather than following an established doctrine, follows his wife's direction. Despite the fact that it is hard on his pride, he grudgingly believes that his wife's way is better than his old way. John and Jeff have taken on mixtures of fantasy and external façade in order to act out ways of being that may not be their own, but they perceive them to be better.

### **6.8.3 Developing an internal guide to change**

A strategy that was used less frequently involved a great deal more introspection and insight. These men seemed to not follow a pre-set path of change, but rather had spent many years developing their own sense of who they are and how they want to be. Mark and Gary are examples of men who seem to be guided more by internal personalized beliefs than the adoption of outside belief systems. Both came across in the interviews as particularly insightful and rigorously honest. Both had spent many years in personal counselling, and Gary had also spent many years in men's support groups. They have a strong sense of themselves and what they want from life. Interestingly as well, neither of these men have children. As much as having children enabled men to readily have a central focus, perhaps not having children has allowed these two men to take more time and develop a greater variety of things in their lives that gave them meaning.

Although developing their own set of values and beliefs was time consuming, they seemed clearer about their priorities and less inclined to focus on the past than the younger men and those with children.

## 6.9 Summary

Each of the men interviewed raised a variety of themes relating to men and masculinity. Despite their differences, they shared a number of experiences. Perhaps the strongest theme across the men was the regularity of change in their lives and the consistency with which change was directed away from men of the previous generation. All of the participants sought to define themselves very differently than their perception of men of the past. The central point of reference tended to be father; however, it was generalized to include all men of the previous era. Men also described pressure over the course of their lives to conform to masculine expectations; these expectations were powerful though vague and often defined in negative terms.

One of the stronger themes across the men was their tendency to feel disconnected from others and unequipped for success in relationships. This was true of intimate relationships, but also of friendships. Relationships were difficult for the men because they seemed unclear about what they wanted and struggled with knowing the expectations of themselves and others.

A number of life events challenged the men to transform themselves. Each transition seemed to bring a new round of uncertainty in respect to masculine expectations. Committed relationships were difficult for many of the men as they were challenge to gain greater clarity in respect to mutual expectations. The birth of children

was perhaps the most dramatic of transitions bringing with it both the very literal determination to be a different dad, as well as providing a powerful and central focus for life. The men who had entered into mid-life seemed more likely to better identify and articulate ongoing struggles with meaning and clarity of identity.

Overall, the men described experiences of what might be considered strain and stress, but this seemed less to do with feeling torn between opposing roles, and more about uncertainty and confusion in respect to who they are and how expect their lives to be.

## Chapter 7: Summary, Conclusions and Implications

### 7.1 Introduction

Throughout the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, much of what it means to be a man had been called into question. Essentialist assumptions of a biologically determined masculinity had been roundly challenged. Functionalist beliefs in traditional masculinity as a necessary framework within a healthy society had been undermined. Gay and Women's liberation movements, along with an increasingly popular post-modern epistemology had all sharply criticized traditional masculinity as oppressive and hegemonic. Traditional masculinity was seen as inextricably linked to beliefs and practices that maintained a patriarchal social order and its various forms of social injustice.

Masculinity was seen as having fallen out of line with contemporary society. Men were changing but were still dragging their feet, failing to keep up with the grand social changes of the latter part of the century. A crisis of masculinity was declared by gender scholars: men were not merely steps behind their female counterparts, but altogether lost in a tide of social change. In academic literature, in popular self-help books, and in the media, men were routinely viewed as desperately in need of reform—either foolishly out of touch with contemporary society or stubbornly clinging to their power and status of a bygone era. The transformation of men became popularized. With the view that men too suffer within the confines of traditional masculinity, and the increasingly acceptance of Gender Role Strain as the problem to be tackled, men became the focus of interest and

possibility. Research programs and skill building seminars were undertaken to understand the plight of men and help bring them into the next century.

However, now, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the urgency to change men has all but disappeared. The optimism about fundamentally transforming gender seems to have lost its steam. The tension and activism of the 1970s, the experimentation of the 1980s, and the reconstruction and reform of the 1990s lost momentum as the century turned. The deconstructive powers and rich critique of post-modernism, once so full of promise, has left the sex and gender debate full of doubt and uncertainty. Lacking polarization, the debate also lacks focus and passion. In the face of some progress, greater confusion and much complexity, the public concern for gender has waned and fallen off the radar screen. Once highly contentious and urgent, discussions about differences between men and women and their respective place in society have been largely relegated to academic circles and marginal interest groups.

The “crisis” of masculinity seems to have blown over. The discourse, once thriving, is increasingly viewed as a topic that has become exhausted and beyond resolution. But while the popularity of transforming masculinity has all but died off, the central questions remain. With no clear resolution of the issues, the legacy of the latter part of the 20th century is uncertain. What is the state of contemporary men? What happened to the masculinity crisis? Are men still suffering from Gender Role Strain? Did Role Strain really describe men’s experience? How have men themselves understood and negotiated the changes in masculinity over the last several decades? Where does the future of masculinity lie?

This study was developed to explore these questions with a small group of men who have lived through the decades of dramatic experimentation and change in gender roles. The study has sought to better understand the ways in which these men have experienced struggles associated with masculinity over time. It has explored how these men have fared throughout the “crisis of masculinity” and asked where they are now. The study has also sought to revisit the relevance of Gender Role Strain for these men; the phenomenon said to be at the heart of contemporary men’s difficulties.

## 7.2 Summary of Study

The study was predicated upon a number of observations in respect to the existing literature on masculinity. As indicated above, the first was the general acceptance and wide influence of Gender Role Strain as the construct that best describes the experience of men (Levant & Pollack, 1995). The second was recognition of the relative disappearance of a thriving masculinity discourse (Clatterbaugh, 1997). The third was the rarity of in-depth, qualitative research into the actual experiences of men as compared to the preponderance of quantitative work that has tended to accept Gender Role Strain as a given (O’Neil, Good & Holmes, 1995). Finally, the fourth was that Gender Role Strain, while widely accepted as the best way to understand and guide men, has been roundly criticized as a wholly inadequate framework for understanding masculinity as a complex phenomenon (Connel, 1995; Segal, 1997).

