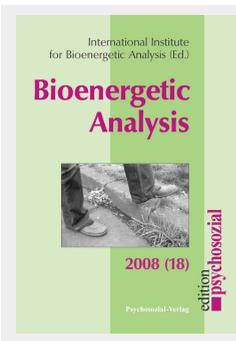


Scott Baum

Fathers are the Dark Matter of the Psychic Universe



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Fathers are the Dark Matter of the Psychic Universe

Scott Baum

Summary

This paper explores some of the aspects of fathers' influence on personality development. The author takes the position that significant aspects of that process have been left unexamined, for reasons hypothesized about in the paper. Using personal and clinical material, the author attempts to bring some of those aspects to light.

Keywords: fathers, fathering, men, masculine development

It has been central to my recovery and development of some sense of self to understand my relationship with my father. In the thirty years of intensive personal psychotherapy in which I have engaged, that relationship has only very slowly yielded to my efforts to penetrate its workings. In making that effort I have discovered that the deeper aspects of my and others' relationships with our fathers remain obscured. Trying to penetrate that obscurity for myself and with my patients, I feel like I am trying to enter a territory in the map indicated by a large dark space—*terra incognita*. Besides the personal meaning to each person of this critical force in our lives, it is also a profoundly significant shaping force in our communal lives and in the formation of the culture that enfolds us.

If the relationship dynamics between fathers and children are as obscured as I think they are, then attempting to truly evaluate the effect fathers have on our children is a very difficult task. Specifically I mean here the psychodynamic and

somatopsychic effects. These effects then relate to everything a person does, of course, but they are often not as visible or obvious as behaviors are. I am trying to get at the formative effects, the kinds of things one sees in response to continuous energetic impact. Dynamic forces that result in accretal, erosive, structuring reactions, that make people who they are at the deepest levels, and are often obscured from view.

As I grappled with this problem of the unseen effect of fathers, it occurred to me that it resembles the cosmological theory of ‘dark matter’. This theory attempts to acknowledge that the visible and measurable (to us), mass in the universe only accounts for a fraction of the gravity known to exist. The mass must be there, but is unseen, hence dark matter. Similarly, as I will attempt to show here, the effect of fathers on the somatopsychic development of children, is clearly demonstrated in our clinical work, and in the world around us, but hardly viewed directly.

Current literature and discussion on fathers and our effect on families and society in our functioning as fathers seems to me to focus on three broad areas. In the first (not in order of priority) the focus is on the significance to the development of the personality of children, especially sons, when fathers are absent or occupy only a peripheral role in our children’s lives. This is an area of social behavior that has undergone significant change in the last twenty-five years. Seen in such seemingly small matters as diaper changing tables in men’s restrooms, this change is huge; however, as I will suggest below, not entirely for the good. In works like *Raising Cain* (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000), the argument is made that the emotional limitations we see so often in boys come very substantially out of relationships with their fathers characterized by distance, coldness or detachment, or criticality unrelieved by softness or empathy or compassion from the fathers.

In the psychoanalytic literature, as exemplified by Benjamin (1986) the father is seen as a force helping to pull the child out of the symbiotic orbit with mother. In this respect he is an exciting object who represents the outside (of the family) world. He acts as facilitator of the developmental thrust toward greater autonomy in the child, and as a counterweight to the regressive pull of the mother’s enveloping caring and sympathy.

Feminist theory (Silverstein, 1996) offers yet another viewpoint. It critiques both the inadequate attention to the social and psychological effects of current fathering behaviors, and the tendency to overvalue fathers as providers, and

authorities. Seen from this perspective, fathers' roles and behaviors have not changed sufficiently in the social context to adequately alter the misogynistic patterns of power distribution.

Each of these views has substantial merit, and each addresses a significant aspect of the dynamics that organize the relationship between fathers and children. Feminist theorists, in particular, do not shy away from identifying and decrying the prevalence of abuse and exploitation so often present in the relationships between men and our dependents. Yet in all of these views (and I do not pretend here to do them justice in the complexity and broadness of their insights) I find something missing. Something about the inner workings of this relationship that affects us all. Something that is best understood through the investigation afforded by in-depth psychotherapy.

