SONS REMEMBERED COMMUNICATION
EXPERIENCES WITH THEIR MOTHERS:
A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

by

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ABSTRACT

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SONS' REMEMBERED COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCES WITH THEIR
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(Title)

Families are increasingly the focus of research, yet communication between
parents and children has received little attention. Family communication research has
focused primarily on relationships of the marital couples, and generally the child's
perspective is not attended to. In addition, communication in families has been
studied by observing the interactions and behaviors between family members.
Missing from this approach is what is happening in the minds of interactants. A
relationship is not defined only by those behaviors that occur between two people, but
also by the meanings those in relationship attach to those behaviors.

In terms of parent-child relationships studied in communication research, the
majority of the work has involved the mother-daughter relationship, followed by
father-son, father-daughter and lastly mother-son. This is reflected in popular and
contemporary literature also.

Many contemporary writers state that a mother has tremendous psychological power and that the emotional bond a man has with his mother is likely to be the most deeply rooted connection in his life. For many boys she is the only person they can trust. However men, unlike women, seem to find it difficult to share their feelings and memories about their mothers that go beyond reverence or simple expressions of disagreements.

Scholarly research on mother-child communication is not without contradictions . Some studies report sex differences in parent-child interaction such as that mothers encouraged dependency and were more nurturing for their toddler sons than for their toddler daughters, while other studies have shown that mothers treat sons and daughters similarly. Researchers do concur, however, that mothers tend to talk more and use more supportive communication, such as praise, approval, agreement and collaboration with daughters than with sons

This research project involves a review of the literature on the topic of the mother-son relationship, both popular as well as academic literature. Research questions pertaining to the communication experiences that sons remember having with their mothers are developed. The methodology is explained: the first two stages will use focus groups and individual interviews. The purpose of these interviews is to gather recollections and stories concerning mother-son communication. These stories will provide the data for fantasy theme analysis, which involves identifying the shared experiences and the ways in which these are recalled, of the focus group and individual interview participants. The final stage will use Q-Methodology, which involves building a Q-deck of 60 cards with each containing a communication episode; participants will then sort the cards as they most relate to their experience. Analysis of the Q-sort results will show if there are distinct types, or clusters, of mother-son relationships and the kinds of communication behaviors found in each . The actual research will be completed at a later date.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the Study

Families are frequently studied; since 1964, more than 79,000 family and marriage research articles have been published (Touliatos, 1993). In general, family dynamics such as cohesion, satisfaction and stability are researched; the goal is to understand the influences of these upon the family. Family communication research has traditionally relied upon large-scale questionnaires, interview data, coding systems in conversational analysis, and has used college students as the population studied. Such research concepts and approaches point to the dominance of the scientific approach in conceptualizing research assumptions about the family. In studying these variables, using the scientific method with college populations, much richness is missed. This is because the scientific method is a construction, and in using this method in studying family dynamics and relationships, what is often omitted from the process is arguably the most important, i.e., the subjective experiences of those we seek to understand, those of the family members themselves (Davilla, 1995).

To date, family communication research has focused not only on using the scientific method, but also primarily on the relationships of marital couples, with other factors, such as extended family members, work, and children, having been viewed compartmentally as contributing to, or impacting, the couple relationship. Generally the child's perspective is not attended to through presently used methodologies in studying family communication (Davilla, 1995). In addition, communication in families has been studied by observing the interactions and behaviors among family members. Missing from this approach is what is happening in the minds of interactants. What are the meanings attached to these interactions and behaviors by those involved?   Relationships occur between interactants, that is

behaviors, enacted by each person affect the other (Hinde, 1981). However, observing only behaviors is insufficient, as what is occurring in the minds of the interactants cannot be observed. A relationship is not defined only by those behaviors that occur between two people, but also by the meanings those in relationship attach to those behaviors (Dixson & Duck, 1993).

Bochner (1995) in the foreword of <u>Parents, Children, and Communication: Frontiers of Theory and Research</u>, writes that the term frontier is a useful metaphor for describing research on communication within families in that it suggests an undeveloped and unexplored landscape, an exciting and dangerous place.   In lived experience, Bochner states, the spaces in which parents and children are mutually transformed is indeed a dangerous place, as this is a place where mistakes are plenty, where people are often not aware of the effect they have on each other, where lack of awareness, experience and education can result in pain and suffering, and where few people feel they have the knowledge and skills to feel confident and competent. Family therapist Salvador Minuchin (1974) advised that parenting is an extremely difficult process; no-one carries out this responsibility to their entire satisfaction, and all are changed by the experience.

The majority of family communication research concerning parent-child relationships involves the mother-daughter relationship, followed by the father-son, the father-daughter and lastly, the mother-son relationship.   Research in family communication indicates that mothers have significantly more interaction with children than do fathers (Lamb & Oppenheim, 1989); however, while the mother-daughter relationship has received the most research, the mother-son relationship has received the least attention.

In terms of methods of study, the use of fantasy theme analysis (Bormann, 1972; 1982; 1985) and Q-methodology (Stephenson, 1952), though not often used in family communication research, have resulted in interesting findings as they elicit

participants' understanding of their relationships and how they each talk about and thus symbolically create their social reality. These methods, which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2, uncover the meanings attached to the behaviors between interactants. Previous research on parent-child communication using fantasy theme analysis and Q-methodology has resulted in interesting findings.

In his work on father-son communication, Gaetano (1995) found that there were six types, or clusters, of rhetorical communities in light of sons' remembered communication experiences with their fathers. Rhetorical communities are groups in which those within the group talk about and construct their social reality in similar ways. The rhetorical communities of father-son relationships found by Gaetano are: 1) being affirmed and guided by a dad who listened; 2) communication avoidance to cope with an angry dad; 3) a loving father but no role model or mentor; 4) pressured to succeed by a father who doesn't know me; 5) feeling close to a sometimes absent dad, and 6) sharing feelings with and being guided by a loving dad. Endres (1996) in his study on father-daughter communication and the daughters' consequent rhetorical visions, found four types or clusters: 1) the essential companion, a predominantly buddy image; 2) the silent intruder, silent and inexpressive; 3) the loving patriarch, authoritarian yet loving, 4) the storyteller, sharing his jokes and dreams. This research study will seek to discover types, or clusters, of relationships between mothers and sons.

The Contemporary Cultural Context

In the movie "Mother" (1996) the male lead character, after just having signed the legal papers to divorce his second wife, meets a friend for a drink at a bar. This conversations follows:

"Do you think all the girls you've ever gone out with, including your wives, do you

think they are all the same women?"

"Well, the two wives are the same, that's for sure. Yes, I'd say out of the three serious relationships I've had, the three of them were exactly the same."

"Well if all the women are the same, what kind of woman is that? Once you figure that out, you go for the opposite."

 "Let's see what they had in common. They didn't really believe in me."

Really?"

"Yeah."

"Well Jesus that 's weird. You like women who don't believe in you?"

"Yeah, I guess I do."

"If a woman doesn't support me, I'm out of there. Why do you think that is? Do you like men who don't believe in you?"

"No."

"So why in God's name would you like a woman who doesn't believe in you? I don't get it."

Soon after, he recognizes the connection between his relationship with his mother and

his relationships with women, and tells his younger brother:

" This is affecting my life. I feel estranged from my own mother and I don't like it; it affects everything I do, especially with women. I've been thinking about this a lot. I'm going to move back in with mother."

   He moves back in with mother, and in this process he learns about his relationship with her, of both his and her hopes and disappointments, accomplishments and fears, and begins to understand the dynamics of this relationship and how this has affected his life. While this is only one perspective on the mother-son relationship, and a fictitious one at that, the profound impact of this parent-child relationship is unquestionable. In addition to movies addressing this theme of parent-child relationships, many writers have explored these relationships. While many books and essays have been written, the mother-son relationship has received the least attention. One example,   The Tie That Binds: A Collection of Writings about Fathers and Daughters, Mothers and Sons (1991), an anthology edited by Martz, contains eighty narratives and poems about parent-child relationships. While daughters wrote twenty-nine of these about their fathers, mothers wrote twenty-nine about their sons, fathers wrote fourteen about their daughters, and only eight sons wrote of their mothers. Of these eight entries, four related to aging and death.   The relatively small number of entries by sons about mothers in this anthology is illustrative of the lack of writing about this particular relationship in the popular literature, which is mirrored in the scholarly literature, relative to that of the other parent-child relationships.
   Yet Gurian (1994), a teacher and counselor, writes in Mothers, Sons and Lovers that the vast majority of men he works with, and the majority of men in national studies, admit to needing to work on the relationship with their mothers: on boundaries, on feelings of guilt about their mothers, and on issues concerning a

wife's/partner's role in relation to their mother's role. He writes of the mother-son bind; a relationship in which the adolescent son wants to destroy the emotional dependence on his mother while at the same time retain it. Gurian (1998) states that adolescent boys are not as tough as we may think, and are far more fragile than we would like to think. Yet Silverstein (1996) states that everything in our culture tells mothers that they have to let go of their sons. This is the context for the study.

