

A father to love: eros and identification in boys – an emendation of Freud on the male oedipal drama

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between a son and his father is usually characterized as primarily one of rivalry. In this emendation of classic oedipal theory, what has traditionally been referred to as the 'negative oedipal relation' is given prominence as a boy's first emotionally significant relationship in which he initiates affection with another human being, his father. Such love is in the service of identification but is also as important as the template for a male's later relationships with women (sexual), other men, and his children. A peculiarity of Freud's relationship with his own father is suggested as the source of oversight of this element of the oedipal drama. A boy's emotional reactive response to his mother is primarily one of gratitude in response to her love. Proactive loving is first experienced with his father.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 4 December 2015
Accepted 5 July 2016

KEYWORDS

Boyhood; fathers; oedipal drama; psychoanalytic theory of development

Everyone agrees about the importance of the relation between the infant and his mothering figure.¹ Above all, this figure conveys to a boy that he is lovable. Differences have been observed in mothering-figure/boy and mothering-figure/girl relations, but the mothering figure typically provides an adequate 'holding environment' regardless of the sex of the infant. Anthropologists and psychoanalysts have questioned the notion of something like an instinct for mothering among women given the significant evidence of infanticide.

The mothering-figure/boy relationship is extremely important for any boy's life, but I focus on the father/boy relation, since I believe it holds the key to reinterpreting the earlier relationship and its evolution through childhood, adolescence, and later life, especially during the era of fathering in a male's life.

The story of Oedipus with which Freud was familiar and to which he refers in his psychosexual theory is the version dramatized by Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*.² Freud certainly knew alternate versions of the myth but omits certain revealing details of the story of Laius, Oedipus' father. These details allow us to emend Freud's account of the oedipal drama.³

By some accounts, Laius brought on the wrath of the Sphinx (on orders from Hera) because he had sexually molested a boy named Chrysippus ('Golden Horse'), whose horrified father, Pelops, railed against Laius: Have a boy of your own and he will destroy you in

revenge for what you did to my son!⁴ What is the importance of this detail of Laius' biography for Freud's theory of male development?

For Freud, the father/son relation was understood primarily in terms of rivalry.⁵ There is no love lost between a boy and his father. But perhaps this figure of speech hints at a way to reinterpret Freud's account of male oedipal conflict by way of the illumination of an element of the son's relationship with his father that has been overlooked in the orthodox Freudian account. Is there no real affection between a father and his son to be lost, or is the loss an unavoidable by-product of the son-father relationship as fundamentally rivalrous?

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud (1900, p. 197) recounts his boyhood feelings of shame for his father. An incident cited evoked in Freud the young boy a complex amalgam of feelings toward his father for not having stood up for himself in an encounter in the street with another man and for having cast a shadow of shame over the young boy walking at his side. Needing to assert himself throughout his life as his father had not, Freud's relations with other men were consistently characterized by rivalry, so that he fell out with every man who did not consent to see him as an omnipotent father figure and defer to his authority. In this way Freud reinvented his own father as a powerful man who would not tolerate other adult male rivals and rejected anyone who threatened his hegemony. In Freud's oedipal theory and, later, in his anthropology,

males relate to one another only in terms of rivalry for power, which is then extended to sexual power over women.⁶

All of this is well known and undoubtedly feelings of rivalry play an important role in every boy's early experiences with his father, both with respect to fantasies about replacing his father as husband and father and, later, as one among a group of males vying for sexual access to females.⁷ But is rivalry the only and most important element of a son's relationship with his father?

Did Freud miss something in the Oedipus legend that supports a contrasting view; namely, as I will now suggest, that the essential element in the son-father relationship is love, not rivalry?⁸

Let us review briefly the meaning of identification as a psychological process, since this will be the context of my discussion of what is going on between a father and his son that has been overlooked.⁹ Identification is an *unconscious* phenomenon. As such, a boy is not aware of identifying with his father. First conceptualized by Freud (1900) as a process that helped explain forms of hysteria, identification was later formulated by Anna Freud (1942) as a universal mechanism of ego defense found in all individuals. Like any defense, its purpose is to control consciously or unconsciously perceived danger to the self and to modulate anxiety that threatens to interrupt ego functioning. Ego psychologists conceptualized the process of identification as an essential element of the formation of the sense of identity (Erikson, 1994). Here identification is understood as the core dynamic of identity formation and consolidation.