Given the above observations, this study was designed to attempt to better understand post-women’s movement changes in masculinity by exploring in detail the lives of men who have lived through these changes. It has sought to re-examine many of

the taken-for-granted assumptions about changes in masculinity through the use of exploratory, in-depth interviews with a small, but broad-ranging group of men. The six questions that underpinned the study are again seen in Figure 10.

**Figure 10: Research questions**

1. *How have men born and raised in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century experienced conflicts or tensions associated with masculinity? How have these tensions changed for them over time?*
2. *What themes underlie these conflicts or tensions?*
3. *How have men managed or attempted to reconcile these conflicts or tensions?*
4. *What might the different experiences of men say about how masculinity is experienced and constructed?*
5. *What might the different experiences of men say about whether role strain exists as a apt metaphor to describe the phenomenon in question?*
6. *What might the different experiences of men tell us about how conflicts and tensions associated with masculinity can be addressed?*

Eight men were selected for interviewing through snowball and purposive sampling strategies. Men were included in the study based on their willingness to participate and consideration was given to include men that varied across common demographic variables such as education, marital status, age, number of children, and employment. Each participant was interviewed at length using a semi-structured interview process that included a wide range of topics beginning in childhood and across the life span. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed according to the

presence of dominant themes. The results of the interviews were compared and contrasted with the extant literature on masculinity and Gender Role Strain.

### 7.3 Summary of Findings

The interviews generated a great deal of data with a wide range of themes associated with masculinity and role strain. The findings were able to be logically organized into six main theme categories relating to the types of role strain dominant in the research literature.

The first major theme category is striking for the frequency with which it appeared in all of the interviews and operated as a framework to rationalize the need for change. This is the tendency for the men to view their father and his time as an undesirable, if not entirely negative, example of a masculine way of being. The men shared a strong desire and determination to adopt different characteristics and to have a very different life than that of their father. In the course of one generation the change that they have attempted to undertake seems considerable.

The second theme category relates to the strain type of Gender Role Trauma. This includes observations involving pressures associated with growing up and the socialization experience of participants. In many respects, the findings challenge the notion that masculine identity formation is inherently traumatic. However, the interview responses support the contention that men experience strong pressures throughout this period to conform to a powerful, yet amorphous standard of masculinity, while avoiding all behaviour considered feminine. A recurring theme among the men was also the tendency to view mother with great affection, while describing the relationship with

father as difficult, disconnected, and at times abusive. Also of note was the prevalence with which men reported feeling a strong sense of disconnection from others.

The third main theme category relates to the strain type of Gender Role Discrepancy and involves the men's perception of the degree to which they have successfully measured up to the expectations of masculinity. The findings suggest that the men experienced very little sense of achieving a successful gender identity given the contradictory and confusing criteria for masculinity. For the men, the difficulty of feeling successful seemed to be more as a result of a confusing or changeable standard of masculinity rather than a standard that is too narrow or too high. Relatedly, the men went to various lengths to compensate for feeling they had missed the "moving target".

The fourth theme continues along the strain types with the category of Gender Role Dysfunction. This area relates to the level of skill and preparedness men experience themselves as having to perform successfully in relationships. Struggles with intimacy, emotional awareness and expressiveness, as well as general feelings of incompetence in relationship recurred here. Most of the men described difficulty in maintaining close connections with others, yet they also set this as a high priority in their lives. Along with the struggle, came a range of emotions including frustration, inadequacy, embarrassment, and guilt for not performing in relationships with greater competence.

The fifth theme was within the strain types of Role Stress and Conflict. This pertained to changing definitions and expectations of masculinity as a result of life transitions. In particular, there existed three events that both fundamentally challenged the men, as well as provided them with an opportunity for a more focused sense of direction and purpose. The events were: entering into a committed, monogamous

relationship; the birth of children; and coping with competing values in mid-life. For the men who experienced these events, these were critical times in which many of their most central assumptions about masculinity were undermined.

The final theme category involves the men's attempts to make change toward re-defining themselves. The findings suggest that all of the men interviewed worked to either adapt to imposed change or toward change that they set for themselves. Much of the focus seemed driven by a view that the past, both their own and their father's, was undesirable. Given this orientation, the direction for future change was unclear. Some men responded by developing their own sense of direction, while others seemed to adopt direction from other sources and individuals. However, all of the men placed high value on making changes in their lives, even though they shared a view that change was threatening and difficult.

## 7.4 Conclusions

While the experience of the men varied greatly, their stories showed recurrent themes such that some conclusions can be drawn. Most notably, all of the men experienced multiple pressures to change coming from various sources. Given these many pressures, undertaking change was complex and uncertain in which the men felt little sense of direction. Each of the men also tended to limit their view of change to involving only themselves. They viewed the problem as coming from own inadequacies and thus viewed the solution as undertaking a personal project to overcome their failings. The Gender Role Strain Paradigm and its various strain types did not seem to fit the experience of the men particularly well. While some of their experiences are reflected

masculinity as profoundly faulty. This belief seemed to coincide with the broader tendency to view most men as defective or in need of change.

3. *That the beliefs and behaviour associated with traditional masculinity need to be replaced.* On the heels of the preceding belief is the conviction that masculinity requires transformation. Successful transformation involves fundamentally changing the values and practices of traditional masculinity to bring it up to more “modern” standards.
4. *That men themselves are personally flawed and in need of reform.* The preferred manner with which transformation occurs is on a personal level. Since the problem is one of personal dysfunction, the solution is seen as requiring personal reform. While this belief was applied generally, it tended to be most readily self-applied. Each of the men tended to view themselves as in need of transformation.
5. *That men feel isolated and believe that changes in gender expectations will bring about greater connection.* Most of the men expressed chronic feelings of disconnection from others, as well as a belief that greater connection was possible and preferable. Personal transformation was thought to be the vehicle through which men can achieve a deeper and most meaningful sense of connection with others. Interestingly, many of the men described only marginal success with achieving a lasting sense of connection. Despite this experience, they remained optimistic that change would bring about greater connectivity and the future would be better than the past.
6. *That success as a male is highly desirable, even in the midst of unclear criteria.* Despite frequent frustrations and many failures in regard to living up to the demands of masculinity, there was a shared view that feeling successful as a man remained very important

even with the knowledge that any standard of measure was unclear and likely unrealistic. Even for the men who felt strongly that they were aiming at a “moving target”, they continued to work hard to reach it. Similarly, the men who may have felt less directly successful in this respect found other vehicles through which to feel positive about their masculinity.