Mothers and sons, it is the classic relationship (Doherty, 1999). Yet what makes this so? And is there only one type of mother-son relationship, or many? The answers to these questions are not readily available because of sons' difficulty with expressing feelings about the relationship with their mothers (Klein, 1994).

Research Questions

The goal of this research is to determine whether or not there are distinct communities of sons that differ with respect as to how they remember their communication episodes with their mothers, and if there are, what are the distinguishing characteristics of such communities?

The purpose of this research is to examine the ways in which sons talk about their mothers and how they remember the messages they received from their mothers while they were growing up. An analysis of how sons symbolically create their remembered communication experiences with their mothers may result in a deeper understanding of the mother-son relationship, and what impact these messages had. This research project will use focus-group interviews, individual interviews, fantasy-theme analysis, and Q-methodology to answer these research questions:

RQ1:   Are there distinct rhetorical communities of sons with respect
            to the way these communities symbolically create their
            remembered communication episodes with their mothers?

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RQ2:   What are the major characteristics of such rhetorical

communities?

<u>Review of the Popular Literature</u>

Kindlon and Thompson (1999), in <u>Raising Cain</u>, state that a mother has

tremendous psychological power and that the emotional bond a man has with his

mother is likely to be the most deeply rooted connection in his life. For many boys

she is the only person they can trust. However, according to Klein (1984), in <u>Mothers</u>

<u>and Sons</u>, men, unlike women, seem to find it difficult to share their feelings and

memories about their mothers that go beyond reverence or simple expressions of

disagreements. Olson (1981), in <u>Sons and Mothers</u>, explains:

> The way in which men see the world, the people
> in it - all the relationships they are ever likely to
> have is welded to the bond with their mothers.
> This bond, this relationship is the cornerstone
> of all future relationships. Yet it is a bond infused
> with and surrounded by misunderstandings,
> fears, and a dark, almost unfathomable
> mythology. It is perhaps the most misunderstood,
> misconstrued, and puzzling relationship of all,
> because by the very process of being reared in
> its mystique men can barely see it all; there
> seems to be a prohibition against seeing it clearly (p. 11).

Druck (1985) adds:

> Men do not often discuss their unresolved feelings
> about their mothers. While they play a key part in
> their relationships with other women, these
> emotions are often hidden away out of our
> awareness. Men's deepest feelings toward their
> mothers remain some of their best-kept secrets,
> even from themselves. Yet a large part of what men
> expect from women, and of themselves as men,
> dates back to their childhood experiences with their
> mothers (p. 74).

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Gurian (1998), in <u>A Fine Young Man</u>, states his belief that "we, in the United States, do not understand adolescent male development and therefore are unable to give our adolescent males the kind of love they need to become fully responsible, loving, and wise men " (p.2). He quotes an African saying, " The mother has the boy for the first half of his childhood, the father for the second." He continues by stating that boys in this culture are like boys in Africa or anywhere else; they will sometime toward the end of the first decade of their lives begin moving with great force toward male systems. Carey (1996), in <u>Healing the Mother Wound</u>, seems to agree that boys do become detached from their mothers, both physically and emotionally, yet claims that this is due to boys not being allowed to remain connected to their mothers in the same way that girls are, rather than with Gurian's assertion that a son moving emotionally away from his mother is due to a developmental need.

Bly (1990), in <u>Iron John: A Book About Men</u>, seems to concur with Gurian and claims that a boy, as he moves into adolescence, must retune himself to his father, to sever his ties with his mother, so as to connect with his father and establish his maleness. Bassoff (1994), in <u>Between Mothers and Sons</u>, agrees with Bly and references Bly's belief that mothers are not equipped to teach sons what they need to know in order to become men; rather boys learn how to become men from their fathers and father-figures. However, Caron (1994), in <u>Strong Mothers, Strong Sons</u>, disagrees; she states that a son's longing for his father does not preclude a strong connection with his mother and that he needs a strong attachment to both parents to instill the inner strength necessary to assume responsibility and acknowledge dependence and understand interdependence. Silverstein (1996), in the video <u>Crucial Connection</u>, states that differences between males and females are characterological, not due to biological sex, and as humans we have the same qualities and feelings. She states it is only a cultural assumption that it takes a man to lead a boy into manhood. Thus it would seem that perspectives on the importance of, and the nature

of, the mother-son relationship widely differ.

In Raising a Son (1985) Weiss cites the well-known adage, "A son is a son till he takes a wife, but a daughter is a daughter all the days of her life." This theme of separation is present in the mother-son relationship from its earliest stages to its last. Weiss writes that the beginning of adolescence is a time of conflict between mothers and sons; they frequently interrupt each other during discussions, not bothering to explain differences of opinion. During the latter part of adolescence, this conflict seems to lessen. Weiss states that this is due to the mother being more conciliatory rather than the son changing his behavior. She interrupts him less and defers to him more. During early adolescence the son's relationship with his father differs in that he becomes less assertive while the father becomes more assertive. He does not become more influential with father, rather he gains power over mother.

Harriet Lerner, in The Mother Dance (1998), writes that mothers are warned that boys may become "effeminate" (p.71) if they don't bow out of their lives, especially at adolescence. Mothers are told that boys need to be separate, tough and independent so as to find their way in the world of men, that they are different from daughters and different from mothers. Lerner states that in enacting this belief, the answer is provided to the question as to why boys can't relate. Silverstein and Rushbaum (1994) state, " The love of a mother--both the son's love for her and hers for him--is believed to 'feminize' a boy, to make him soft, weak, dependent, and homebound" (p.11). The authors state that what mothers do with the best of intentions to foster their son's masculine development is actually a form of abandonment.

Elium and Elium (1996), in Raising a Son: Parents and the Making of a Healthy Man , state this fear of feminizing our sons creates internal conflict for mothers who are naturally affectionate with their sons, and that we betray our boy children if we accept our culture's fear of the feminization of its sons. They report that mothers

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tend to coo less with boy babies than they do with girl babies after six months of age, and they tend to take longer to answer their sons cries as well. At the same time that we are attempting to teach independence by withholding hugs and kisses, we expect sons to express affection, share toys, and play cooperatively. This is problematic for sons who are expected to grow up to be strong and independent, yet become loving husbands and fathers. We confuse being strong and independent as not needing hugs and kisses. Kaplan (1978), in <u>Oneness and Separateness: From Infant to Individual</u>, writes, " It is ironic that the vital importance of a human infant's attachment to his mother should be subverted by shame and impatience at the very moment in history when the complaints of human detachment are loudest" (p. 27).

    Given this cultural push for sons to separate from mothers, mothers might ask themselves if they are loving sons enough, being overprotective, overmothering, or overcontrolling. Gurian (1998) has suggestions for mothers of sons: 1) the mother son separation is not merely a relational issue, but one including the whole family; 2) be constantly available to the son's vulnerability even though emotional separation is occurring; 3) masculinize your emotional method if no male figure is around; 4) encourage the boy to develop an emotional vocabulary by reading and discussion; 5) verbally reward the son's moments of emotional conversation or insight seeking; 6) help only when asked and sometimes decline to help if this will foster independence; and, 7) be aware of the boy's verbal and nonverbal signals about too much emotionality from the mother.

    Silverstein and Rushbaum (1994) state that from birth on, a boy's mother is engaged in the process of pulling back from him. What motivates this? The authors cite these following reasons:

-Desire to protect the boy from social censure, by making sure he does not become perceived as a mama's boy or a sissy because of his close connection with, or similarity to, her.

-Buying into the notion of difference, which is the belief that certain characteristics are male, others are female, and that a woman could contaminate her son if she were to pass on her own qualities to him.

-Avoiding the grief of projected loss; this pertains to the belief that a daughter is a daughter for the rest of her life, a son is a son till he gets a wife. Acceptance of this belief may lead a mother to keep distance from her son so as to protect both her and her son from the pain of the inevitable break to come.

-Female lack of self-esteem; the feeling of inadequacy in raising a boy, of not being capable to model the qualities he needs to be a man. Another version of this is the self-denying of the sacrificing mother, who lives through her son but never lets him really know her.

-Fear of exercising control over a male child, from the belief that for a woman this would be inappropriate and potentially emasculating.

-Male ownership of the boy; the belief that the boy belongs to his father, and that a son is a woman's gift to her husband and sometimes to her father as well.