On the classic Freudian account, like any defense mechanism, identification occurs in response to conflict and this is why it must be a response to rivalry. It is one method among others of finding a solution (albeit one that is bound to fail) to a distressing conundrum facing the individual. Thus a boy's identification with his father is the next best thing to becoming him, which is impossible. The boy avoids being overwhelmed by his father by settling for becoming *like* him and *liked* by him, since excessive strenuousness about *being* him entails fantasies of replacing him which are believed to provoke the father's own defensive response that Freud postulated takes the form of an implied or actual threat of castration for the boy. Identification with the father saves the boy from losing his nascent masculinity, the miniature hint in him of the man he is to become.

For Freud, love is an epiphenomenon of sexuality.¹⁰ This is a legacy of the orthodox Freudian perspective that became part of the ethos of anyone who grew up

in the twentieth century Western world. But what is the place of love (what I will refer to as erotic longing) in the son-father relation?

Erotic longing is in quest of the invisible possible in another human being. A son first experiences and expresses this longing with his father. It is requisite for his identification with his father as a male whom the boy aspires to be (like) one day. Rivalry with the father is secondary to erotic longing and in fact depends upon a degree of identification with the father already achieved that only such longing can make possible. A corollary of this thesis is that erotic longing is the model of male amativeness (feelings for someone of the other sex), who in the first instance will be the young boy's mothering figure when she is seen to be a female as well as his mother. It follows that a male's feelings for women, beginning with a boy's mothering figure during the oedipal years, will be based and modeled on erotic longing for his father. Such feelings for his mother are typically conflated with the little boy's pretensions to become like and even indeed become (as least in fantasy) his mothering figure's husband. Eros will also be the model of male adhesiveness in same-sex friendship. So-called male homosexuality is quite another matter, as we will see.

Before we look more closely at what happens between a son and his father we must disabuse ourselves of the misconception that a boy in infancy feels the draw and drift of erotic longing for his mothering figure. The sentimental notion that an infant loves his or her mothering figure as a reflection of her love for the infant has led us into a fog of misapprehensions about the mothering-figure/boy relation. An infant's reaction is entirely anaclitic (dependent). It draws energy away from the mothering figure, whether it is as breast milk or maternal attention. The picture of a blissful, smiling, loving Madonna/child duo is misleading. It is surely an artifact of Christianity. The smiling infant does not signify love but rather recognition, satisfaction, and above all gratitude.

Face-to-face, an infant boy recognizes his mothering figure in the same blindly biological, symbiotic way he felt her presence when he was a fetus. She is a source of what he needs and on which he relies in his helplessness. As in prenatal life, after birth he continues to draw materially (and exclusively) from her. His needs are insatiable and demanding because he is helpless.¹¹ He does not cling to his mothering figure because he loves her but because he is afraid to be alone and requires constant care. His endless demands invariably cause him to be disappointed at his mothering figure's inability to fully meet his demand for complete

satisfaction, all of the time, as she did when he was in the intrauterine environment.

This is not to say that love is missing from the picture of a mothering figure and son, but only that it is unidirectional, from mothering figure to son. The boy slowly learns to empathize with her.

Near the end of the separation-individuation process in the third year of life he begins to move away from this figure in order to be able to go about identifying with his father.¹²

We must now proceed slowly and carefully in order to tease apart several lines of development that are closely woven together along this stretch of the boy's psychological life. In order for the male infant to individuate and become a boy he must separate from the mothering figure.¹³ The break is always ragged and the boy continues to imitate selected personality features of the mothering figure as he grows older. Later there may be identification with the mother as female, which is likely a necessary though not sufficient condition for some forms of so-called male homosexuality. The first self-initiated feelings of longing for the mother in the oedipal drama will be possible only after the boy has identified with his father and turns back to the mothering figure (if she is a woman) as his oedipal mother.¹⁴