7. *That men need a sense of purpose and direction.* Given that traditional masculinity was seen largely as a collection of beliefs and behaviours to be abandoned, the men had a strong desire to have some other structure to put in its place. The men struggled for a sense of purpose since much of their definition of masculinity seemed to hinge on it. Some men went to great lengths to be introspective and develop a personal sense of purpose, while most were more likely to adopt a framework from someone they admired or was in was position of authority.

#### **7.4.2 The Men’s View of Change: A Personal Project of Self-reform**

Despite many opportunities to do so throughout the interviews, most of the men rarely connected their experience with larger social movements in respect to gender. Most men did not express a felt connection to any aspects of men’s movements, nor were the men critical of the changes pressed by the Women’s movement. In fact, the men rarely linked the changes that they undertook with a larger social or historical context outside themselves. There was awareness that other men were also changing, however the men tended to view their change as unique and very personal pressed by the smaller forces of their private lives. Each man seemed to view himself on a separate path of self-reform; each his own private project of self-change propelled by the need to

separate from the past and aspire to a better future. Most of the men were not inclined to view their struggle as universal. Instead, they felt a personal responsibility to change for their own wellbeing and for the good of those close to them.

Despite the personalized context of change, the pressure and complexity of undertaking change was considerable. The men varied in the degree to which they had successfully made substantive change in their lives, yet all had made change a priority. While they had employed various strategies to both adapt to imposed change, as well as initiate change on their own, they showed a number of commonalities in respect to the change process. What can be said about the men's experience of change is as follows:

1. *That change lacks clear success criteria:* Most of the change was driven by moving away from the past. For most men, change meant ending particular beliefs and behaviour rather than adopting new ones. Change tended to be defined in vague terms that made it difficult for men to measure progress.
2. *Change lacks a guide to direct change and often is reaction to dissatisfaction:* The abandonment of past behaviours and lack of clarity in respect to a "new masculinity" left men with feeling bereft in respect to direction. This led to many men seeking sources of direction. Some men developed their own "guide" to change, while other men adopted direction from external sources.
3. *Change is often viewed as gaining skills:* Most of the men viewed change as "getting better" at doing certain things. Change for them often seemed to be framed as gaining competence or overcoming inadequacies. In this way, change also seemed to be understood as finding a resolution or way to fixing an old behaviour.

4. *The change process is inherently threatening to self-image:* Undertaking change did not necessarily lead to greater feelings of competence. On the contrary, many found the pressure to change very threatening. Men coped with this pressure in various ways since maintaining some sense of competence and pride seemed to be crucial for most of the men.
5. *Successful change often involved developing greater clarity in respect to fundamental values and beliefs.* The men who seemed to feel more confident and comfortable with themselves tended to have changed through a more prolonged period of internal questioning and struggle. Change seemed to be experienced as more successful and transformative to the men when they were personally challenged to question fundamental beliefs. While this might have been a lengthier and unsettling process it brought about a greater clarity of belief which in turn seemed to improve the men's overall feeling about themselves.

#### **7.4.3 The Experience of Masculinity: More Than Just Role Strain**

The experiences of the men suggest that the struggles they have in relation to masculinity are more complex than the Gender Role Strain metaphor allows. Role Strain implies that men are caught between the old and the new; that they straddle conflicting sets of expectations in respect to how men should be. The metaphor further implies that the solution lies in helping men move into a new set of roles and the letting go of the past (Levant & Kopecky, 1997). However, for these men, their experience seems to support the criticism that role strain is too simplistic and superficial a construct, and ultimately a poor fit with the actual lived experience of men (Kimmel & Messner, 1989).

The men rarely spoke in terms of merely experiencing pressures between conflicting role demands. To suggest that their struggle was best summed up as finding themselves expected to perform a given role, yet pressured to fulfill another, is too simplistic. The experience of the men seems indicate a phenomenon much more fluid and complex.

For example, the men rarely talked about simple straining situations in their lives such as finding themselves caught between a nurturer and provider role. Instead they were more apt to struggle to define on a more fundamental level what a nurturer or provider might be for them. Thus, in many cases there weren't competing standards of expectations, but rather expectations that had been fundamentally challenged and overturned. Likewise, the men seemed to be less influenced by striving to conform to masculine stereotypes and more likely to attempt to abandon them altogether.

The experiences of the men also challenge the notion of role norm violation as the source of distress. Contrary to the literature, the men don't seem to have experienced role norm violation since they had already abandoned any belief in the superiority of a set of established role norms. For them, any gender ideal had become an entirely ambiguous construct. Thus, psychological distress didn't arise from the violation of norms, but more likely from the lack of any set of norms. It seems more reasonable to conclude that the men experience difficulties not because they break the rules in respect to gender, but instead have ascertained that the established rules are seriously flawed and have been set adrift. They aren't pulled between two poles, or even struggling to break free of a dominant pole; instead they have largely broken free and are wandering without clear aim. To add to the potential for distress, the men haven't merely abandoned the "old" masculinity; they feel strongly negative toward it. Yet an alternative masculinity

remains unclear to many of them. The natural tendency then to revert back to the known means associating themselves with something that is entirely unacceptable for them.

In breaking down the Role Strain metaphor into its various types, the metaphor continues to oversimplify the experiences of the men. Aspects of the construct describe part of the men's struggles, but overall the reliance upon a metaphor that assumes polarization between standards of masculinity fails to capture the complexity of their experience. The following conclusion can be offered:

1. *There is little evidence of normative traumatic socialization.* Contrary to the central contention of the Gender Role Strain literature, with one exception, the majority of men did not report socialization experiences that they described as traumatic. They experienced pressure to conform throughout childhood, but did not describe the outcome as one that left them deeply wounded. Any trauma that did exist seemed to be at the hands of an abusive parent and was less about normative masculine socialization and more about parenting approaches that were domineering and cruel.
2. *Masculinity remains defined opposed to femininity.* It has been argued that masculinity has never had a clear set of criteria and has generally been defined as simply anything that is not viewed as feminine (Segal, 1997). This seems truer than ever from the experience of the men. In support of aspects of the notion of Gender Role Discrepancy, the men expressed feeling that they do not measure up to the standard of masculinity. However, as previously stated, the men do not appear to be judging themselves against a gender ideal as much as continuing to hold an ambiguous view that successful masculine is the absence of femininity.