-Elevation of the boy; raising the boy to a position superior to his mother's, which can lead to the child feeling lonely and distanced.

-Fear of homosexuality, as homosexuality is still thought by many to result from a too close relationship with mother.

-Belief in the unknowability of the male, leading to a decision to bow out of a son's life, especially at adolescence.

-Fear of being a sexually seductive mother, which increases at adolescence.

Silverstein, (1993), in an article "Raising Sons" writes:

> "To be a daddy's girl is terrific, but that being a
> mama's boy is crippling to the male child. We're
> afraid that if we stop raising our sons to be part of
> the patriarchal system, they won't survive. Well, in
> fact they don't survive in our system. We kill them

in war, they die of early heart attacks, they kill each
other in the streets.... The more aggressive, the tougher
they are, the less they survive" (Ms, p.46).

    According to Pittman (1993) a boy also experiences contradictory feelings about

his relationship with mother. In <u>Man Enough</u> he states that when a boy goes through

adolescence, the tension between he and his mother increases; he both wants to leave

her and to stay with her in widely divergent ways from which she wants him to both

stay and go. He may wish to still be taken care of by his mother while at the same

time gaining more authority around the house; however, she may want him to still be

a boy under her authority while he uses all that "new masculine energy" (p.151) to

make her life more comfortable and to keep her company. There is uncertainty about

how to leave her and move into adulthood.

    In <u>Strong Mothers, Strong Sons</u> (1994) Caron writes of how time is spent with

fathers compared to mothers. She states that nearly half of an adolescent son's time

with his father is spent in doing homework, getting advice or learning a skill, while a

quarter of the father-son time was spent talking about common interests or practical

matters. Communication with mothers differed in that it was less practically-oriented

and more relationally-oriented. Sons spent almost half of their time with mothers

talking about fathers, relationships with siblings, their school progress, views on

religion, and attitudes toward marriage.

    Many books deal in general with communication behaviors that facilitate positive

relationships between sons and parents, however they do not differentiate between

fathers and mothers. Elium and Elium (1996), in <u>Raising a Son: Parents and the</u>

<u>Making of a Healthy Man</u>, focus on the need for parents to communicate caring to

their son, being firm and directive, and being honest and respectful. They encourage

parents to listen for the positive intent in their son's communication with them; to

hear the needs behind the words. For example, the authors state that when the son

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says, "Dad is a jerk; he never listens to me" the positive intent behind this is " I need dad to listen to me; to be on my side." The authors also emphasize effective listening skills and the helpfulness of "I" messages. They give many examples of how parents typically respond to sons, often out of frustration, and then provide alternatives. For example, the son says, "You're always telling me what to do; get off my back" might result in parents saying to the son, "You'll do what I tell you!" An alternative that shows respect and encourages communication might be "I hear you say you need to be allowed to make your own decisions." Thus the parent is helping the son to articulate what he may not yet be able to. This leads to open, honest, and respectful communication between parents and sons and limits defensiveness.

Other books offer suggestions and strategies for effective parent-child communication yet do not differentiate between fathers and mothers, or between sons and daughters. Gordon (1975), in P.E.T.: Parent Effectiveness Training, suggests accepting the child as she or he truly is, demonstrating this both verbally and nonverbally. Active listening is more effective than passive listening; this involves the parent putting aside their own thoughts and feelings and conveying understanding in their own words. Parents need to want to listen and be helpful, trust the child, be able to accept the child's feelings and the transitory nature of these and accept the child's individuality. Talking so children will listen includes using "I" messages and owning the problem when appropriate. Communicative messages to be avoided are commanding, threatening, moralizing, giving solutions, blaming, shaming and psychoanalyzing.

Dinkmeyer and McKay's (1989; 1990), The Parent's Handbook and Parenting Teenagers also emphasize effective listening skills and expressing feelings through the use of "I" messages. In terms of teenagers, they point to the self-fulfilling prophecy: if parents expect teenagers to cause problems; then problems are likely to occur. The key to effective parenting is equality and mutual respect. The authors

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stressed the ineffectiveness of reward and punishment as these show a lack of respect for the individual, and encourage parents to allow teenagers to learn from natural and logical consequences. An example of a natural consequence is when a teenager misses dinner, they are hungry later; an example of a logical consequence is if the teenager misses dinner, he to prepare his own food. Allowing for consequences, rather than rewards and punishment which arise from power differentials, maintains the communicative environment of equality and respect. Another distinction the authors make is between praise and encouragement. Praise is a reward that is given for winning and using external rewards, with statements such as "You are a good boy, you came in first." In contrast, encouragement attends more to feelings. For example, a parent might say, "You seem to feel pretty good about coming in first," and results in the child feeling good about himself, rather than what he has achieved. Being proud and being encouraging are qualitatively different.

Beausay (1998), in <u>Teenage Boys: Surviving and Enjoying These Extraordinary Years</u>, states the importance of communicating in ways that access the son's learning style: visual, auditory or kinesthetic. His being kinesthetic could be problematic with its emphasis on touch, as, according to Kindlon and Thomas (1999), almost every mother notices, at some point, that her son shies away from these overt displays of physical affection. She, in response, comes to feel uncomfortable hugging, kissing or caressing her son as she used to do often when he was younger.

Mothers and sons do experience this transition differently. Some mothers report worrying about the effect touch has on him, given the changing effect his sexuality has on him at this time; others say they don't want to embarrass him in front of other boys. However, nurturing touch also plays a strong role in child development, and research suggests it continues to be an important way of communicating love and caring for both younger and older children. Generally, mothers maintain physical closeness with daughters as they grow up, but not so with boys. Most mothers of

boys find that nurturing physical contact with a son becomes more awkward and less frequent by age ten with a more dramatic shift as he moves into adolescence.

Carey (1996) in <u>Healing the Mother Wound</u>, poses the question of whether mothers, even if they have not heard of the term Oedipal complex, still become aware of cultural constraints around showing closeness to their sons beyond a very young age. Carey recounts Freud's Oedipus complex:

> The boy's pre-oedipal attachment to his mother becomes sexually charged and the boy then comes to see his father as a rival for his mother's love and wishes to replace him. The boy dreams about killing his father, or at least replacing him; he then develops a fear of retaliation from his father for having these desires, specifically that he himself will be castrated. The fear of castration is such that he gives up his sexual attachment to his mother, and represses and sublimates his feelings toward her (p.86).

The reward that he receives for his sacrifice, apart from not losing his penis, is "identification with his father, and the superiority of masculine identification and prerogatives over the feminine" (Chodorrow, 1978, p.94). Within this perspective, the healthy development of masculinity becomes the ability to separate from, and reject, all that is feminine.

According to Kindlon and Thompson (1999) the mother of a boy faces two gender-specific challenges that may affect the synchrony of her relationship with her son. If she did not have brothers, she may feel she does not know much about boys. Or, if she has had difficult experiences with boys or men, it may affect how she views her son. Seeing her son only for who he is and bridging the gender gap will greatly affect the quality of their relationship. Whatever doubts and uncertainties, fears, or expectations about life with boys will be communicated and will affect her son's feelings about himself and the quality of the mother-son bond.

The issue of power is the hidden agenda, according to Klein (1985) in <u>Mothers and Sons</u>. Historically locked out from larger spheres of influence, a mother can satisfy her need for power in relationships with her children. This is complicated by this power being vicarious and only indirectly involving her self-esteem. And not only does the child have to live out the mother's dreams so as to establish her increased influence, but if her power comes from giving, then the child must need to continue to take from her. This power in motherhood is most complex when related to being the mother of a son; she is the mother of a child who belongs to a more powerful sex than her own.

Adrienne Rich, in <u>Of Woman Born</u> (1975), expresses some of the complexities associated with this issue of power in asking,

> What do we fear? That our sons will accuse us
> of making them into misfits and outsiders? That
> they will suffer as we have suffered from
> patriarchal reprisals? Do we fear that they will
> somehow lose their male status and privilege,
> even as we are seeking to abolish that
inequality? (p.204).

According to Klein, mothers and daughters may connect through feelings of shared victimization, creating a strong bond and desire to eliminate limitations, while knowing reality, which may add to the mother's feelings of powerlessness. With a son, the thought of being in charge of a male child's life can be unsettling, especially for mothers who are unfamiliar with the issue of personal dominance, yet are vulnerable to the idea of being responsible for their son's success. In addition, Klein states that mothers of sons fear losing control and fear losing their son's love. The issue of power is complex and more will be written of this issue in the review of the academic literature.