Continuous, uninterrupted symbiotic involvement with the mothering figure will impede or preclude a boy's emotional availability for identification with his father and the subsequent realignment of his feelings toward the oedipal mother. In strongly gender dimorphic cultures such as ours, prolonged maternal attachment may lead in several different developmental directions: The boy (1) may remain fearful and clinging, reluctant to explore the world beyond his mother's protective gaze. (2) He may fail to see the mothering figure (assuming it is a female) as a female and a woman (a member of the other sex and not merely a source of provisions). Here is the prospect of not clearly differentiating between males and females, a situation accepted more and more in our post-Freudian culture. (3) As a result of the failure of experiencing self-initiated erotic longing for another person, which is one of the central dynamics of the father-son relationship, a boy may be unable to express such affection for anyone. He may be limited to feelings of gratitude, rivalry, and/or sexual interest. Finally, (4) as he moves into middle childhood (roughly, age 5–10), a boy may feel uncomfortable around other boys and older males.¹⁵ This does not exhaust the possibilities but merely suggests several eventualities that figure prominently in clinical work with men. In general, these psychological scenarios are a consequence at the very least of the confluence of several factors, including

(1) the presence of a mothering figure who (a) does not permit the boy to separate and individuate from her or (b) makes this process difficult for him, and (2) having a father who does not respond to the boy's erotic longing, because he (a) is physically not there to do so, (b) is ambivalent about the feelings his son evokes in him, or (c) rejects the boy.¹⁶

Very few cultures on the anthropological record are not strongly gender dimorphic.¹⁷ That being the case, identification with one of the two genders, which is certainly based on an inner sense of being an instance of one of the two sexes,¹⁸ is compulsory for the boy and the only culturally acceptable option for him. In nearly all cultures manhood is defined in terms of what is not-feminine (just as from ancient Athenian Greece through the European nineteenth century of Freud's upbringing womanhood has been defined in terms of not-being a man) and separation from the mothering figure (who is usually a female) is the prerequisite for a boy's identification with and as a male. Usually, separation is strongly encouraged and enforced by the mothering figure, who is motivated to do so by the experience of weaning, but also by a desire to see her son's individuation completed in the course of physical and psychosocial maturation, and often because of obligations to younger offspring who require her attention and care. As supporters of the social construct we know as manhood, mothering figures (certainly when they are females) are under pressure to see the process of gender identification realized in their sons. Signs of clinging, the beginnings of identification with her (cross-identification), or wariness by the father to support his son's identification with him are countered by the mothering figure's encouragement of her son's independence, acknowledgement and promotion of signs of his increasing competence, and welcoming his movement toward his father.

If the father is physically absent or emotionally distant from the boy's mothering figure, discouragement of his cross-identification with her may be difficult. If her partner or husband is unable or unwilling to engage with his son in the identification process, she may have no choice but to encourage the son to cross-identify with her. The alternative is to be left bereft of a person welcoming the boy to be like him or her. If the boy's inner sense of maleness is not strong or his awareness of it is inhibited, he may more readily acquiesce in the cross-identification. It is also possible that a boy may look for consolation and company in heterosocial peer groups who collectively remind him of the mothering figure, assuming this was a woman. He may turn inward and become socially isolated. Finally, lonely and experiencing what has been termed

'father hunger' (Herzog, 2004) the young boy may turn to older males for protection, but not primarily for purposes of identification. A substitute for the father may be sought in a brother, grandfather, or other older male (coach, teacher, hero figure).

One test of the success of a boy's identification with his father is whether he accepts his own body. This is more than just approval of one's body. A boy whose identification with his father has not been successful may see the image of his body in the mirror (what we may call the body he *has*) as an entity different from the body he *is*. He may then see his own body as sexually appealing and arousing. It is possible that other male bodies will then come to substitute for this image in his fantasies. Idealized, the image of the body he has or other male bodies may become central to his masturbation fantasies when he reaches puberty.

In keeping with their overall physical style males are by nature more playful in general than most girls (Geary, Byrd-Craven, Hoard, Vigil, & Numtee, 2003). After adrenal puberty or adrenarche (Herdt, 2000), sexual preference and attraction are tentatively established. Most boys' playful, homosocial interactions are diverted into games with rules such as sports. In adolescence, a boy whose identification with his father was deficient or incomplete may enact with another male a scenario of heterosexual intercourse in which one partner 'plays' the male and the other 'plays' the female role.¹⁹ These young males find the way blocked to sexual relations with women because of their incomplete identification with the father, since among the features of identification is seeing oneself as an available sexual partner to a female with other males also vying for being chosen by her as a sexual mate. A boy who has not identified with his father will not feel rivalry with them and, subsequently, with other males. He will not see himself as attractive to women although he may enjoy their company and even find them aesthetically attractive.²⁰