3. *Contemporary masculinity is defined opposed to an image of traditional masculinity.* To further obfuscate the criteria for successful masculinity, the men not only viewed success as not being feminine, but have another vague yet powerful admonition against which to judge themselves: to not be a “traditional male”. In both cases, men potentially feel unsuccessful when they perceive themselves as displaying anything approaching feminine or traditionally masculine attributes. Again, masculinity remains in the vague realm of what a man isn’t, rather than what a man actually is.
4. *The criteria for successful masculinity is constantly changeable and influenced by life stages.* As a final complicating element, any aspects of the criteria for successful masculinity seems to be altered by life events and overturned by transitions into new life stages. For example, what might have made men feel successful in their early twenties become beliefs and behaviours in direct conflict with success in married life. This goes beyond reconciling conflicting roles and involves the deeper shifting of fundamental values and beliefs.
5. *Men feel inadequately prepared for relationships.* The Gender Role Dysfunction literature suggests that men are routinely socialized into ways of being that leave them inadequate and flawed in their ability to be successful in relationships. This view holds that men undergo poor training to prepare them for life and thus require reform. There seems little doubt that the men perceived themselves in need of reform, and felt ill equipped for some aspects of life. However, that the men felt woefully inadequate seems unsurprising given the above vague and changing criteria for successful masculinity. Therefore, it may not be simply that they are lacking skills; it seems also likely that any male, when comparing themselves against a standard that

is defined by negative, vague and changeable terms, would experience themselves as inevitably coming up short.

#### **7.4.4 A Struggle for Identity and Meaning**

The focus on roles as the source of difficulty seems to deal with only one aspect of a more complex experience for the men interviewed. More light can be shed on the difficulties facing these men when all elements of the construct of gender are re-considered. As stated early in Chapter 3, Clatterbaugh (1997) suggests that gender involves the intersection of four influences: gender roles, gender ideals, gender stereotypes, and gender identity. For the men studied, all four of the influences have become increasingly vague and changeable over the last several decades: roles have broadened, ideals have become more diffuse, stereotypes more varied, and identity more open to change. In many respects, this broadening seems a positive and progressive development. However, the experience of the men seems to indicate that the struggle for clarity of identity is at the heart of the difficulties that they describe. Confusion and change in respect to identity seems to better capture the complexity and depth of the struggle that the men relate. Along with the struggle for identity seems to also go an upheaval of meaning. The two related constructs provide a much more fruitful framework for understanding the difficulties that men face.

Identity has been the subject of a great deal of examination outside the masculinity literature and is generally considered a complex phenomenon shaped by a range of personal and social forces (Truett Anderson, 1997; Gergen, 1999; Ludwig, 1997, Taylor, 1989). Within the masculinity literature, identity has received relatively little

attention and has been limited to describing men's subjective sense of successfully fulfilling gender expectations (Clatterbaugh, 1997). However, even in this limited sense, identity seems to better reflect the realm of struggle for the men.

Central to the concept of modern identity is the idea of a clear and enduring self with predictable beliefs, behaviours and associated self-perceptions (Truett Anderson, 1997). Many authors have pointed out however that post-modernism has radically challenged how we understand identity and has undermined much of its certainty and clarity (Gergen, 1999). The criteria with which an individual arrives at a sense of self and respective place in society involving the alignment of values, beliefs, practices, traditions, and social status have all been fundamentally upheaved (Ludwig, 1997). This has been particularly unsettling for groups of people who once held identities of clarity and status, but whose very same practices are now associated with dysfunction or oppression (Gergen, 1999). This fits well with the experience of the men. The struggles that the men relate seem to more regularly involve questions of who they are and who they are striving to become. Having rejected the traditional masculine identity with no clear alternative in sight, they are left with pressure to create a new identity, but lack clear criteria for going about the process.

This seems to be a serious complication for the men, since what constitutes a "clear identity" has changed as a result of the post-modern shift. Identity can no longer be evaluated on the criteria of the past. The men can no longer rely on evaluating the fit between their self-perception and the essentialist gender ideals of productivity or strength as the way to confirm their identity. The men see this as an outmoded way of viewing masculinity and thus essentialist criteria leaves them unconvinced of their

success. However, the men are not free of these old meanings of masculinity. Much of the old meanings associated with masculinity have taken on negative connotations. New meanings are required in their place but the process of meaning creation is a slow and difficult one for the men. The new identity canvas is not blank since many of the old meanings of masculinity continue to linger and influence the way men view gender. As a further complication gender identity is not simply developed by each male individually. Instead, identity is a relational and complex process involving personal and social forces. Individuals shape identity, but so too does society.

## **7.5 Implications of the Research**

The experience of the men who participated in this study suggests, at least for them, that the seeming disappearance of the masculinity crisis is not as a result of its resolution. The men do not describe settling into a new and contemporary set of gender roles, nor do they describe returning to conventional ones. Nor do they, in fact, describe struggling between the contemporary and conventional. The men do not seem to be caught within role strain. The Gender Role Strain Paradigm fails to fully reflect the dynamic phenomenon that the men recount. However, the men do describe a struggle—one that often seems prolonged, personal, fundamental and irresolvable.