Review of the Academic Literature

Russo (1979) argued that the mother role is central to the identity of American women. Feminist theorists (Braverman, 1989; Hare-Mustin and Broderick, 1979) state that there is a powerful "myth of motherhood" in American culture that influences belief systems about child-raising, children's well-being, and the ways in which family members interact. The motherhood myth has resulted in the idealization of motherhood and also in stereotypes which influence behavior and perceptions of one's own behavior; the most salient of these are: forgiving, reliable, protective, thoughtful, a good listener, responsible, dependable, understanding, caring, loving, nurturing, tender and affectionate (Ganong and Coleman, 1995). This is the cultural backdrop for investigation into the mother-child relationship and communication within this relationship.

Communication is important in all aspects of family life; it is important that family members can share their thoughts feelings and needs, as well as everyday issues such as food likes and dislikes, clothing and how to spend leisure time. Too often family members are unwilling to share their real feelings with each other, adolescents especially (Noller & Callan, 1991). The interactions that have the greatest impact on children's development are the interactions they have with their parents (Vuchinich, Vuchinich, and Coughlin 1992).

As children move from childhood to adolescence, however, their needs for autonomy and privacy within the family environment generally increase, and they may rely more on peers than parents as they move toward adulthood (e.g. Blos, 1962, 1979; Erikson, 1959; Sessa & Steinberg, 1991). This points to the dialectics inherent within interpersonal communication, such as needs for both autonomy and intimacy, and for privacy and self-disclosure. Petronio's (1991) Communication Boundary Management Theory begins with the assumption that people in close relationships are faced with conflicting demands pulling them to both intimacy and autonomy when

deciding whether to disclose personal information to others. Baxter's Dialectics Theory (1988, 1990) also supports this dynamic of simultaneously trying to achieve opposing goals; for example, openess-closedness and connectedness-autonomy within relationships, which must be managed by those in close relationships. Rawlins (1992) proposes that the dialectical tension of expressiveness-protectiveness exists in the feelings of push and pull within communication designed to express feelings and also avoidance to protect oneself from vulnerability. These theoretical perspectives suggest that communication between parents and children may involve approaches alternating between openness and closedness, autonomy and intimacy, and privacy and self-disclosure.

In terms of what children choose to not talk about, a distinction needs to be made between topic avoidance and secrets. Secrets suggest hiding information from others (Vangelisti, 1994), whereas avoided topics may be known by others (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). Children may avoid discussing topics that they feel will cause conflict, such as political or religious views, as previous discussions have been conflicted. The vast majority of research on topic avoidance has found females to disclose more to parents than do males, particularly when topics are highly personal.

Sprecher (1987) found that females disclose more about romantic relationships, fears, and feelings about friends, than do males; Papini et al. (1988) similarly found that daughters disclose more information than do sons. Barnes and Olson (1985) found that adolescents talk more with mothers than fathers and are more willing to disclose their real feelings, although sons reveal less personal information and talk more of work and study, attitudes and opinions. Sons are also less satisfied than daughters with interactions with both parents. However, adolescents talk with mothers across a broader range of topics than with their fathers, reporting stronger relationships with mothers than with fathers.

Research shows that both sons and daughters prefer sharing personal information with mothers rather than with fathers (Youness & Smollar, 1985). In addition, it was found that mother-daughter disclosure was more frequent and intimate than mother-son, although mother-son disclosure and intimacy was greater than for father-son. Papini et al. (1988) found that when the topic involved issues related to sexual experiences, children reported avoiding communication with the opposite-sex parents more than with the same-sex parents. An issue that may affect the willingness to disclose, beyond the dialectics of close relationships, is trust.

According to Boszormenyi- Nagy and Spark (1984), as described in <u>Invisible Loyalties</u>, ideally what is being learned and developed in the earliest stage of a child's relationships with his parents is a capacity for trust and loyalty, yet this can only happen if the parents themselves also experienced trust in their earliest relationships, which comes from having their earliest emotional and physical survival needs met. Erikson (1968), in <u>Identity: Youth and Crisis</u>, describes basic trust as originating in the mother's relationship to her baby, "in the unmistakable language of somatic interchange, that the baby may trust her, the world, and himself" (p.82). Erikson, whose research was based primarily on male development, thought that the adolescent's primary task was to create a stable sense of purpose in life. Only then would he be ready for the next stage of development, that of making commitments and finding intimacy. Erikson felt that a boy who did not achieve identity by the end of adolescence would extend his restless search into adulthood.

Satir (1972,1983), an experiential family therapist, viewed communication as the greatest factor in determining the relationships we have with others and what happens in the world around us. Self-esteem develops through improved communication between family members. Satir believed that healthy family functioning involved accessing nurturing skills, taking the risks necessary so that family members could be in charge of their own lives, building the self-esteem in each family member, and

emphasizing that each person is unique, having the right to express his or her own views. Satir had three goals for families; 1) each family member should be able to communicate openly and honestly, in the presence of others, what they feel and think, see and hear about themselves; 2) each family member should be related to in terms of their uniqueness, and 3) differences be openly acknowledged and used for growth (Nichols & Schwartz, 1995). Healthy family communication thus involves the honest and open sharing of emotions.

Fivush (1989) reported the results of a study on emotional content in mother-child interaction; she found that in conversations with children three years old parents' use of emotional talk depended upon the sex of the child. Specifically, mothers talked more of sadness with daughters than with sons, and more about anger with sons than with daughters. They also attributed both positive and negative emotions to sons, but tended to focus on positive emotions with daughters. Fivush and Kuebli (1989) claim that conversations concerning past emotions may be particularly influential in terms of emotion socialization, as in such conversations children may not experience the emotional state as acutely and thus may be more able to reflect on, and interpret, the emotion. More recently, Kuebli, Butler and Fivush (1995) found that in conversations with six-year old children mothers used a greater number of, and variety of, emotion words with daughters than with sons. Over time, girls used an increasing number and variety of emotion words whereas boys did not. A follow-up study, (Adams, Kuebli, Boyle & Fivush, 1995), resulted in a somewhat contradictory finding in that children of both sexes mention more emotion words in conversations, and in addition, more so with fathers than with mothers. However, there is much research to suggest that emotional expressivity varies with culture and with sub-populations within a culture, such as class and ethnic differences, so no general conclusions can be drawn.

In studying dinner table conversations between parents and a young child, Greif

(1980) reports that all three family members talked for approximately the same amount of time, but there were significant differences in how much individuals interrupted each other. Fathers interrupted daughters the most while mothers interrupted sons the least. Gleason and Greif (1982) found that fathers uttered significantly more imperatives and teasing names, especially to sons, than did mothers. These authors state that fathers and mothers provide quite different linguistic and cognitive input to children, and gender role socialization is conveyed, both in content and form. Fathers are less empathic and accepting, and children have to make more effort to communicate effectively. In contrast, mothers' speech is more precisely tuned to young children's needs; their speech tends to be warmly empathic and accepting of the child's behavior, linguistic or otherwise. Vandell (1979) found that parents' communication with their boy toddlers contained gender differences in the content of the interactions. Mothers used significantly more vocal comments, and showed more positive affect, while fathers used more one-word imperatives. Children have been found to be similar to their same-sex parent in terms of expressiveness, self-esteem and sex role socialization (Idle, Wood and Desmarais, 1993). In summary, there are differences in ways that mothers and fathers communicate with their children in both content and form, as well as differences between sons' and daughters' communication.

In terms of conflict, research shows that adolescents have more conflict with mothers than fathers, yet they also report that mothers understand them better and interactions with mothers are more positive. Mothers and fathers differ in their expectations of their children (Howard & Harris, 1984). Mothers tend to criticize sons who are messy, unappreciative and unsociable, while fathers criticize daughters who are unaffectionate. In addition, daughters are more likely to adopt the parents' values than are sons, yet mothers' and adolescents' attitudes about family life are more similar than those of fathers and adolescents (Noller & Callan 1991). Martin and

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Anderson (1997) found that similarities exist between mothers and sons, and mothers and daughters, in terms of aggressive communication traits, suggesting that children model their mother's communication, while no significant relationship was found for fathers and their children.

Campbell, Anderson and Sanders, (1998), in a meta-analysis involving the gender of a child and the parents' communication found that mothers tend to talk more and use more supportive communication, such as praise, approval, agreement and collaboration with daughters than with sons. Mothers tended to talk more with both sons and daughters than do fathers, using both more supportive and negative speech, such as criticism, disapproval or disagreement. Mothers also used less directive and informing speech than did fathers. Directive speech includes descriptive statements, opinions and explanations while informing speech includes imperative statements or direct suggestions. Mother-father differences in supportive and negative language were greater with younger, toddler-aged children. In addition, with younger children, the primary distinction that mothers make is in the amount of verbal interaction, whereas with older children, mothers may differentiate between sons and daughters in the type of verbal interaction. According to Block (1983) parents are more likely to encourage self-assertive behavior and the control of emotional expression in boys, and social-engagement and relationship-enhancing behavior in girls. Mothers are found to use more affiliative, and less instrumental language, than are fathers (Fagot, 1974; Noller, 1978). In studies in which significant effects are found, both parents tend to use more affiliative language and less instrumental-directive language with daughters than with sons (see Lytton and Romney, 1991).