In my search to illuminate these forces of fathering, I realized I could do no better than look to my own experience for insight. Then I might be able to match my experience up with observation and data collected from others' experience. Unavoidably, this methodology would introduce a bias, even a skew, into my findings, since my experience with fathering has been so devastating. But if, even with that skew, my findings resonated with other data, from others, or from the culture which we all breathe and assimilate, then perhaps there are generalizations to be made. These generalizations are likely to apply directly to only a proportion of men, perhaps especially those of us who end up seeking psychotherapeutic help. But personal and professional experience over many years tells me that these generalizations also apply to aspects of our culture as human beings that are pervasive, often subtle, and significant in their effects.

In fact, as I tried desperately to understand my negative feelings and behaviors as a father, and deepen my sensitivity to the impact I was having, I asked for help. But little help with this issue was available, and ultimately I had to find out for myself, using feedback especially from those most affected. Those who know me well, or have read my work, know that I live in an internal emotional underworld of great darkness, where I experience profound negativity and hopelessness. Surely this has influenced greatly my understanding of what transpires between fathers and our children, still I believe I have seen things and seen them in a way that can be generalized and is relevant beyond my unique circumstances.

Professionally, I think we have to shake ourselves out of the torpor of the

modern view of psychotherapist as a facilitator of adaptation, because it so often can be based on denial. In this case the denial is born of many of the same dynamics that are frequently intrinsic to the fathering process. If we make it our project to examine the dynamics of fathering in society, wherever that analysis may take us, we will all have to challenge the denial and anxiety this analysis can cause.

It is not our role to tell people what their purpose in therapy is. But we must be prepared to see a person's experience as clearly, and without distortion – especially the impact of chronic abuse against the self – as we can. We must be prepared to challenge our patients and ourselves with a depth of analysis and conscious experience of the dynamics of fathering. That analysis may run counter to conventional views of benevolent paternity. It may well directly oppose cherished political, social, and psychological beliefs about benign patriarchy and the healthiness of the dependency.

Starting with my personal data about my father, and father figures, and then myself as a father, my discoveries, however disturbing, may shine a light on much broader phenomena that affect many people, although perhaps in less destructive ways than they affected me. Whether in less destructive ways or not, the fact that these dynamics, forces, and processes are at work in many of us is significant. It is significant not only in the ways they affect each of us in the development and unfolding of our individual psychologies, but also in the ways our psychologies interact collectively.

I grew up idolizing my father, as many men do. It is true that my idolization was conditioned and thus intensified by the fact that he saved me from a very disturbed, very destructive mother. She was a dead person inside, he was not. He made himself appear to be, and in comparison to her, at least in my eyes, he was, the sane one. I clung to him desperately as we three traversed the first nine years of my life. Initially, after he left her when I was one-and-a-half years old, the custodial arrangement called for twice-weekly visits by my father – which, as far as I can remember, he kept to faithfully. Each time he came to get me over the first five years, I felt like I was being released from jail. And each return was despair and terror. He rescued me by maintaining his tie to me, even through kidnappings on both sides. Eventually, after a court-ordered six month and six month split, we left our hometown, and then the country, thereby assuring that my mother, who was not pursuing her custodial rights very aggressively, would be unable to reach me.

I offer this history in part to give some sense of how difficult it has been for

me to examine my father's behavior as a predator, and a perpetrator of abuse. My father encouraged my idealizations of him. He was different from other fathers. He was open, and open to emotions, he was not afraid to touch, or of sexuality. He was a charismatic leader, and I was his living demonstration of the way to raise an emotionally healthy, assertive, secure child. People believed all this of him, and followed him. Although some, like my wife, saw fairly quickly – long before I did – how limited he was, how much of his interaction was filled with contempt and superiority, and a deep-seated need for control.