What about the man who finds the physical features of males (including himself) attractive but who does not find genital behavior with them at all appealing?²¹ I would suggest that this is the basic psychological disposition of all men, but given the heavy psychological investment in heterosexual identification that a strongly gender dimorphic culture requires, men will either pursue the reproductive sexual course with women (which accounts for probably about 90–95% of the population), pursue a 'homosexual' career, or settle into an asexual alloerotic position, either ascetic or limited to 'autosexual' activity.

According to the revision to male developmental theory I am proposing, the boy's identification is not

primarily defensive. Why must we suppose that every father unconsciously desires to feminize his son by castration as a result of the son's wish to become a man? Freud assumed that the boy *wants* to become a man, but as the anthropologist Gilmore (1990) and others have shown, boys worldwide do not want to become men at all, but rather are pulled, resisting and fighting against older men's (and women's) desires, into manhood.

Since boys are coerced into the rites of manhood, there is no need for the hypothesized impulse in every father to feminize his son when the latter begins to identify with him, that is, when the son puts himself forward as a man-to-be. Why should a father's *first* reaction be wariness, even anger at his son's pretensions to manhood? An alternative psychodynamic scenario may be envisioned. In it, fathers welcome the erotic longing of their sons and respond in kind.

Manhood was likely invented by men themselves with the concurrence of women, who stood to gain from the largesse provided them by men, especially the provision of food and protection from the forces of nature while pregnant or in the early stages of nurturing young.²² The institution that first made culture possible and desirable, manhood is always gained at great personal sacrifice to individual males, but the benefits of their ordeal to women, their offspring and the resulting culture are evidently boundless and have been pursued relentlessly. Yet males continue to resist being forced into the bondage of manhood, including especially the requirement that they again and again demonstrate their manhood and prove that they are men by serially successful shows of sexual prowess. A father's expected reaction to this demand is to encourage it. Dad himself is a man and wants his son to be a man, although he knows very well how harsh the role will be for his son. At best, then, his son's manhood is an unconsciously ambivalently felt wish. If there is a sadistic element in most fathers' behavior, it is not in threatening castration but in the desire to see his son suffer as he did (and continues to do) in gaining and maintaining his manhood. Far from wanting to feminize his son by castration, as Freud seems to have surmised, a father desires to masculinize his son and make him even stronger than he and all his forebears have been (see Zoja, 2001, p. 89), in part as a result of a narcissistic projection of his idealized self onto his son.

If, as anthropological evidence attests, boys do not by nature desire to become men, why then do they identify with their fathers at all? If threat of castration is not the driving dynamic in son-father relations, what motivates the process of identification? What makes it possible for boys to overcome the inertia that keeps

them close to the mothering figure and the fear of what they suspect they will have to endure in the passage to manhood? Here we return to the central theme of the article.

I propose that the fundamental impulse for identification is erotic feeling for the father. A boy's identification with his father and affection for him are two sides of the same coin. A boy wants to be like his father because he likes him. His father is the embodiment of his own physical potential. On the other hand, he likes his father because he wants to be like him. The experience of identification allows for the first expression of other-directed erotic feeling over narcissistic interest in the self.

In short, having been loved well enough by the mothering figure, then released by her to his father and welcomed by him, a son experiences his first self-initiated attraction for another human being in a relationship with his father.²³ Shall we call this love? In keeping with the terminological distinctions I have introduced, I will say: not love, but the strongest feeling of affection for another human being a male is capable of. The boy has learned from his experience with the mothering figure that *there are others* (the mothering figure having emerged in his consciousness as the first 'other'), but the consequence of this realization is his almost immediate release from the maternal orbit. Set free, the boy finds a newly discovered other in his father, who differs from his mothering figure as being an entirely independent, free-standing other without a history of symbiotic enmeshment with his self.²⁴ While his mothering figure has been found to be an independent self, she never loses the quality and psychological tone of her once symbiotic unity or 'dual unity' (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1990) with him before he individuated. Later such symbiosis is sought in sexual intercourse with females without ever being attained. Nature's consolation prize for the ever-failed effort is the awesome pleasure of orgasm and the eventual appearance in some cases of another human being the man has pro-created. Perhaps males who do not yearn for union with a woman have never lost the infantile sense of union with their mothering figure.