However, empirical research on gender-differentiated interaction is not without contradictions. Whereas some studies report sex differences in parent-child interaction, others have shown that parents treat sons and daughters similarly (Lindsey, Mize & Pettit, 1997). Fagot (1978) observed parents' nurturing behavior

toward sons and daughters, and found that parents were more accepting of daughters' closeness and comfort-seeking behavior, while Goshen-Gottstein (1981) observed that mothers encouraged dependency and were more nurturing for their toddler sons than for their toddler daughters.

Lindsey et al. (1997) found that parents may respond differently to daughters and sons depending on children's behavior as well as children's gender. Also, children may vary their own behavior based on the sex of the parent with whom they are interacting. In a study, both boys and girls engaged in pretense play more with their mothers than with their fathers. The authors state that this could be due to the children's recognition of their parents' preferences for certain types of play; this could also be due to the children encouraging their parents to become involved with them by engaging in a form of play appropriate to their parents' sex. Alternately, children may adjust their own play behavior based on the parent with whom they are playing in ways to reflect their own gender biases. In addition, it was found that fathers were less likely to be involved in pretense play than were mothers, and this suggests that parents' play preferences may influence their children's behavior.

Relationships with the opposite sex parent, that is sons with mothers and daughters with fathers, result in different outcomes (0sborne & Fincham, 1996). The authors found that negativity in these opposite-sex relationships was more strongly associated with the child internalizing problems than negativity with the same-sex parent. Negativity in the mother-son relationship significantly predicted boys internalizing problems. This did not happen in the father-son relationship. The same holds for father-daughter relationships. In addition, girls tend to experience self-blame for their parent's conflicts, whereas boys tend to react with feelings of personal threat. Mothers are generally inclined to demand more obedience from daughters than from sons, and whether mothers feel especially warm toward daughters is due in significant degree to the daughter's behavior, such as whether they help more in household

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chores, and agree with their mothers by stating their own feelings and preferences less often (Russell and Russell, 1989).

Wenk, Hardesty, Morgan, and Blair (1994) studied the influence of parental involvement on the well-being of sons and daughters. Behavioral and emotional involvement with both mother and father are important for the well-being of boys; for boys this ongoing relationship with both parents is more important than father presence. For girls, the effects of behavioral involvement are stronger than the effects of emotional involvement, and behavioral involvement with father is nearly as important as emotional involvement with mother.

In a study of nonverbal behavior in families with adolescents which was conducted in the participants' homes (Noller & Callan, 1989), the researchers expected that the nonverbal behaviors displayed would reflect the sex and status differences that typically characterize the family. The family members were asked to discuss two topics: how parents and the adolescent should change in their attitudes, behaviors and habits; and the choice of a single rule that could apply to family members. In these conversations, while fathers with daughters seemed to act more attentively and used more forward lean and head nods than those with sons, mothers' nonverbal behavior was not related to the sex of the adolescent; she was equally attentive nonverbally to both sexes. Mothers also used more head nods and forward lean indicating more positive communication and immediacy.

The issue of power was mentioned in the review of popular literature; Klein (1985) states that the issue of power is the hidden agenda in the mother-son relationship. The mother has ambivalence toward her power in the relationship; she is the parent, yet at the same time there is the knowledge that he is of a culturally more powerful sex than is she. In this research project, understanding the son's perception of his relationship with his mother in terms of her power or influence over him is potentially significant. The concept of power has been studied from several

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perspectives.

French and Raven (1959) developed social power theory with five bases of power: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power and expert power. Bandura and Walters (1963) suggest that children identify with the parent who has the power to reward. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) found that children identify with the parent whose words and actions they perceive as valuable. McDonald's (1977, 1980) theory of social power posits that control of resources in the family is the major source of imitative behavior; he terms this the social power theory of parental identification. Acock and Yang (1984) tested McDonald's theory but found little correlation between the perceived power of the parent and identification by the child. The identification by a son with his mother was found to depend only on her ability to control outcomes and her referent power, but the coefficients were weak. They conclude, in part, that the extent to which a son identifies with either his mother or his father does not appear to be grounded in social power variables. The power a mother feels she has, or has not, will affect her style of disciplining her son.

Hoffman and Saltzstein (1967) identified three types of disciplining styles: power assertion, which focuses on the parent's use of their own power in punishing the child; love withdrawal, which includes verbal expressions of anger and disapproval, and induction, which involves reasoning about behavior and its consequences. Baumrind's (1967, 1971, 1991) typology of parenting styles is an integrative approach; it includes responsiveness and clarity of communication. The parenting styles are permissive, authoritarian or authoritative. Permissive mothers are nondirective, more responsive than they are demanding, are nontraditional and lenient, allowing much freedom of behavior. Authoritarian mothers are demanding, directive, not responsive, and expect to be obeyed. Authoritative mothers are both demanding and responsive, assertive but not intrusive. They combine reasoning and logical explanations as to why they make certain decisions or give directives about

the child's behavior. She devised the term "authoritative parenting," meaning that parents know that they know more than their children, and are both highly demanding and highly responsive to their children. Authoritative parenting rejects the extremes of the other two styles.

The research on parenting styles suggests that authoritative parenting is most productive in regard to positive outcomes. One study (Buri, Muselle, Misukanis, and Mueller, 1988) involved 230 college students completing the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale and the Parental Authority Scale, which is based on Baumrind's typology. It was found that the vast majority who reported their parents as having an authoritative style were in the high self-esteem group, whereas the vast majority who reported their parent as having an authoritarian style were in the low self-esteem group. Lambourn, Mounts, Steinberg, and Dornbusch (1989) found that adolescents raised with an authoritative parenting style showed better adjustment, more competence, and more confidence in their abilities than those raised in an authoritarian or permissive parenting style. In a study focusing on mothers' style, Steinmetz (1979) concluded that mothers who express disappointment, ridicule and isolation in disciplining produced aggressive and dependent children, with only moderate levels of conscience development.

Some researchers in the field of communication suggest that the study of parental control techniques is best served by looking at such interactions as a process of persuasion, and that a typology of compliance-gaining strategies may prove more useful (deTurk & Miller, 1983). These include direct requests, indirect appeals, exchange and reciprocity, reward and punishment, face-maintenance strategies, relational appeals, and verbal and nonverbal expressions of affection. Persuasive, compliance-gaining, messages and their effect on interpersonal communication have been studied and reported in many journal articles (see Miller, 1983; Trenholm 1989). More recent research takes the child's behaviors and responses into account as part of

the co-construction of interaction events (Prusank, 1995). However, this perspective is beyond the scope of this research project as the focus is sons' remembered communication experiences with their mothers.

It is unknown whether or not these concepts of identification, power and compliance-gaining strategies, and parental style affect the sons remembered communication experiences with their mothers. Or to what extent the emotional expressivity found in studies to be typical of mother-child communication, although different for sons than for daughters, affects the sons' recollections.   This research attempts to ascertain which remembered communication experiences sons identify with.

 In terms of the methodology, identification is the deepest level of sharing a fantasy, that is, a shared construction of reality. For example, a man may hear a story about a communication episode between a mother and son. He may sympathize with the characters in the story, or he may empathize with them, and be able to relate with similar experiences. Or, on a deeper level, he may identify with characters in the story, and feel that the son's experience is his experience   Finding which communication messages and mother-son portrayals men identify with is the purpose of this study.

Chapter 2 will cover the methodology to be used in this study: the use of focus groups, individual interviews, fantasy theme analysis and Q-Methodology.
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CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Rationale

This research project will attempt to access rhetorical communities of sons and mothers. To accomplish this, the project will use Bormann's fantasy theme analysis to identify salient themes related to mother-son communication. This chapter will discuss the research methodology: fantasy theme analysis and Q-methodology, and the specific phases the proposed research will entail: focus groups, individual in-depth interviews and the administering of the Q-sort.

<p style="text-align:center"><u>Fantasy Theme Analysis</u></p>

The rationale used in this project to examine the research questions about mother-son communication was based on Bormann's (1972; 1982; 1985) symbolic convergence theory. Symbolic convergence theory is a general theory of communication (see Bormann, 1980) in which the communicative process is the sharing of group fantasies; a process which results in symbolic convergence for the interactants. The content of the message from the fantasy elicited is called the fantasy theme; "fantasy theme analysis is the rhetorical tool of symbolic convergence theory and is a dramatistic form of humanistic analysis" (Endres, 1986, p.15).