It is important to share this because what my father did, although extreme in its own way, is what men do characteristically. We overwhelm and intimidate, we say things with emphaticness and absoluteness, and we show contempt for those who do not yield, who do not submit to us. Yes, of course, some men do not behave that way—all the time. But it is part of our indoctrination and enculturation as men. In fact it is an intrinsically double-binding communication all men I know have experienced: “in the playground don't tolerate any put down or domination—fight! In the classroom tolerate and submit to any humiliation and keep still and quiet”. If you look at us men as we are organized vertically, from most intimate to most surface, I do not think you will find many of us capable of softness, resiliency, and receptivity across the different levels of interaction from least to most intimate.

At some point the requirement that we be rigid and refuse to be subordinated will arise. This can happen in the smallest ways, as I know too well. Being offered suggestions about how to do something, for example, or being asked to explain something we are doing can be enough to trigger a defensive raising of the hackles. We are ready to fight, very often responding to an over-imagined internalized humiliating person, and then responding to the wave of humiliation that has swept all other sensations before it, the need to fight to the death for honor and self-esteem taking priority over anything else. We have little equipment to cope with that imperative to fight except by enacting it or displacing it. So, we can fight, or we can yield and displace the negativity elsewhere, to those dependant on, or vulnerable to us. We have little, or no, training in how to meet and negotiate with each other, how to be receptive, and how to maintain our integrity even in the face of hostility actually directed at us from the outside, without precipitating violence of one kind or another.

I am talking about the general enculturation of men here, not about any specific man or exception to the rule. I acknowledge those may exist. But as

I try to think about such a man specifically, I cannot name one. It is not a question of perfection. It is rather, recognition that the specific character flaws that men evince, even when we do the right things and espouse the right positions, have great relevance for how we run the world. And make no mistake, we run the world.

This, I believe relates very directly to our work as therapists. We have studied extensively the intricacies of children's relationships with their mothers. We have, as a field, correctly identified the significance of attachment as a basic constituent of human experience and development. But we continue to see it largely as a phenomenon in early childhood taking place between mother and child. Freud, in his emphasis on Oedipal processes, makes it clear that what happens between children and their fathers matters. Indeed it does; but it is very hard to study. It is threatening to us all, as members of this culture, to risk the dangers of raising consciousness, our own and others on this subject. What is the real impact of the formation of identity through the identification with and submission to an intimidating figure? We see the evidence of the effects of this process all around us, in the mix of idealization and repulsion from mobsters, example.

Were we to study the personality shaping dynamics of these processes more closely, we would, I think, have to face the severity of the negative impact fathers have individually, and as representatives of cultural forces and ideologies. We would have to deconstruct the power dynamics of relationships in a society in which one gender predominates over another in the distribution of power. Doing this would open to revelation (and analysis) the intrapsychic, the energetic, and the characterological impact of that fact.

Right now men, as fathers, are seen largely as the facilitators of separation from the regressive infantile clinging to mother. We are not seen as primary attachment figures who are competitive with mothers and siblings, and who demand a most profound loyalty and submissiveness to our needs and demands. Not seeing this clearly, leaves us unable to study the subtle manipulations and collusions, as well as the outright dominations that reflect the workings of the system.

It is my position that it is mistaken to believe that enabling, or even insisting, that men and fathers become more available, or even more emotionally responsive, will change things. Rather, only if we analyze and modify the underlying power system to which we all subscribe, and in the case of men, give

up our privileged status, can there be adequate space created for new things to develop. Giving up privilege is difficult. I, for one, find it very hard. Of course this is tied up with my own narcissistic desperation. But it is also part of my enculturation as a man. Here I am talking about the privileges connected to power and the exercise of power.

Modern feminist theory has changed our view of relationship patterns in psychotherapy and in the world. The relational model of psychotherapy process finds many of its originating concepts in the feminist view of relationship as an egalitarian, mutual, co-created process in which the psychotherapeutic and democratic ideal of even the smallest voice being heard can be realized. In this view the man and the father have to be more than the figure who assists the child to emerge from the mother's orbit for the purposes of separation and the development of autonomy. He would have to become the co-creator, with an autonomous and self-realized mother, of a mutually dependent matrix. In this model, autonomy is grounded in successful dependency, the kind of dependency one sees in mother-child relationships wherein the mother supports and facilitates individuation and separation because she loves her child, and her or his burgeoning mastery and independence.