The men's experience in many respects mirrors the broader changes in regard to how individual and group identities are shaped as a result of social changes linked with postmodernism. These changes have posed strong challenges to the certainty and essentialism of the modern identity. Increasingly, identity is viewed as a socially created and highly changeable construct (Gergen, 1999). The modern identity, which assumes an

unchanging, fundamental and certain self, has been challenged by the view that the self is fluid, de-centred and constantly shaped by personal, social and political forces (Truett Anderson, 1997). While this thinking has provided a strong framework for critique and deconstructive analysis in respect to the politics of identity formation, it leaves in its wake many more questions than answers (Held, 1995). While it offers a great deal of analytic value, it lacks practical application. For example, it invites probing discussion but does not show how to raise a son. For this reason, the framework has been criticized for being backward viewing; challenging past assumptions but leaving little in respect to future possibilities (Eagleton, 1996).

Now, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the social changes linked to postmodernism having been both a source of enthusiastic deconstruction, as well as frustrating relativity, there has been a move toward what some have called post-postmodern times. Again, as its name implies, there is no resolution offered to the dilemmas inherent in constructs such a gender, but there is a stronger desire to move away from relativity and toward some kind of clarity (Truett Anderson, 1997). This search for resolution has arguably taken the masculinity debate in three directions. First, as has been discussed earlier, there seems to be the direction of exhaustion as the seeming irresolvability of the topic has lead people to simply give up the discourse. Second, has been the push for further postmodern relativity and critique of gender with no resolution but instead continued discussion (Butler, 1999). Finally, there has been a direction that represents a return to the certainty of essentialism and a preoccupation with gender as being primarily biologically determined (Blum, 1997). However, all of these approaches fail to offer any real alternative and continue to operate within the

limitations of existing gender paradigms. In order to better reflect the complexity of experience expressed by the men, what seems required is a view of masculinity that does not seek resolution or reconciliation but rather allows for contradiction and conflict. In this way masculinity is not a crisis to be resolved, but rather a complex and dynamic ongoing phenomenon that can take countless forms.

### **7.5.1 Identity Reconstruction and the End of the Masculinity Crisis**

The current framing of masculine gender as a straining of roles naturally leads to searching for solutions to the “crisis” that involve aligning roles with perceived expectations. Such a framework tends to be narrow and modernistic in its orientation implying that progress lies in getting men to learn the new skills and roles of contemporary masculinity. In so doing, masculinity is falsely dichotomized between the traditional and contemporary with traditional masculinity negated and the illusion of a clear and superior masculinity supported. As shown by the men interviewed, this leads to a general demonizing of behaviour considered traditionally masculine, and the pursuit of an idealized and superior “new” masculinity. However, as the men’s experience also demonstrates, there seems little clarity in respect to what beliefs and behaviour actually constitutes traditional and what is contemporary. In the men’s experience, traditional becomes “anything associated with the previous generation”, and contemporary becomes “anything not associated with the previous generation”. The Role Strain framework forces men to categorize masculinity between the “old” and “new”, yet their experience suggests that their struggle is not between competing role expectations, but toward some clarity of identity and meaning in respect to masculinity.

Framing the so called masculinity crisis as involving the reconstruction of masculine identity, rather than the alignment of roles, allows for a more sophisticated and fruitful view of the men's struggle. It also accurately places men's struggle with identity alongside many other groups in society who have similar experiences yet have arguably shown greater progress in addressing identity questions. Indeed, there is a significant body of literature that has put identity at the centre of understanding the challenges facing many individuals and groups. For example, women and many marginalized groups have placed considerable emphasis on identity such that developmental phases of identity reconstruction have been identified (Gergen, 1999).

Identity reconstruction involves undertaking to re-define the commonly held assumptions that define and limit the group. The goal is to challenge beliefs that restrict the group and press for a broader and more flexible set of possibilities so as to break down the subjugating forces that maintain marginalization. It has been thought that men do not have to undertake this process, since it has long been considered that men have played a dominant role in defining all groups, and have therefore already defined a masculinity identity that most advantages them (Johnson, 1997). However, this doesn't seem to be reflected in the experience of the men interviewed. There seems little clarity around definition for the men, nor any sense that they are consciously doing the re-defining.

To better understand how identity reconstruction may be a valuable framework for men, it is useful to look at the developmental phases of identity reconstruction typical of marginalized groups. Gergen (1999) outlines three phases of identity reconstruction. The first is *resistance*, where the group actively challenges stereotypes and

assumptions that are associated with the group. This has been a common theme in the women's movement, as well as within anti-racist and diversity movements. Men have engaged in resistance in a limited way in aspects of men's movements. However, little progress seems to have been made since masculinity is considered to be more negativity represented in society than ever before (Nathanson & Young, 2001).

The second phase of identity reconstruction is *self-representation*. Here the group seeks greater control over how the group is represented in society in order to re-define the group in a way that serves the group better. Again, self-representation was emphasized in aspects of men's movements but the political implications of this phase have made it a difficult undertaking for men. For example, a common concern among the women's movement has been that, if men practice greater self-representation, they will likely be inclined to re-establish a definition of masculinity that entrenches it with patriarchy (Johnson, 1997). Again, self-representation has been considered unnecessary for men, since it has been generally contended by women's groups that it is men who have been defining all groups.

The third stage is *political reconstruction* where the social categorization of individuals is fundamentally challenged. Two alternatives to the typical binary categorization of people have been posed. The first has been to work toward the simple abandonment of the categorization male/female and removal of all assumptions, related expectations and criteria for evaluating "successful" gender (Butler, 1990). This strategy may on its surface be appealing for its wholesale challenge to society's most basic assumptions. However, apart from its inherent idealism, the strategy suffers from failing to recognize that differences between men and women do exist and that with these

differences come a historical and political landscape that have accorded power and privilege to males. To erase the categories of male and female is to erroneously pretend that, in doing so, all individuals will be suddenly be on equal footing (Segal, 1997)

A second and more viable alternative, and the aspect of identity reconstruction that seems to best fit the men's experience, involves the redefinition of masculinity through the transformation of assumptions held in respect to what constitutes the "self" (Gergen, 1999; Truett Anderson, 1997). This strategy involves replacing the current view of the self that assumes a singular, coherent and univocal core, with a conception of self that is fluid, nomadic and polyvocal. Rather than a self that seeks uniformity and consistency, the alternative view defines a self that can have many values, characteristics, beliefs, and behaviours that are shaped by the context in which the individual finds themselves. Further, it is argued that these aspects of the self, or "selves", need not be consistent or in agreement. Instead the self is defined within the context and demands of relationships. Contradiction and change is thus no longer considered a conflict but instead an inevitable and acceptable outcome of the "multiphrenic self" (Truett Anderson, 1997).