The process of fantasy theme analysis stems from the work of Robert F. Bales (1970) who devised the Interaction Process Analysis (IPA): a set of categories used for identifying patterns of interaction in ongoing small groups. There were twelve categories: six being task-oriented and six being relationship oriented. One of the categories was named "shows tension release," yet this did not seem accurate as some of the behaviors assumed to be releasing tension, such as giggling, might actually increase tension. Bales noticed that members of small groups would often release tension by telling stories, and group members would experience increased energy and would become excited, and laugh or even cry. Consequently, Bales renamed this category, changing it from "shows tension release" to "dramatizes." Bormann expanded on Bales' work in fantasy-sharing and developed fantasy-theme analysis. A

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fantasy is any dramatized message that does not relate to here and now experience; it relates to past or future experiences or to some present event that is happening in a different context to that of the group members. Fantasy is a term which refers to the "creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfills a psychological or rhetorical need" (Bormann, 1985, p.5).

Bormann (1990) explains the process of fantasy sharing:

> When we share a fantasy, we attribute events to
> human actions and thus make sense out of what
> may have previously been a confusing state of affairs.
> We do so in common with others who share the
> fantasy with us. Thus, we come to symbolic
> convergence on the matter and we envision that
> part of our world in similar ways. We have created
> common villains and heroes and celebrated certain
> basic dramatistic actions as laudable and pictured
> others as despicable. We have created some
> symbolic common ground and we can talk with
> one another about that shared interpretation with
> code words or brief allusions (p.106).

In studying small group communication, researchers noticed that group members might respond to dramatizing messages in one of several ways. As stated earlier, when a group member dramatizes, others might respond by becoming excited or laughing. Another potential response is that the group members might pay little attention to the dramatization, or they might outrightly reject it. Each of these responses is explained in more detail as follows.

If the group responds to the dramatization with involvement and excitement, they come to share the drama; they share a group fantasy. In this sharing of the group fantasy, members express agreement as to who the characters are, the villains, the heroes and supporting players, motives, beliefs and values are assigned to their action, These characters are involved in scenarios - plotlines that refer to the content of the drama. When members share a group fantasy, symbolic convergence takes

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place. Bormann (1990) defines symbolic convergence as follows:

> Convergence refers to the way in which, during
> certain processes of communication, two or more
> private symbolic worlds incline toward each other,
> come closely together or even overlap (p.106).

The term fantasy as used in the context of symbolic convergence theory refers to the

way in which participants recollect their experiences; it does not refer something

unrealistic, make-believe, or magical.   Bormann (1990) states that in symbolic

convergence theory, the term fantasy means:

> ...the creative and imaginative shared interpretation of
> events that fulfills a group's psychological or rhetorical
> need to make sense of its experience and to anticipate
> its future (p.104).

If group members do not share a fantasy they may reject it. In this case, group

members might verbally or nonverbally express disagreement with the fantasy theme.

members may disagree with the values and attitudes, depictions of the heroes and

villains, and the motivations of the characters.   Group members can learn from the

rejection of fantasies about the ways in which their symbolic worlds do not collide or

converge: where they might disagree. Or it may be that group members simply do

not identify with the scenario, characters or values; the drama does not resonate with

them at all, rather than group members actively accepting or rejecting the drama.

This might result in what Bormann (1990) refers to as a "ho-hum" (p.104) response.

When the symbolic worlds of group members converge, the content of the

dramatizing message that results in active acceptance of the fantasy is called a fantasy

theme. Bormann and Bormann (1992) define a fantasy theme as:

> ...the concrete narrative that tells the story in terms
> of specific characters going through a line of action...
> Fantasy themes are always slanted, ordered, and
> interpreted; they provide a rhetorical means for several
> small, task-oriented groups to account for and explain
> the same experiences or events in different ways (p.111).

The actual content of the message in which the fantasy is evoked is called the fantasy theme. Bormann (1990) explains that the fantasy theme could be a pun, figure or analogy that characterizes an event, or it might be a narrative telling the story in terms of specific characters in a specific plotline. A fantasy theme relates to some event in the past or in the future, to the there and then, not to the here and now.

Bormann (1990) states that when a number of similar themes, including specifics of scene, characters, and situation, have been shared by members of a group, they form a fantasy type. A fantasy type is "a stock scenario repeated again and again by the same or similar characters" (p.108). The concept of "rhetorical vision" is also an aspect of symbolic convergence. Bormann (1985) explains rhetorical vision as follows:

> When a number of people come to share a cluster
> of fantasy themes and types, they may integrate them
> into a coherent rhetorical vision of some aspect of
> social reality... A rhetorical vision is a unified putting
> together of the various scripts that gives the participant
> a broader view of things (p.55).

Bormann defined a rhetorical vision as the total dramatistic explanation of reality (Cragan and Shields, 1981). Those who share a rhetorical vision are part of a rhetorical community. The research for this project will seek to ascertain if there are collectives of sons who accept or reject fantasy themes relating to their remembered communication experiences with their mothers. These collectives then form rhetorical communities: communities that share a rhetorical vision. A fantasy theme analysis will then be undertaken on the clusters or types of fantasy themes that were accepted or rejected by the rhetorical communities. In the actual analysis of the fantasy themes, Bormann (1972) proposes asking several questions:

> Who are the dramatis personae? Who are the
> heroes and villains? How concrete and detailed are
> the dramatizations? Motives attributed...? For what
> are the insiders praised, the outsiders or enemies

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characterized? What values are inherent in the praiseworthy characters? Where are the dramas set? What are the typical scenarios? What lifestyles are exemplified as praiseworthy? What meanings are inherent in the dramas? What emotional evocations dominate the dramas? Does hate dominate? Pity? Love? Indignation? Resignation? What motives are embedded in the vision? (p. 403).

The initial step in ascertaining if there are different communities or types of sons who share a rhetorical vision in light of remembered communication experiences between mother and son is to collect diverse and numerous fantasies. As stated previously, according to Klein (1984), in <u>Mothers and Sons</u>, men, unlike women, seem to find it difficult to share their feelings and memories about their mothers that go beyond reverence or simple expressions of disagreements. Thus the popular literature may provide only a limited number of fantasy themes.

Shields (1981) states that a researcher must "learn to identify and capture the fantasy themes that comprise a rhetorical vision" (p.9). The types of rhetorical visions that may exist pertaining to the mother-son relationship is an unknown at this point, and so this project takes an exploratory form. As such, there are no hypotheses, only attempts to ascertain the existence of rhetorical visions and the characteristics of each of these potential visions.

Q-Methodology and Q-Technique

In <u>Communication Theory</u> Bormann (1980) suggests the "dramatistic melding of humanism and social science" (p. 205). Fantasy theme analysis provides the humanistic component; Q-methododolgy provides the social science component. The Q-technique was developed by Stephenson (1953). This method is a form of factor analysis that correlates persons, not tests or test items, resulting in person types.

Cragan and Shields (1981) explain the methodology in the following way:

> Q-technique is a set of procedures used in testing
> persons' subjective orientation to a behavioral
> dimension. Data is gathered and processes as
> follows: respondents sort stimuli such as words,
> photographs, or statements into a forced choice
> fixed distribution, approximating a normal curve,
> along some specific dimension--for example from
> agree to disagree. In essence, Q-technique is a
> sophisticated form of rank-ordering objects and
> finding rank order coefficients of correlation
> between all possible pairs of rankers. The analysis
> correlates persons, not tests. Then, persons who
> rank the objects similarly are objectively and
> mathematically defined as factors or types (p.238).

Cragan and Shields (1981) add that the "Q-technique appears to have excellent potential for capturing empirically the rhetorical vision of a collectivity" (p. 249). Q-methodology has been used, combined with fantasy theme analysis, by numerous researchers: Cragan and Shields (1977) involving Peorians' perceptions of foreign policy dramatizations; Rarick et al (1977) involving perceptions of Jimmy Carter; Endres' (1986) study of rhetorical visions of unwed mothers, Austin's (1992) study of types of respondents to health communications concerning AIDS, Gaetano's (1995) study of rhetorical communities of sons in light of remembered communication experiences with fathers, and Endres' (1996) study of rhetorical communities given daughters remembered communication with their fathers.

As previously stated, Q-technique is a form of factor analysis that correlates people, not items. Stephenson (1953) presents a set of statistical, philosophy of science, and psychological principles to replace the traditional social science techniques of large sampling, and measurement of group differences using discrete test items; thus enabling the researcher to draw inferences from small samples and find correlations between persons, not test scores as with the traditional methods.