I remember a colleague, a bioenergetic therapist, and a man who had worked on himself, and had an enlightened view of sexism in the culture. But he also felt that men were being characterized unfairly, that the pendulum had swung too far in identifying men as chauvinistic and over-powerful. I could hear his resentment at having to accept the burden of being a part of the privileged class. He felt wronged by women, and he felt that the view of men as destructive in our superiority, and as the ruling group was exaggerated and persecutory. This was happening hardly after the women's movement had emerged, and the true nature of the oppressive system women live in was just being limned. It informed me how limited the open space would be for the honest acknowledgement of our participation as members of the ruling group, and how hard it would be for us to give up our privileged position in society, which exists even when we feel oppressed because of personal or social realities. This experience gave me some clue about how hard it would be to redress the harm of lifetimes of inequality, prejudice, and discrimination.

At the same time, my friend's distress with the new identities being offered and demanded of men points to an important fact. Within the family – people often say – they saw the wife and mother have the power, and therefore be the

dominant figure. In this frequently described configuration, it is argued that it is really the mother who is powerful to the children, with the father a weak, or secondary character. It certainly can be true that in any particular familial constellation, this is the way things are within the family. But the family does not exist in a social vacuum. And the children in the family, while young and immature, are not oblivious to the social environment in which their family functions. In that environment, by any measure, it is men who predominately control things. Even where women are the actual holders of authority, the system we all have to adapt to is a system evolved over many generations to correspond to the values predominately espoused by men. In that system the values espoused by men make us the ultimate repositories of authority.

Our focus as a profession on the importance of the interpersonal field, and the significance in people's lives of attachment, has brought us to a recognition of the formative meaning of a child's early relationships. In particular, theory and research over many decades has brought into view the prominent meaning and impact of the child's relationship with her or his mother. This focus remedied some of the neglect of the mother as an important figure in her own right in a child's intrapsychic and interpersonal life. But there is even now still something of a feeling for me that we view the mother's function as preparing a child (especially boys) for the important tasks of entering and controlling in the real world, and those functions and activities are mediated by men, so the mother remains a subsidiary figure (a regent to the king) hovering in the background, hopefully a nurturing or benign presence, sustaining the person in his contention with the world, but not herself really a player in it. Most children in our culture experience a version of a scenario in which the mother is in charge of the household and childrearing, but there is always authority reposing in the father to overrule or veto her authority. When this is not done by frank overpowering, is often done by disparagement and sabotage.

This view enables a denial on all our parts of the significance of the paternal role, both as father and representative of the masculine identity in society. We pretend that men do not run things, and that understanding our patients' dynamics and experience does not require that we see the impact that denial of that has on them. It is because of this that modern discussion of the role of fathers focuses so much on the question of the father's presence or absence in the child's physical reality. The focus should be much more on what the father's presence is, in whatever form, in a child's intrapsychic and somatopsychic

reality. We know very well as clinicians that distance and reserve can enhance a person's aura of power. We know this from the evocativeness of the analyst's abstinence and apparent detachment. Mothers, as a group, rarely feel such reserve or abstinence is appropriate or acceptable, and it is usually a requirement and expectation that they be engaged and hands-on. Fathers often engage in abstinence reflexively as an expression of power facilitated by greater emotional unresponsiveness.

I watch as David twists and turns in the couple therapy with his wife. A man in his early sixties he is devoted to his wife, and to a vision of them as a couple. The vision includes love, recognition, appreciation, affection, and an egalitarian framework in which both are equal and equally valued. Many times she attempts to show him how he reflexively diminishes her and her position. He's a man whose convictions are strong about politics and morality. He has worked hard to become more open, more peace-loving, to recover from a childhood of denigration and belittlement. A man of many talents, he can build and repair most anything, he teaches and performs as an artist, and he is vigorous, athletic and virile. Each time his wife, Sarah, tries to tell him about her feelings of depreciation at his hands, he replies with a moment's receptivity. Then, driven by a deep sense of humiliation and shame, and a profound narcissistic defensiveness, he launches into a recriminatory justification of himself. Has he not done so much to change? Has he not done so much to improve their lives? How can she insult him so, with these terrible accusations? He hammers her until she falls silent.