In fact, contradiction is not only considered inevitable, it is argued that accepting contradiction more fully allows individuals to meet the many demands that are placed upon them in contemporary society. Further, embracing a "polyvocal self" removes the preoccupation with attempting to conform to a single expectation and instead encourages individuals to live more fully up to the expectations of the moment. This approach liberates the individual from restricted self-imposed limits and encourages experimentation and possibility:

*“If one’s identity is properly managed, the rewards can be substantial – the devotion of one’s intimates, happy children, professional success, the achievement of community goals, personal popularity, and so on. All are possible if one avoids looking back to locate a true and enduring self, and simply acts to full potential in the moment at hand. Simultaneously, the sombre hues of multiphrenia – the sense of superficiality, the guilt at not measuring up to multiple criteria – give way to an optimistic sense of enormous possibility”*

*(Gergen, 1990).*

### **7.5.2 The Future of Gender: Polyvocal Possibilities and Multiphrenic**

#### **Masculinities**

The concept of a self that is intentionally changeable and normatively contradictory is in sharp contrast to the traditional, idealized self that is seen as the core of a stable and unwavering personality. Similarly, a view of masculinity that embraces experimentation and variation, poses a strong challenge to the very existence of a masculine gender ideal. There seems little doubt that moving from a paradigm that places a strong emphasis on predictability and certainty at the centre of wellbeing, to one that allows for multiple, simultaneous values and beliefs is a difficult undertaking. There is a strong bias in Western society that equates individual univocality and consistency with superiority, and associates individual polyvocality and seeming contradictory behaviour with inferiority (Truett Anderson, 1997). However, the men’s experience suggests that for them, and perhaps many men, the pursuit of a singular, fixed and independent masculinity may not only be unlikely, it may be a poor adaptation to the demands of contemporary society. In contrast, allowing masculinity to take many forms

and meanings in the individual's lives of men seems to enable them to better meet the demands of their life, as well as moves gender toward a paradigm that increasingly blurs the problematic barriers that distinguish the masculine from the feminine.

Since movement in the direction toward a relationally constructed and polyvocal masculine identity runs contrary to the tendency for certainty and predictability that is so often preferred in the gender discourse, what might have greater likelihood for success is to move the discourse incrementally toward the new paradigm and away from the old rigid paradigms. There are a number of initiatives, many of which have been individually supported at times in the past, that represent strategies for encouraging a plurality of masculinity not just among men but within them as well. The following strategies might help move toward a paradigm that better deals with the struggles that the men relate:

1. *Re-invigorate the masculinity discourse.* As a general initiative, the interest in masculinity (and femininity) needs to be re-ignited. If social change in respect to gender is to occur then it requires an interest by society. As has been previously argued, the interest has waned possibly as a result of feeling at an impasse. The initiatives that follow are toward reinvigorating the discourse.
2. *Connect masculinity with identity reconstruction rather than role conflict.* As has been argued above, difficulties associated with masculinity seem to be better understood within an identity framework rather than role conflict framework. It would be useful to explore the experiences of other men to determine whether the men's identity struggle can be generalized. Further research of both a quantitative and qualitative nature is required to explore whether an identity framework provides a better lens through which to understand men and inform

theories and practice related to masculinity. In so doing the dominance of the Role Strain Paradigm can be challenged and possibly replaced by a framework that allows greater sophistication in understanding masculinity.

3. *Challenge negative and limiting images of masculinity.* As a practical, yet powerful initiative, the preponderance of negative images of men and masculinity need to be challenged. The quieting of the discourse in masculinity has arguably led to a settling in of dominantly negative male images in society (Nathanson & Young, 2001). Challenging the images involves re-taking up the resistance phase of identity reconstruction and is critical in order to open up space in the masculinity discourse for different representation of masculinity. At the same time, in order to maintain space for the freedom of exploration in respect to identity, the images cannot be challenged through attempting to replace them with alternative but similarly rigid images, as was the case in some aspects of the men's movement. Instead the move should be toward challenging any rigid or stereotypical images of males (or females).
4. *Challenge essentializing views of gender.* In a similar light, essentializing views of gender need to be challenged. However, these views should be distinguished from biologically based views of gender. From a polyvocal identity framework, all representations of masculinity represent different views and are therefore encouraged. The goal is not to limit gender in any way but rather allow gender to include the broadest possible range of views. However, essentializing views, which assume a "best way" to understand gender, is limiting and modernistic.

5. *View identity as relational, highly contextual and changeable.* As an alternative to the fixed view of identity, a view of identity as inherently changeable, shaped by relationships, and varying with contexts allows for a radically different conception of individuals and their traits. Such a view enables the acceptance of identities that are fluid and contradictory without pathologizing them as incoherent or unstable. In so doing room will be created for individuals to meet the demands of various situations and experiment with alternative ways of being without feeling pressure to resolve their identity. The focus is put on the acceptance of difference and dialogue between views rather than the eradication of conflict.
6. *View various masculinities as meaningful.* If identities are accepted as changeable, then it follows that masculinity (and femininity) should be similarly open to redefinition and experimentation. Men can thus be encouraged to “take on” different masculinities as situations and life events require. Rather than seeking a certainty of gender, variation becomes increasingly acceptable. With greater variation in both genders, the lines between them become increasingly blurred such that over time the categories lose their meaning.
7. *Focus on meaning.* Experimentation and variation is not a random process but rather should be driven by values and beliefs that have the greatest meaning for the individual. Identity and gender is driven by explicit questions such as: “who do I want to be”, “what do I value most”, and “what gives me the greatest satisfaction”. Thus identity construction is not an aimless process but instead is

guided by an intentional attempt to make meaning and create satisfying activity and relationships.

8. *Men live in society and by social contract.* Having said the above, the experimentation and fluidity is not without limitations. While identity variation is encouraged and relativity in respect to values and beliefs are recognized as inevitable, even preferable at times, identity construction does not occur in a vacuum or without consequences. Men remain at all times part of society and in so doing are part of a social contract that prescribes legal and moral standards. Thus relativity only goes so far before the practical and pragmatic considerations of living in a society amongst other people need to be included in how identities are constructed.