A boy's affection for his father is his first experience of giving and showing genuine *interpersonal* affection, that is, affection that is mutual.²⁵ It will serve as the model for all subsequent expressions of affection. It is the model for his feelings toward his own children and others with whom he is associated in other intimate ways, for example, as friend, colleague, teacher, or even psychotherapist. The mothering figure's primordially central place in a boy's psychological life is never surrendered, since feeling lovable is a condition of

being able to show affection. I want to stress that the dynamics of a female's experiences of affection (in contrast with feelings of love) are entirely different and require a full discussion of its own.

Psychotherapists are so accustomed to approaching affective life first in sexual terms that my proposal here may seem profoundly counterintuitive. I again underscore the fact that the feeling a boy feels for his father is not sexual, but rather a longing for the possible in himself. Only in an age when we take for granted something such as infantile sexuality should this be a problematic assertion. I do not wish to discount Freud's contribution but suggest that his notion of childhood desire has been misinterpreted in certain ways. Clearly, children's lives have an sexual dimension, but we must distinguish between the erotic and the sexual. Strictly speaking, childhood sexuality is a hypothesis, albeit one that has by now been taken for fact. Freud's insistence that heterosexual intercourse is the telos of 'psychosexual' development required that he see all examples of infantile desire as deficient precursors and elements of that predetermined telos. A broader interpretation of erotic life, however, allows us to see a boy's longing for his father in non-sexual terms, that is, as a phenomenon of eros.

Given Freud's erotics (Ricoeur, 1970), he was bound to see the father-son relation primarily in phallic sexual terms and to postulate rivalry as the basis of the father-son relationship and castration threats as the prime means of enforcing the father's hegemony in the relationship.

Clearly, however, the boy is very much the initiator and is in a sense 'in charge' of initiating the oedipal relationship. Implicit in Freud's account is possession of the organ required for sexual intercourse and attaining the telos of interaction between the sexes. But why is friendship, for example, or 'love' of God not the highest form of human relationship? We know Freud's answer to both options: deep friendship (adhesiveness) is sublimated homosexual sexual desire, and love of God is fearful regard for and deference to a distant, disembodied father who by displacement has become the one god of Judaeo-Christian (and Muslim) monotheism. In fact, in the Christian West emotional closeness between men is still viewed with suspicion and what is left of the spiritual life is enmired in androcentric religions.

It bears repeating that homosocial activities and relations are so highly valued by men because in all-male groups men are relieved of having to compete with each other in the sexual drama, which is directed by women, not because such interactions give men an opportunity to express in socially sanctioned forms

otherwise forbidden 'homosexual' impulses. And must all spirituality be theistic, in particular monotheistic? It is indeed an unholy irony that the very possibility of Christian practice in its primitive form was based on a newly conceived (New Testament) loving son-father relationship, even though sacrifice of the son was reintroduced (compare the *unconsummated* Old Testament pedocide of Isaac by his father, Abraham), this time carried out, albeit indirectly, by the father but precisely in order to be transcended. I often wonder how modern psychology would have developed if Freud had been Catholic.

We are only beginning to recognize different possibilities of how sons and fathers may relate to each other. Manhood is being understood for what it is, not a fact of nature but as a social construction. The concepts of sexuality and gender are being disentangled (Laqueur, 1990; Zeitlin, Winkler, & Halperin, 1991). Heterosexuality and homosexuality have been revealed as concepts of recent vintage that may obscure more than they explain. Finally, gender itself is being challenged as the most useful lens with which to examine the fine structures of human experience and interaction. At the same time, however, we remain a staunchly gender dimorphic culture, so that there is good reason to continue to take seriously the gender basis of identification. It is not likely that in the near future we will be free to enjoy as adults the playful eroticism of childhood, yet there is no reason that continuation of the species would be jeopardized if we were permitted or even encouraged to do so. Finally, Freud's pansexualism and the hypothesis of childhood sexuality are being critically examined.