Finally, feeling I know him well enough, and the issues all too well, I enter the fray. I say his wife is telling him that he has no heart for her. At first taken aback, he summons himself up, indignant. But she supports my view consistently, willing to risk his wrath, and her own disappointment, to face the truth in her and him. We go through the cycle many times. She tells him he disrespects her, in small and big ways, a thousand times a day. She tells him that she is becoming resigned to the possibility that their relationship will not be what she had hoped, although it is so much, even now. He pulls himself up in outrage and hurt—what about his side of the story? With my help she battles back his attempts to break her down, and then he softens, and the truth of his desire to do the right thing emerges. As does his vision of himself as a man like the man she wants him to be. And the severity of his limitations in his capacity, and perhaps motivation, to become that man, to the best of his

ability comes into view. He softens, then, and tells her with evident sincerity of his desire, and intention to be the kind of man who truly loves, honors, and respects his wife, as partner, collaborator, and witness.

I know this pattern of David's all too well, because it is mine also. I know it as husband, and as father, and I see it in the men around me. Its constituents are a basic competitive disrespect for others, and a need to be superior. It is based on a fundamental limitation in empathy, in the ability to experience another person's reality, *and* to value it as much as one's own. Basic training in relatedness for men is accomplished through humiliation and embarrassment. Men don't refrain from asking for directions because we are too stupid to know when we are lost, but because we anticipate the ridicule from the gas station attendant when it is revealed that we have been driving on the street we have been looking for all along.

The inculcation of these attitudes is a basic aspect of the socialization of men, handed down from father, coach, male teachers, public figures, and of course mothers, to male children. And so to some extent cannot be avoided by any of us. In some cases, like mine, the cumulative effect of the personal and social forces at work destroys the capacity for compassion and love, leaving only the malevolent forces behind with any significant visceral reality. The only option for goodness then becomes a set of principles to believe in and follow, even without the visceral emotionally based conviction to go with them. The visceral emotional ground for empathy, compassion, and healthy submission to the needs and welfare of others, is not built. Rather the male child learns to despise these processes and feelings as sissified, they feminize and humiliate him.

It is hard for people to accredit this view I have of myself, but it gives me a very distinctive vantage point from which to view the impact of fathers on our children, on our wives or partners, and thus, ultimately on society as a whole. The negativity I see, endemic to the psychology of men, is often subtle. There are many rationalizations for its expression, some offered by the perpetrators, some by the victims. But there exists an underlying competitiveness, driven by unconscious and exquisite sensitivity to dynamics of power and dependency. The acknowledgement of dependency, for men, is to be denied at all costs because dependency always entails humiliation; humiliation of a kind that will require either revenge or suicide. Those feelings are enacted and expressed in various forms, such as retaliation, defiance or sabotage, or splitting and identification with the aggressor.

Coping with these interpersonal and intrapsychic forces requires strong action. Disparagement, devaluation, contempt, envy, dismissiveness, and derogation, are leveled at one's opponents, those who would defeat and vanquish us. And with equal ferocity at those who hold us in their hands by virtue of the vulnerability engendered in us by our dependency on them. Given the pervasiveness of these attitudes, the force of the action enacting them, and the power differential that most of the time exists between perpetrator and victims, victims are left with little choice but to blunt consciousness. Or being conscious, to form various counter defenses of ultimate superiority, or rationalizations and accommodations to the abuse which assert impermeability to the toxins. How many times do therapists hear the mother or wife describe the father and husband as just another child in the house, when it is evident she is being devalued and even mistreated? To remain conscious, to acknowledge vulnerability, and to understand the nature of the power dynamics, leaves one with little choice but to fight for identity, for value, for one's psychic and spiritual life.