Data is gathered and processed as follows: respondents sort stimuli, in the case of fantasy-theme analysis these will be the fantasy themes, into a forced-choice (agree, disagree or neutral) fixed distribution approximating a normal curve. This is termed a Q-sort.   A Q-sort is a method for rank-ordering objects and finding rank-order coefficients of correlation between all possible pairs of respondents being ranked. With Q-methodology the needs of the study prescribe the Q-sort items.   In addition, the Q-technique requires respondents to respond to a large number of items at the same time so that a person's feeling toward a particular Q-sort item will influence their response to another item.   People who rank order the Q-sort items similarly are objectively and quantitatively defined as clusters or types.

Q-Sorting

Q-Methodology requires the development of a testing instrument, a Q-deck, which consists of a relatively large number of items.   These items, or stimuli, consist of the dramatic images, the fantasy themes, found in the fiction and non-fiction writings pertaining to mother-son communication, and from both the focus groups and individual in-depth interviews which constitute the first two phases of this research project.   The fantasy themes from phases one and two are transferred to a set of cards known as the Q-deck. In this deck, the statements on the cards constitute the "population" being studied, whereas the respondents become "variables" (Stephenson, 1953).   In deciding how many cards are needed to compile the Q-deck, two major factors need to be considered.   First, the deck needs to contain sufficient issues to provide depth and insight.   Second, the deck needs to be limited enough so that respondents can complete sorting the cards in a reasonable time, less than one hour. Kerlinger (1973) suggests that for statistical reliability the deck should contain no fewer than sixty cards and preferably no more than one hundred, with a good range being sixty to ninety cards. The number of cards developed is dependent upon

the number of fantasy themes and fantasy types collected from phases one and two of this research. In addition, because the cards reflect shared fantasies, the statements on the cards must be dramatistic in nature. A deck of sixty cards will be created for this research project with each card containing a fantasy theme or type. Respondents will then sort the cards into a forced normal distribution or a close approximation.

Q-Sort Data Analysis

The Q-analysis then sorts the data gathered from the Q-sort. The data obtained from the Q-sort will be analyzed using Van Tubergan's (1975) QUANAL program. This statistical procedure is a form of factor analysis which allows complex data to be organized into a form that is more simple and easier to understand (Kerlinger, 1973). This analysis runs the data through a series of calculations. The first step of the process is to code the data from the sorting template. Each card in the Q-deck is assigned a number from #1 to #60. Each participant's sorting of the card resulted in a corresponding number for that card dependent upon which pile it was placed on the sorting template. For example, if a participant placed card #1 in the extreme right-hand pile; i.e. most like me, then that card would have a value of "9" for this particular participant. A card placed on the extreme left of the template; i.e., least like me, would have a value of "1". Those cards placed directly in the center of the template would have a value of "5" and so on. In this process, each of the participants would assign each of the sixty Q-deck cards a rating of "1" to "9."

The data is then entered into the computer. The QUANAL program correlates the data from each participant with the data from every other participant. This will produce a 30 X 30 person-person correlation. The matrix will then be factor analyzed and the principal components extracted. These indicate factors, or person types, the result being the identification of those clusters of people who share similar responses to the stimuli. The factors extracted are not only those which are highly

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correlated, but also those which are most dissimilar from other factors.

The QUANAL program also contains a process called WRAP (Weighted Rotational Analytic Procedure), which computes a Z-score for every item within each type or cluster, then lists each type according to the descending order of Z-scores. The researcher can then determine which fantasies are most strongly accepted within each type, and which are most strongly rejected. Some items may be present in all the types; these are termed "consensus items", while some items may predominate in only one group. A large number of consensus items might indicate that the types or clusters of people might share not so discrete rhetorical visions. For each factor or type that will be identified, items that result in z-scores above 1.0 or below -1.0 in the range of factor type z-scores will be focused on. Representing standard deviations of at least one above or one below the mean, these differences will be considered significant enough to indicate sharing at the level of sympathizing or more. These findings will be used to explain the rhetorical visions of each type.

The specific process of administering and sorting the Q-deck will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. The first two phases of the research, focus groups and individual interviews, are discussed below. Preceding these is a summary of fantasies collected from reading non-fiction accounts of mother-son experiences.

Fantasies Collected from Popular Literature

While mother-daughter and father-son relationships have been widely written about, much less has been written and published about the mother-son relationship. While searching for writings on mother-son relations, I found that many of the works focused on caring for an aging mother, the onset of Alzheimer's disease, the process of dying and grieving the loss of mother, or memoirs. Such books include Terra Infirma (1998) by Kamenetz, and Looking After: A Son's Memior (1996) by Daniel; While these were poignant and interesting, they yielded no relevant fantasies.

Several non-fiction books did provide potential themes. These are:

The Secret Loves of Sons (1997) by Weinstock

Father Daughter; Mother Son (1997) by Kast

Mothers and Sons (1997) by Smith

The Secret Loves of Sons (1997), which included many interviews with adult sons, included the following potential themes (pp.50-93):

> I could tell her almost anything. She didn't react.
> She would first try to handle the situation and then
> deal with me later. If I had a problem I would try
> not to tell her at night as she would stay up all night
> thinking about it and then in the morning she might
> be exhausted, but she'd have the solution.
>
> As a teenager, she kept asking me over and over
> again about what I was doing and how I was feeling.
> She kept asking and asking and it got on my nerves;
> it was really annoying.
>
> As I entered adolescence, I treated my mother in a
> more equal way, and thought of struggles with her as
> a contest between equals. I tried to get my mom to
> join my side in confrontations with dad. We kept things
> from dad, in a kind of conspiracy of silence to keep
> my dad out of some of the realities of my life. I
> pleaded with mom, "Don't tell dad."

Father Daughter, Mother Son (1997) also provided potential themes (pp. 27-64):

> My dad would go off the deep end, yelling and really
> laying into me. And my mom would sit there afterwards
> and tell me you know he works hard for us, and he's just
> tired. You know he loves you, you know it's not his fault.
> And I'm like 'Come on!'
>
> There was no real affection between me and my
> father, although my mother wanted to think there was.
> I think that she wanted me to respect my father first
> and foremost. She still wants things between him and
> me to be wonderful. She still thinks that a man who
> respects his father will be an automatic survivor in the
> real world.

And finally, <u>Mothers and Sons</u> (1997) provided these potential themes, amongst other (pp. 101-114):

> I could wind my mother around my finger. Not in a
> major way, but over little things. I could convince her
> to come round to my way of thinking. She was more
> resistant to my sisters, but only marginally.

> She taught me from minute one that I was God's gift
> to the world. And there's no way I would have
> achieved what I have without that. That was her gift
> to me.

> What I liked best about my mother is the way she made
> me feel the most important person in the whole world
> to her. If I wanted my Mum to do something for me she
> would do it without argument. It wasn't because I persuaded
> her to, but that she wanted to do it for me.

> My mother thought she knew me, but she never really
> knew anything about me. Nor what I really thought a lot of
> the time. I simply didn't tell her. I'm not saying that I know
> her through and through. I wouldn't know how she actually
> felt, but I could predict how she would react to any given
> situation.

Focus Group Interviews

The first method for collecting fantasy themes for the Q-sort deck will be through the use of the focus group. Gaetano (1995) used surveys for the initial step in collecting fantasy themes in his study on father-son communication. However, he found that only slightly over 10% of possible participants returned the open-ended question surveys, and of those which were returned, some questions were left blank, some were responded to with 'Not that I can recall,' and of the questions that were responded to, few fantasy themes were included.   The focus group format has advantages over surveys for several reasons.

The focus group format allows for generating discussion of perceptions of a

particular idea, concept, event or experience in a comfortable, supportive environment and promoting self-disclosure among participants. A permissive, trusting environment is paramount (Krueger, 1994).   According to Morgan (1988) the hallmark of the focus group is the explicit use of group interaction to produce insights that would be less accessible without the group interaction.   Merton et al. (1956) state that the group interview releases inhibitions, thus participants are more willing to self-disclose. As one person talks about their experiences, others feel more free to do the same.   However, in caution, the researcher must be careful to not be affirming nor disconfirming, as this may inhibit responses and lead to some group members being silenced or feeling that some answers are more correct than others. One strategy the researcher can use is an appropriate level of self-disclosure so as to establish interpersonal rapport with the participants. The goal is to create a comfortable, social climate in which all the participants feel free to discuss sensitive topics (Zeller, 1993).   The researcher needs to be rhetorically sensitive, use the language and terms of the focus group participants, actively listen, be able to handle emotional topics, and be aware of communication phenomena within the group such as social desirability, low levels of trust, and compliance; for example, participants saying what they think the researcher wants to hear. Another area of caution is that researchers' own preferences and biases may be signaled unintentionally to the participants, and they may respond in what they perceive to be desired ways. In addition, sensitive and potentially embarrassing topics may result in politeness and in the need to save face (Albrecht et al. 1993).