In summary, a polyvocal view of identity allows for a masculinity that emphasizes the inevitability of variation and contradiction. Masculinity is no longer a crisis to be resolved, or a set of roles to be clarified, but instead is a complex phenomenon to be explored and encouraged. At the same time, gender exploration is not done for its own sake but rather toward seeking a greater sense of satisfaction and meaning in the lives of individual men, as well toward an understanding of gender that is better for all members of society.

## **7.6 The Future of Masculinity Research: A Renewed Discourse**

The experiences of the eight men interviewed in this study suggest that Gender Role Strain is a framework that almost entirely fails to capture the complexity of their

lives. The experiences of the men also suggest that no meaningful resolution to the difficulties associated with gender and identity has occurred at least for them. However, the conclusions of this research are based on the eight men studied here. While their experiences cast serious doubt on the applicability of the Gender Role Strain framework, other men need to be studied if the implications of the research are to have broader meaning. Indeed, the study of samples of men that show greater variation in respect to geographic region, age, family constellation, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and other demographic characteristics is a logical and important next step in masculinity identity research. Further research needs to be done to examine whether an Identity framework is a more meaningful alternative. Most importantly however, the undertaking of further research is essential to reinvigorating the discourse on masculinity and broadening it beyond the confines of the Role Strain framework.

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## Appendix 1: Information Letter to Participants

David Tranter  
Assistant Professor  
School of Social Work, Lakehead University  
955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, ON, P7B 5E1

Date

**Dear Participant,**

My name is David Tranter. I am a PhD student at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. I work at Lakehead University as an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work. I am conducting research into the ways in which men experience stress or conflict associated with the different roles they are expected to assume in their lives. This research is being used as part of a PhD dissertation in Social Work at Memorial University. I am writing to ask you to participate in this research.

You will be asked to participate in an individual interview which will be tape recorded and transcribed. The interview will be conducted by me and will focus on your experiences as a man in relation to such topics as family, friendship, intimate relationships, and work. I expect that the interview will last approximately two hours.

Before you agree to participate, you need to know the following information:

1. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the research at any time
2. Your identity will not be revealed in the report
3. The information that you provide will be treated confidentially. All records will be stored in my locked office. The records will be destroyed following completion or abandonment of the PhD dissertation.
4. Information that you provide will be used toward the PhD dissertation described above. It may also be used for related scholarly papers and journal articles.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (807) 343-8737. If you would like to discuss this research with my research advisor at Memorial University, you can contact Dr. Ross Klein through e-mail at [rklein@mun.ca](mailto:rklein@mun.ca), or by phone at (709) 737-8165.

Please complete the attached consent form and keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

David Tranter

## Appendix 2: Consent Form to Participants

**Research Project Title: The Problem of Masculinity: Where Are We Now?**

**Participant's Name (Please Print):** \_\_\_\_\_

I understand that I have been asked to participate in an interview about my views and experiences regarding the different roles and expectations of men. This interview will explore in an in-depth manner a variety of topics associated with masculinity including my experiences related to friendship, intimate relationships, work, and family.

I understand that if I agree, I will be asked to participate in an interview that will last approximately two hours in length. The questions will cover a range of topics related to my life. The questions are designed to help the researcher and participant develop greater insight and awareness into the participant's life as it relates to masculinity.

I understand that I can choose not to answer any questions that might make me feel uncomfortable. If for any reason any of the questions posed create feelings of discomfort or concern, either during or following the interview, the researcher will assist me to connect with a qualified professional counsellor.

The interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed by a professional typist. I may also be contacted for a second, follow-up interview which will be tape-recorded and transcribed.

I understand that I will not be identified in any written or verbal report. Privacy and confidentiality will be protected. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this research at any time without penalty.

\_\_\_\_\_ I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE AND HAVE READ THE STATEMENT ABOVE

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like to receive a copy of the results of this study, please provide your mailing address below.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3: Confidentiality Agreement

### Confidentiality Agreement for the Transcription of Data

Name of Transcriptionist (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_

I understand that I will be transcribing confidential interview data conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation undertaken by David Tranter at Memorial University. The interviews will explore in an in-depth manner a variety of topics associated with masculinity including men's experiences related to family, friendship, intimate relationships, and work.

As part of this research project, I will be paid for providing the transcription service and as such I understand that I am bound by policies that protect the privacy of the research participant information that I will be given access to. I agree to keep this information in the strictest confidence.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

### A. Demographic Information

1. Age
2. Marital status
3. Number, age, sex of children
4. Educational background
5. Employment status or type of work
6. Educational status and type of work of spouse or partner
7. Parent's education and employment history
8. Birthplace and length of time living in Thunder Bay

### Probes to Guide the Interview

#### B. Early Experiences

9. How would you describe yourself as a boy? What kind of boy would you characterize yourself as?
10. What first experiences influenced your understanding of what a man should be? How do you think those experiences affected you?
11. Were there particular activities or ways of being that you strongly associated with how a boy should be? How did you come to learn this?
12. Do you recall any times in the early years of school where you felt some conflict between how you were and how you should be? How did this influence you? How did you sort out the conflict?
13. Were there any particular men, either real or fictional, that you identified with? What about them do you think made them stand out for you? Why do think this was?
14. In the first say 10 years of your life, did your perception of what a man (or boy) should be change much? If so, in what ways did it change? What do you think was responsible for the change?

#### C. Family of Origin

15. How would you describe your father – as a father and as a man? What, in the early years, do you think you learned from him in terms of how a man should be?
16. How would you describe your mother – as a mother and as a woman? What, in the early years, do you think you learned from her in terms of how a man should be?
17. How do you think they might have influenced you in other ways, e.g., relationships, emotion and the like?
18. Tell me about any brothers or sisters that you grew up with? How might have they influenced your view of what and how and man should be?
19. How would you characterize your family in general? What was life in your

- household like? In what ways was it similar or different from your friends?
20. What was your neighbourhood like? How would you describe it in terms of other neighbourhoods in your city or town?