This is the situation I find myself in. Despite appearances to the contrary—my father was a very successful body-oriented psychotherapist for the last third of his life—he carried dramatic versions of these basic attitudes of men that I have described. When combined with the effects of my earliest childhood when I was exposed to an even more unvarnished version of evil in the environment around my mother, I have had little inner experience of the reality of goodness to bring to bear to counter the hateful and malevolent attitudes infused and grown within me. This reality meant that it took years of agonizing, very difficult work for me to see the true force of these attitudes within me, and their expression. It would undoubtedly have taken much more time, or not even happened at all, had my wife not insisted on fighting tooth-and-nail against my imposition of these destructive patterns of behavior and expression on her and on our family.

In the end, I have discovered that the most I can do is participate in the formation of a space in which my wife and children can be protected, as much as is possible, from the unchallenged expression of the toxic attitudes and affects of merciless competitiveness and devaluation I embody with such force and ferocity. So, in my case, being more available was certainly not the gift we imagine when we talk about fathers' greater involvement in the lives of their families. In some ways my capacity to contain and restrain the expres-

sion of these feelings comes too late, severe damage has been done to those closest to me. One can see that, for example, in my wife's having to spend so much of her emotional and psychic energy setting limits on my acting out, or recovering her ground after being mind-fucked, sufficiently to assert reality and demand I acknowledge what has happened. And I can see it in my son's expression of feeling himself without a self, having had his selfness attacked and decimated, and then identifying with my rigid, controlling demandingness and assertions of superiority. My daughter, while spared some of the devaluation and competitiveness, had to take distance from me, and my wife. From my wife because her decision to take care of me made her less available to her children than her love of them would have otherwise directed her to be. From me, among other reasons, to cope with the assimilating force of my identification with her athleticism (a common problem in men with athletically gifted children), even though I was attempting to control it. These are only examples, of course, of what was a pervasive set of dynamics, but represent some of those dynamics related specifically to the issues under discussion here. It is painful to contemplate the tragic disruption of the very loving feelings between my wife and my children, in both directions, so severely deformed by these attitudes and feelings. This pattern of alienation due to hostile and devaluing attitudes is to some extent endemic to men as fathers. Where mothers embody and express the same attitudes, it often reveals elements of these same dynamics as they have been structured into the culture.

In some ways, my awareness of these negative attitudes and behaviors, and my intention and struggle to restrain their expression comes just in time in my own family. Because there is yet much which can be preserved, and allowed to develop. But the truth of the dynamics, the actions, the feelings and the structures, powered and engendered by these attitudes can only be ignored at great peril to all of us. This is true in my family, in *the* family, as representative of the basic emotional and social home of us all, and in society as a whole, an outgrowth of the family.

It is a basic conviction in bioenergetic theory, as it is in many humanistic philosophies, that once consciousness is raised, and emotional obstacles removed, compassion and empathy will flow relatively unobstructed. On a very basic practical level this seems to me incorrect. Compassion, empathy, and sensitivity are all attributes, which in their deployment improve with practice and refinement. So, just clearing the way for their emergence, while necessary,

is not sufficient for them to become well-used and sophisticated elements in human relatedness. These capacities must be honed, and dovetailed with skillfulness in communication and expression, to reach a person's potential for goodness and right behavior.

In fact, focusing on the aspect of relational attunement in meaningful interactions, including in one's sexual life, which is so central to a Bioenergetic view of life, means getting to know oneself and the other. Going through strong, cathartic events is part of that experience. In this respect, both sexuality and aggression are central to the development of men. Clearly, the focus in bioenergetics on the full experience of one's sexual self is critical to one's development, but not as a vehicle for discharge of pent-up energy from stimulation, as much as a vehicle to know oneself through the matrix of relationship with another.

The focus on discharge takes us back to the primitive and the unrefined, and can lead to objectification of the self and the other. This is something we see often in modern representations of sexuality in the culture. This focus on discharge can be useful as a tool to open closed structures and dulled sensations, but it is not an end in itself. A more desirable end is to develop the capacity for self-directed and self-sustaining autonomous growth and development in our ability to be in contact with ourselves, others and reality.