The separation of fathers from their sons in a strongly gender dimorphic culture is a serious problem with important social consequences. Antisocial personality disorder, bipolar mood disorders, poor academic performance, and impaired capacity for emotionally coherent and cohesive relationships with women have already been identified as consequences for young men who missed having a father to love during the childhood years just discussed. The brittleness of many sexual relationships is a result of men not having learned how to express non-self-related affection. This can be traced back to a non-existent, damaged or inadequate son-father relation in which, I suggest, males learn to love.

We must keep in mind that in most cultures, neither men nor women feel anything like the Western response we call romantic love. There is no need for personal intimacy between females when as a group they raise their children together. Nor is the need for the father-son relationship I have been describing at all easy to discern when boyhood is renounced for

manhood in brief dramatic rites of passage at puberty that have been preceded by an extended period of dependency on a maternal figure who is nearly always a woman.

Freud once said that 'the most important event, the most poignant loss, of a man's life' is the death of his father (Freud, 1900, p. xxvi). He says 'man,' not male. I wonder what he would have said about a son's experience of his father's death when he is a boy. Freud was 40 years old when his father died and the event is credited with being the stimulus, in 1896, for beginning his psychoanalytic autobiography and first basic theoretical work, *The Interpretation of Dreams* finished three years later. Freud's father was 81 when he died. His mother lived to be 95, predeceasing his son by only nine years, when Freud was 74. In effect Freud was a man who never knew life without his mothering figure's living presence, even when he had five grown children and had been married to their mother for 46 years. On the other hand, Freud had been fatherless for 43 years when he died in 1939 and had been in a sense the psychodynamic source of psychoanalysis.

The central son-father story to which he turned was about Oedipus and Laius, a mythic king of Thebes, who was known to Freud as a son who unknowingly kills his own father (parricide) and lives in an extended incestuous relationship with his natural mother. Freud concluded that the story contains two themes that are part of the unconscious experience of every boy: murderous rivalry with his father and sexual attraction to his mothering figure. What had evidently shocked listeners to the story and then theatre-goers in ancient Greece as human events known to hapless individuals lorded over by the capricious will of the gods Freud believed to be present in every male's unconscious mental life. The events only rarely occur in real life, Freud thought, but the collective impulses underlying the experience and behavior of Oedipus work their way from unconscious sources into the play and dreams of every boy and dominate his early and middle childhood. Did he miss one element of the classic son-father drama that because of his influence we have lost sight of?

Notes

1. While the phrase usually refers to the natural mother, it must be remembered that 'the mothering figure' is a set of functions. This raises a question to which we will return later, about how a boy raised by his father (or another male) will negotiate the oedipal relationship with that male when he identifies with him. The father is not a set of functions indifferent to his sex.