Guiding questions will be used in the focus groups. These are: How would you describe your relationship with your mother? How would you describe communication with her? What topics were readily talked about and what was avoided? Did she have expectations of you? If so, what were they? For what, and how, did she praise you? Criticize you? How did she and you handle conflict and

disagreements? What are the most valuable lessons you learned from her? Is there anything you wish she knew about you but didn't? Participants will be asked if there are any other topics they wish to discuss in addition to those mentioned. The focus groups will be transcribed verbatim and fantasy themes will be extracted and transferred to index card for consideration for use in the Q-deck.

Individual In-Depth Interviews

Fantasy themes will also be collected through the use of in-depth interviews. Twenty individual interviews will be conducted with participants within the age range of twenty to fifty years. These interviews will be as undirected as possible, asking each participant to recall communication experiences with his mother, and allowing him determine which issues to focus on. Only when the subject seeks direction or has difficulty exploring different areas or topics will I suggest areas to explore. These might include topics such as advice-seeking, emotional expressivity, demonstrations of physical affection, praise and criticism, and feelings of being known or understood. These interviews will be taped and transcribed verbatim; care will be taken not to alter any of the participants' wording. Fantasy themes will be extracted and transferred to index cards for consideration for use in the Q-deck.

Administering the Q-sort

Before beginning the Q-sort each participant will be informed of the purpose of the study, the identity of the researchers and of confidentiality, as per the informed consent form which will then be signed. Q-sort instructions will then be given. First, each participant will be given a deck of cards and asked to sort the deck into three distinct piles: the right hand pile to contain the cards that they feel are most like them; that is most like their remembered experiences, the left hand pile to contain the cards they feel are least like them; that is, least like their remembered experiences,

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and the center pile to contain cards about which they are neutral; that is those that have little meaning for the participants. After sorting the cards into three piles, the participants will be asked to again sort the deck, rank ordering the cards into nine piles with, from left to right, least like me to most like me, providing a neutral midpoint to the cards. These piles will have a specific number of cards in each pile as illustrated in the template diagram below.

	"least like me"			"neutral"		"most like me"		
pile #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
# cards per pile	2	5	7	10	12	10	7	5	2

The template guide for participants will consist of nine index cards taped together horizontally. Each card will be labeled with the pile number; i.e. 1 through 9, and the number of cads that need to be sorted into each pile. The cards will them form a normal distribution.

Participants will work from the ends of the template guide, choosing the "most like me cards" first, followed by the "least like me" cards, working their way the center of the template guide, on which will be placed the most neutral cards, those which have no meaning with which the participant is able to identify. When the sorting is completed, the participants will be asked to turn over the cards so as to display the randomly assigned numbers of the cards, and then record these numbers on the Q-deck scoring template. Each participant will then be asked for their reasons, in writing, for choosing the two cards at both extremes, in both piles 1 and 9. This ensures that the cards had been read correctly and that participants have thought through their choices and placement of these.

The participants will be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire as follows:

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Your age _____

2. Your mother's age _____

    If deceased, the year of your mother's death _____

3. Ages of your brothers and sisters _____

4. When sorting the cards, was the mother referred to in your choices your:

    Birth mother _____

    Step-mother _____

    Adoptive mother _____

    Other _____

5. Ethnic origin/culture with which you identify _____

6. Current relationship (identify all that apply)

    Married _____

    Divorced _____

    Widowed _____

    Single _____

    Partner/Cohabiting _____

7. Do you have any children? _____

    If yes, list ages and sex of children _____

8. Which of the following best describes the environment in which you were raised?

    City _____   Suburb _____   Rural _____

9. Which of the following best describes the economic situation of your family

while you were growing up?

        Lower class _____

        Lower middle class _____

        Middle class _____

        Upper middle class _____

        Upper class _____

10.   What is the highest education level have you completed?

        Some high school _____

        High school _____

        Some college _____

        Two-year college degree _____

        Four-year college degree _____

        Some graduate school courses _____

        Master's degree _____

        Ph.D. _____

11.   How often do you presently communicate with your mother?

12.   How would you describe your relationship with your mother now? (If your mother is deceased, what was your relationship with her like in the last few   years of her life?)

13.   How satisfied are you with your present relationship with your mother? (If your mother is deceased, how satisfied were you with the relationship in the last few years of her life?)

After completing this survey, the subject will be orally asked a few process questions. These questions include: What was the sorting experience like? Was it easy? Difficult? Did you have any problems? Is there anything you think needs to be added to the deck, any missing themes or experiences you would have like to have seen included?

As stated previously, this research is exploratory in nature and the results will not be generalizable. In addition, Q-Methodology is not suitable for testing hypotheses for large numbers of individuals, nor can it be used too well for large samples (Kerlinger, 1973). "One can rarely generalize to populations from Q persons samples" (p.598). However, Kerlinger does conclude that Q-methodology is appropriate for research concerning the "relations among variables within individuals or groups," and that Q-methodology is "an important and unique approach to the study of psychological, sociological and educational phenomena" as it enables the researcher to explore "unknown and unfamiliar areas and variables for their identity, their interrelations and their functioning" (p.598).

CHAPTER 3: SUMMARY AND CONSIDERATIONS

Families are frequently studied, yet communication between family members has received little attention, and what attention it has received is most often focused on the marital couple, with the child's perspective being omitted. This study will attempt to access the child's perspective, specifically sons' remembered communication experiences with their mothers. As covered in Chapters 1 and 2, the methods to be used in the study are individual and focus group interviews, fantasy theme analysis of the stories and recollections shared in these formats, and the Q-sort technique. The

use of these methods will result in identifying participants' rhetorical visions, that is how they construct their social reality with respect to the relationship with their mothers, which then leads to identification of distinct rhetorical types.

It is hoped that this study will support and advance applied family communication research. Whitchurch and Webb (1995) specify five necessary and sufficient conditions for such research. First, the scope of the research must involve a family "whole" or "subpart" (p.242), which a study of mothers and sons does. Second, the goals, i.e. the purpose and focus, must be to understand and affect family issues. The importance of the mother-son relationship, and the lack of previous study, leads to the conclusion that increased attention and understanding will be of use to both researchers and practitioners. Both description and theory-building will result from this study, and aid in the need to better understand this relational type. The third condition is significance, which Whitchurch and Webb define as making "a substantive contribution to the problem being studied." The fourth condition is that rigorous and valid methodological approaches, either qualitative or quantitative, be used; this study will integrate both these methods. Fifth and last, "applied family communication research must address implication for practice with families while not conducting the actual interventions" (p. 244). Identification of various rhetorical visions may well be useful in attempting to understand the complex dynamics of mother-son communication. Endres (1997), in his study of father-daughter communication, posited several implications for the findings of his research which are detailed below. These implications will apply to this proposed study; the parent-child relationship is the focus of research and the methodology to be used is that used by Endres. Findings of distinct types of mother-son relationships, with specific communication behaviors intrinsic to these relationships, can be useful in several ways: to mothers, sons and therapists, and possible applications are discussed below.

If there is an ideal model, such as in Endres' (1997) study of father-daughter

communication in which the essential companion - a predominantly buddy image-was the ideal model, a mother might want to look for herself in the Q items found in that type. Of course, not all ideal relationships are the same; however, in understanding what communication behaviors lead to positive and negative outcomes allows a framework toward making change.

For sons, the study findings may show them that they are not alone in their stories and experiences. To read that other sons have similar feelings toward, and perceptions of, their mothers can result in a sense of comfort and community. Also, sons might benefit from seeing what the relationship is, and is not, and might seek to work toward changing communication behaviors within the relationship .

In the event that identification of distinct rhetorical types results from this research, these findings will inform therapists that there are many types of mother-son communication; these relationships are not all the same and yet none are entirely idiosyncratic. Therapists might also use the Q-deck as a practical communicative tool. If a man in therapy has difficulty in talking about his experiences, or feels uncomfortable with self-disclosure, the cards may provide a safe way to talk about possible issues with his mother. The use of the cards may even result in increased awareness about the relationship, awareness that might not otherwise be gained.

In summary, the mother-son relationship is complex, in many ways unknown and not understood, and warrants research. Studies such as this increase the possibility of talking about this relationship in ways other than previously talked about. By sharing personal experiences, by understanding distinct types of relationships and communication behaviors within each of them, the opportunity is presented for developing healthier and more satisfying relationships.

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