The same is true with respect to aggression. One unaddressed issue in the life of men is the inevitably life-altering experience we go through when we go to war, whether government directed, or part of the culture of the streets we grow up in. We maintain a fiction, clearly pointed out by David Grossman (1996) that one can try to, and even kill, another, or be threatened with death, and not be permanently affected. The effect on us of being threatened with murder, or attempting it on another, is likely to be in the direction of greater hardness and insensitivity. The logical end to profound devaluation and competitive control is killing.

My experience of the terror of being threatened with death as a very young child; and with penetration, physical and psychic; and with identity annihilation through manipulation and torture; and feeling the feeling and the consequences for me of murderous rage, a compassionless urge for revenge, tells me that even healthy, solid, grown men are challenged to the edge of madness when they are required to kill. What happens to children exposed to this level of inhumanity and horror, even if it is only in the body of someone they love—their father?

And what happens when these same forces and feelings are acted out in the crucible of the family? Even if a hand is never raised to another, only words, tones, looks, and attitudes are conveyed.

It might be argued that this view is so skewed it sees only the most egregious cases of fatherhood in this culture. Things are much more moderate than they seem here. Both my own experience, and the popular culture tell me that this is probably not true. I coached youth athletics for ten years, and I was involved in the administration in the administration of those programs with men who are, as a group, among the most enlightened and aware men I know. I saw very clearly the ferocity with which these attitudes of deadly competition, and the drive for supremacy, coupled with characterological and cultural desensitization, still prevail even among those men who deplore them.

The focus in popular culture on fathers – e.g. in the Simpsons, Family Guy, Home Improvement, All in the Family, and the like – reveals them on the whole to be fatuous, bloated, self-important, vain, oblivious and destructive people, with fragile egos, immense social power, and yet given the undying love and devotion of their dependents. Think of characters from Ralph Kramden to Homer Simpson. The proliferation of such characters right now, I believe, is a way for young people to deal with their relative helplessness in a world dominated by such people, by ironically embracing and laughing at them. But I think the underlying truth is that these characters represent a truth about the state of fathers and fathering in the world today.

Raising our consciousness, opening ourselves to feeling, and enhancing capacity for cathartic experiences is not enough. To expose the destructive dynamics embedded in the current methods of fathering and becoming a man, requires acknowledging that fathers' effect must be like the "dark matter" I talk about in my title, in order to explain its form. It is not measurable because it is not visible to us, but it must exist because of the immense gravitational force it exerts. A force which is believed in current cosmological theory to determine the shape of the universe as we know it to be. A force, though not visible, many times greater than that exerted by what is visible. Similarly, in the world, men dominate. Children, while immature, can see what is there to be seen, and even if they cannot see it, they feel the inexorable effects of the forces at work.

Looking to the past to find for ourselves a way to embody the lessons of empathic attunement and subjective relating will not succeed. As best I know,

given the known record of human history, we are more available now than ever before for a social system prioritizing relatedness and equality. Attaching priority to relational attunement and interconnectedness requires the development of a new kind of person. It may be that this is not the natural human form, or it is for too few humans, despite what research and belief conclude. We may have to make it a specific project to develop ourselves and humans into such people. It is not the job of therapists to tell our patients what kind of people to turn into. But in order to be maximally available for choices that test the range of human possibility, do we not have to have as full and as deep an understanding of the impact on our patients, and ourselves, of fathers, and men, as we can possibly have? And with that awareness be willing to face and facilitate a change in consciousness and behavior in our patients, in ourselves, and in the world in which we live.

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About the Author

Scott Baum, Ph.D., ABPP, is a clinical psychologist practicing and living in New York City. He is on the faculty of the New York Society for Bioenergetic Analysis, and a member of the International Faculty of the IIBA.

Scott Baum, Ph.D.
711 West End Avenue (1AN)
New York, NY 10025
USA
docsbpsych@aol.com