- For a view that challenges this, see Corbett (2009). Since this is a paper about the boy's development, I will use the male pronouns exclusively.
2. This is a Latinized version of the Greek title *Oidipous Turannos*. The Greek word *turannos* reminds us of the godlike status of Oedipus when he is king and his being above the law of the land. His personal life is similarly above natural law as the unwitting murderer of his father and a participant in mother-son incest.
 3. Freud certainly knew Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, which contains some of the relevant details. See Edmunds (1985).
 4. In Sophocles' version of the Oedipus story, Laius and his wife, Jocasta, are warned against having a son by an oracular pronouncement. Edmunds (1985) concludes from the full story of Laius that he was the first pedophile (pederast). He also relates the figure of Laius to Judas, the biblical figure who betrayed Jesus to the Roman authorities and effectively opened the way to his crucifixion. The line of inquiry Edmunds pursues is interesting in itself, but one can read the relationship between Laius and Chrysippus in a different light, which I propose to do in my revision of Freud's theory of the early father-son relationship. See also John J. Winkler (1991) on the historical context of the myth. It is significant that Laius was a homeless boy, whose own father, Labdacus (himself left fatherless as a boy) had been murdered. Lycus, his adoptive father, was also killed. Laius was thus twice orphaned. See Calimach (2002, pp. 31–35). Devereux's (1953) brilliant paper states outright that the 'early history of Laius seems to provide us with data which are fundamental for the understanding of the entire Oedipus myth' (p. 139) and in that way a full psychoanalytic understanding of the son-father relationship.
 5. The well-known work by Ross (1982) and those who have responded to him on the 'Laius complex' assumes that rivalry is the leading psychodynamic feature of the son-father relationship. My proposed revision does not counter the orthodox Freudian account but is intended to supplement it. Freud considered any feelings a boy might have for his father in terms of passive sexual strivings, which he termed the 'negative' dimension of the boy's oedipal development. But there is more to the relationship.
 6. Freud's disappointment in his own father, Jakob, led him to see his father as a passive (feminized) male, a coward who while walking with his young son, Sigmund, would not stand up to a man who knocked off his hat causing it to plop into the mud. Freud used an historical figure (Hannibal) to as serve as a model for identification, much as boys do now with television superheroes. In his own self-analysis, Freud can be seen fathering himself, and this may have been his greatest personal accomplishment. Boys in contemporary American society who are being raised without a father (currently nearly one out of three) are using fictional cartoon characters, television personalities, and professional athletes for the same purpose. In general, the view that men want to see their sons become great and powerful men is an androcentric myth. Most fathers recall quite well their own experience of the 'big impossible' of becoming a man (Gilmore, 1990).
 7. Freud's anthropology (1913) stresses the rivalry among sons and between father and son. Another aspect of the male oedipal situation deserving attention is the father's own feelings of rivalry for his son that seems to occur in childhood during the phallic-oedipal phase and again following the son's puberty. The earliest occurrence of this feeling probably follows receiving relatively less attention from his wife as she attends to the demands of the infant. It occurs in another form when his son reaches adolescence and becomes a fit competitor for selection by women as a sexual partner. Many fathers react to this by trying to be like their adolescent sons. They return to the gym and may go looking outside of the parental partnership for a younger female sexual companion.
 8. Perhaps we have erred by first looking at the relationship of *father* to son rather than that of *son* to father, that is, by beginning the analysis with the father. It is implicit in the former (father-son) relationship that the father takes part in what will become a reciprocal relationship. In the latter (son-father) relationship, however, the son is understood to initiate the relationship. For the boy, this makes all the difference in the world.
 9. One classic account is found in Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) where it is defined as the 'psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides' (pp. 204–207). Lacan's (1977, pp. 1–7) mirroring process in infancy as 'primary identification' is in service of recognition of the self and perhaps identification *as a human being*. Those who believe that identification is entirely a matter of imitation (as in social learning theory) will neither need nor care to follow me further.
 10. I am not speaking here of love as unconditional devotion to another human being, which is known only to females and is based on the natural mother's relation with her infant. Only women are capable of love so defined. Men can simulate such feeling in romantic love in which the female is idealized and loved on the model of love of God (de Rougemont, 1983). Such love is different than amateness (male-female sexual 'love') and adhesiveness (male-male friendship). Both are distinct from erotic longing. I consider the feeling between a father and son to be a manifestation of this longing. On male adhesiveness see Lynch (1985) and Katz (1995). Freud's later concept of Eros as a primal force has another sense.
 11. Mahler et al. (1990) has characterized the first months of life as autistic and symbiotic. These vivid terms capture the character of the relationship between an infant and his mothering figure that is entirely selfish. Anaclitic, it does not require that the infant see the mothering figure as a separate entity, let alone as a person (to say nothing of being a sexed being). He feels the need for what she has to give him.
 12. I borrow the term 'separation-individuation' from Mahler et al. (1990).
 13. Greenson (1968) has suggested that the boy dis-identifies with his mothering figure as he enters the