#### **D. Adolescence**

21. I want you to think about your teen years now. In what ways did becoming a teenager influence or change your perception of what a boy (or man) should be?
22. What types of kids did you tend to spend most of your time with? How would you characterize how you (and they) fit in?
23. Were there any particular events throughout your teens that stand out in your mind as being significant to your development of what “being a man” meant for you?
24. The teen years are often thought to be a time of identity confusion, were there times that you felt confused about who (or how) you should be as a male? How did you deal with these situations or feelings?
25. Were there times where you faced or felt conflict about what kind of male you should be? How did you sort this out?
26. Were there any particular individuals (friends or adults) that you recall as being particularly influential in terms of your development as a male? How did they influence you?
27. As you look back over your teen years, how did this time in your life influence you as a man?

#### **E. Friendships**

28. Growing up, what kind of person were you like socially? Did you tend to be more outgoing or shy?
29. Do you remember having “best friends” growing up? Tell me about some of the friends that you remember. What were those friendships like?
30. Did the types of friends that you had change over time? If so, how did they change?
31. What qualities did you look for in a friend?
32. How would you describe the friendships that you have today? Have they changed over the years?
33. How satisfied do you feel with your friendships today? Is there anything that you would change about them if you could?
34. What have you noticed in terms of the way men have friends? Do you see any particular things that men seem to have in common in terms of how they relate to friends? What is this like for you?

#### **F. Intimate Relationships**

35. When you first became interested in a female (or male) in a more sexual way, how do you think this influenced your sense of who and what you should be as a man?
36. Have there been particular themes or patterns that you have noticed in your intimate relationships? How would you describe these? Why do you think they occur?

37. Have there been particular conflicts or struggles that you have experienced in relationships? Can you tell me about these? Why have they occurred?
38. In your current relationship (if you are in one), what are the biggest struggles that you and your partner have? How have you attempted to sort these difficulties out?
39. Are there any struggles in particular that you and your partner have successfully overcome? How did the two of you manage to do it?
40. What are the most satisfying elements of your relationship? Why do you think this is?
41. Over time have you changed anything about the way you behave in relationships, i.e., your beliefs, practices, etc? How have you changed? Why have you changed? What has enabled you to make these changes?
42. What other changes about how you approach your relationship would you like to make?
43. What, if any, do you think are the main differences between men and women in terms of how they are and what they want where relationships are concerned?
44. What are the biggest difficulties or struggles that you think men typically face in relationships? Why do you think this is?

**G. Parenting**(for those participants who have children)

45. How has your relationship with you father changed over time? Why has it changed?
46. Do you see your father any differently now than how you used to? What accounts for this change in view?
47. How has your relationship with your mother changed over time? Why has it changed?
48. Do you see your mother any differently now than how you used to? What accounts for this change in view?
49. In what ways is your approach to parenting similar and different to how your parents did it? Explain?
50. In what ways has having children influenced the way you are as a man? Have you made conscious efforts to change aspects of yourself? If so, what have you changed?
51. What roles do you take on in terms of parenting? Are there any tasks or activities that you tend not to do as compared to your wife?
52. What sorts of tasks and activities associated with parenting do you consider to be more appropriate for the man to do?
53. What challenges do you face in teaching your son about what a boy should be? How have you approached these challenges?
54. What challenges do you face in teaching your daughter about what a boy (or man) is (or should be)? How have you approached these challenges?

**H. Household/Family** (relates to current relationship, or if not currently in a relationship can apply to previous relationship/s)

55. Are there particular chores or duties that are typically completed by your partner? Are there those more typically completed by you? How has this arrangement

- come about?
56. What if any, disagreements or conflicts have you and your partner had in respect to task or chores? How have you attempted to sort this out?
  57. Have the chores or duties changed over time in respect to who completes them? How has this changed and why?
  58. Have there been other differences or disagreements related to expectations of each other? Can you describe some of these and talk about how you have attempted to resolve these difficulties?
  59. Are there particular roles or duties that you believe are most appropriate for men? For women? Has this view changed at all over time? How has it changed? What do you think lead to the change?
  60. Are there changes that you would like to see happen in terms of the expectations or roles that you and your partner have of each other? What are they and why?
  61. What sorts of difficulties do you think most men experience when it comes to how duties or chores are divided up in the relationship? Why do you think this is?

### **I. The Workplace**

62. Tell me more about the particular job that you do?
63. What led you to this kind of work?
64. What were the main factors in you continuing to work in this area e.g., money, availability, status, flexibility, satisfaction, meaning, etc.
65. How do you feel about your job? What is the best part of it? What is the worst part of it?
66. What, if any, conflicts or tensions do you experience between your work and other aspects of your life? How have you attempted to address these difficulties?
67. Are there particular changes that you would like to make related to your job? What are these?
68. Do you think there are differences between men and women in terms of their relationship to their work? If so, why do you think this is?
69. How does your work influence your sense of being a man? How does it contribute to your identity?
70. What do you think work means to men in general?

### **J. Region**

71. Do you think that living in the North, and in Thunder Bay specifically, influences the way that you are as a man? How so?
72. How do you think men in Thunder Bay in general are affected by living here in terms of their sense of what it means to be a man?
73. What do you think are the biggest stresses or conflicts for men in this region?

### **L. Masculinity**

74. What expectations or stereotypes of men do you feel pressure to live up to?
75. In what ways has this affected you? In what ways have you intentionally not lived up to these expectations? Why?
76. What do you personally feel defines “what a man is”? How would you describe

- the definition that fits for you?
77. How has this definition changed for you over time? Why has it changed?
  78. What has been most helpful to you in terms of making changes related to your own definition (and behaviour) of what it means to be a man?
  79. What other changes would you like to make?
  80. What are the biggest struggles that men in general face?
  81. What do you think can be done to help men deal more effectively with these struggles?
  82. What do you think about the idea that men are in a kind of crisis because times are changing and they are failing to change with them?
  83. Many possible solutions have been suggested about how best to help men from training courses, policy changes, to many other strategies? What do you think men need to do? What do you think needs to be done for them?