- phase of identification with his father. The term is misleading, however, since no real identification with the mothering figure has taken place. Mirroring and or 'primary identification' and oedipal identification are not equivalent psychological processes. Partial identification seems to be an equivocal use of the term.
14. Again, the question arises: What if he has been reared through infancy by a male? Although this is still rare, it now occurs more commonly.
 15. I suspect that Freud's own development took this direction and left its impression on his theory of oedipal dynamics. It should be noted that the standard explanation of so-called male homosexuality is not among the possible results listed. This follows from my view that it is not a form of sexuality at all but rather erotic experience that is essentially ludic. Female homosexuality has an entirely different dynamic. Undoubtedly, another overall effect of protracted symbiotic involvement with the mothering figure is incomplete formation of the self. Such boys have probably felt unlovable since infancy in the orbit of maternal involvement.
 16. In being the object of identification, a father will very likely recollect emotionally (if not explicitly and verbally) his own identification with his father.
 17. Gilmore (1990) notes that the indigenous Tahitians and Semai of central Malaysia are such exceptions.
 18. Stoller (1965) argues persuasively for this view of an inner sense of maleness on the basis of clinical experience. He does the same for female development (Stoller, 1968).
 19. This is necessarily an unsatisfying venture and acquires a compulsive quality. So-called homosexual men find themselves in a psychologically impossible situation. The point is that, although we have come to call such behavior homosexual (in contrast with heterosexual behavior), it is not sexual behavior at all. Homosexuality, as we know, was invented to give a name and sense to what appears to be reproductive behavior between individuals of the same sex. They were characterized as deviants who did not seek out the other sex to reproduce. On historical material that supports this, see Katz (1995).
 20. This is not primarily a matter of not *being attracted to* women. Most 'gay' men enjoy the company of women and many even feel more comfortable among them. Some, of course, dislike women and may even find them repugnant because they remind such men of the mothering figure, her needs, and especially her unwillingness to let them reach full individuation and independence. Lack of sexual interest is secondary, however, to a perception that women (as represented by the mothering figure) stand in the way of a male's existential unfolding as an individual. In extreme situations, some men may seek revenge on substitutes for the mothering figure and commit rape or other sexually tinged crimes. Sexual intercourse then becomes a means of asserting power over and controlling the primal female substitute. Jukes (1997) has suggested that all males experience primitive rage in reaction to the process of psychological 'hatching' (Mahler et al., 1990) from their mothering figures that takes place during the first months of life. Ordinarily, however, powerful social constraints (morality) suppress expression of this 'psychotic core' of hate for the early mothering figure.
 21. The fact that men are expected not to find other men's bodies aesthetically appealing does not affect the argument. As gender dimorphism becomes less decisive in our culture especially for woman and ways of seeing human beings other than in terms of gender become more prominent, it can be expected that men will again express aesthetic interest in other men's bodies as they have periodically in the West (ancient Greece, the Renaissance). In our culture, women are only now admitting to seeing the male body as something beautiful as well as healthy and strong. Women have always been free to see other women's bodies from an aesthetic perspective.
 22. On the debate whether matriarchy preceded patriarchy, see Young (1991).
 23. While an infant boy mirrors his mothering figure without necessarily knowing that she is a separate entity, he models himself on an image of his father that has among its features the status of being a separate individual and a (genital) male one at that. The separateness of the father (as well as the boy's own individuation) as distinct from the dual unity or oneness with the mothering figure is a condition for undertaking the identification process at all.
 24. The mothering figure and the boy were a *self/other* that then divided into the boy's own self and the first other in his life. On the other hand, his father is the first *other self* a boy experiences. A son never experiences his mothering figure as an independent self, which accounts for why the relationship with her remains so ambivalently powerful throughout a man's life. Other males and features of other males with whom he will later identify (older peers, teachers, coaches, religious and political leaders, writers) are also independent selves from which the individual takes on characteristic values, ways of thinking and behaving. The father, however, I take to be the fundamental model of an other self, not just an alternative to *his own* self which emerged in the boy from the undifferentiated mother-self. Other selves, both women and men, will never have quite the same importance in the formation of his personality as his father did, since he was the object of the boy's first self-sourced erotic longing (affection). Undoubtedly, there are elements of the mother's love for the boy in his way of relating to his father, but since his first erotic efforts are as primitive as they are ardent, they have a quality about them that is unique. Besides, the relationship is ultimately in service of identification.
 25. It is important that a boy's first object of directed affection should be a male, since another male is more likely than a female to appreciate the ways boys tend to express affection; namely, by doing rather than saying. Hence the necessity of a father's availability to *do* things with his son (perhaps with little verbal

exchange) and not merely talking with him from a distance which some parental separation and divorce situations require. Boys typically show their affection (later for non-parental others, including their female sexual partners and wives) rather than speak it, which is a more natural way for girls to express their affection given their greater verbal facility. The greater verbal expressiveness of girls has often been observed. This way of behaving may be innate in girls but it is more likely the case that a purely biological disposition to speak feelings and thoughts rather than enact them is an effect of the extent to which girls are spoken to more as infants and boys are listened to less by parents regarding matters of the heart.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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