

The forgotten parent:  
The father's contribution to the infant's development  
during the pre-Oedipal years

A dissertation submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment  
of the degree of Master of Health Science in Psychotherapy

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### Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

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## Ethics Approval

Ethical approval has been given in a general approval of dissertations of this type. The approval number for Dissertation 588869 is 02/33 and was given on the 27th April, 2004, 2007.

Client confidentiality has been strictly maintained and written informed consent has been obtained from all people used in case illustrations. Pseudonyms have been used for all patients and some biographical details have been altered.

## Abstract

This dissertation argues that the pre-Oedipal father makes an important contribution in the development of the infant. Employing a modified systematic literature review of the psychoanalytic literature on the role of the pre-Oedipal father, this dissertation traces the works of Freud, object relations and attachment theory to more contemporary notions of the father-infant relationship, including the contributions of feminist psychoanalysts, to develop a psychoanalytic understanding of the pre-Oedipal father.

Until recently, the father of the Oedipal complex has overshadowed the pre-Oedipal father. Freud placed great importance on the father's role in the Oedipus complex, a stage of development he believed essential to the emotional development for both the boy and the girl. With the emergence of object relation's theory, the mother-infant relationship took centre-stage while the father was cast in a supportive role. However, long before the infant has reached the Oedipal stage, much has taken place between the father and infant.

The findings of the literature review reveal that the pre-Oedipal father's relationship with both mother and infant plays a pivotal role in both the emotional and cognitive development of the infant. Attention needs to be paid to this crucial relationship, one that can easily be overlooked in the therapeutic relationship. A psychoanalytic understanding of the pre-Oedipal father's role will significantly contribute to a clinically useful understanding of pre-Oedipal father/child dynamics and how these may manifest in the therapeutic relationship.



## Chapter 1 - Introduction

I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection (Freud, 1930/1961a, p32).

This chapter introduces my topic "What is the father's contribution to a child's emotional development during the pre-Oedipal years" and my interest on the topic of fathers. I also provide an overview of the chapters to follow.

My interest in the importance of fathers arose while working with one of my first clients. As I sat with her each week, it became obvious that her father had influenced nearly every area of her life and it felt like he was with us in almost every session. Many times I would leave sessions reflecting on my own father and his influence on my life, although he was only a shadowy presence in the early years. As time went on, I began to notice the influence that fathers played in all of my clients' lives, especially during the early years. As a therapist, I was aware that my experience with my father was very different to many of my clients, and I began to wonder about the father's role in the child's development.

There has been much contemporary literature on the importance of fathers, but on many levels 'fathers' are still very much a mystery. As a therapist, there were many aspects of fathering with which I was unfamiliar. There were many unanswered questions, such as, when does the father enter the infant's life? What does he contribute to a child's development? Is his contribution different for the girl and boy? What lasting influence does a father leave? What difference does the father's relationship with the mother make to the child? What about an absent father? Does the 'actual' father have to play this role? Moreover for therapists, can paternal deficits be healed using the therapeutic relationship?

Central to psychoanalytic theory is the child's relationship with parents, and literature has been devoted to the importance of the parent's relationship with the child especially in the early years. In most of the literature I reviewed regarding fathers, there is some reference made to Sigmund Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex.

The Oedipus complex refers to a stage of psychosexual development in childhood that Freud believed was pivotal for both the boy and the girl. During this time the child competes for the exclusive love of the parent of the opposite sex. The

name derives from the Greek myth of Oedipus, who unknowingly kills his father, Laius, and marries his mother, Jocasta. In Freud's thinking, the Oedipus complex comes as the climax of infantile sexuality, and that an overcoming of the strivings of this period with the attainment of adult sexuality is necessary for normality

Freud and the early psychoanalysts such as Ferenczi, Abraham and others placed the father as the central figure in early emotional life of the child, but the role of the mother was not emphasised in the same way. Later psychoanalytic thinkers such as Klein, Winnicott and Bowlby placed the mother who is in most cases the primary caregiver as the primary figure in the infant's life from birth with the father in a secondary role. These theorists brought the focus onto the pre-Oedipal period and introduced the idea of the father having an important influence on the infant's development before the Oedipus complex. Kramer (1978) notes that until recently, little attention had been paid to the pre-Oedipal father in psychoanalytic literature. However, in contemporary thinking the Oedipus complex is no longer looked upon as the nucleus of healthy emotional development. Consequently there has been more attention paid to the infant's earlier years (Gitelson, 1952) and subsequently the father.

This dissertation focuses on the father's contribution to the infant's development during the pre-Oedipal years, which covers the period from the infant's birth to approximately three years. It is difficult to identify the exact period that the pre-Oedipal stage ends and the Oedipal stage begins, as it varies with the individual infant.

The term 'mother' is used to refer to the child's primary caregiver and the terms 'infant' and 'infancy' to the child during the whole of the pre-Oedipal period, not just during infancy as we know it. The term 'child' refers to the child from the Oedipal years onwards.

In reviewing the literature, several themes emerged: the father as an internal object (the intrapsychic father); the father's relationship with the mother and the father assisting the infant to separate from the mother. These roles are all interrelated yet at times are discussed separately for clarity.

The main body of this dissertation is divided into five chapters, that are structured chronologically and thematically. Chapter Two contains my methodology. Chapter Three is devoted to the changing psychoanalytic understanding of fathers beginning with Freud and following through to the early attachment theorists such as

Bowlby. Chapter Four covers literature from 1950s through to the present time. The writers from the 1950s expand and modify some of the early theories. Chapter Five explores works of feminist psychoanalytic writers such as Mitchell, Benjamin and Chodorow and provides a summary of their critiques as well as modifications of the ideas of the early theorists. This chapter makes reference to Deutsch and Horney, forerunners of feminist psychoanalytic thinking. Each chapter includes clinical vignettes from my practice to illustrate clinical application of theory, including how pre-Oedipal father dynamics may manifest in the therapeutic relationship. Chapter Six presents a discussion and synthesis of the previous chapters, followed by a summary and conclusion.

## Chapter 2 - Methodology

### *Research Question*

This dissertation is guided by the research question “What is the father’s contribution to a child’s emotional development during the pre-Oedipal years?”

### *Aim*

The aim is to develop a psychoanalytic understanding of the role that the pre-Oedipal father plays in the child’s emotional development, in order to contribute to a clinically useful understanding of the pre-Oedipal father/child dynamics and how they may manifest in the therapeutic relationship.

### *Method*

This dissertation employs a modified, systematic literature review. Systematic literature reviews have evolved from evidenced based practice methodology (EBP), as a way of reviewing and appraising literature contributing to best practice. Designed for medical practice, and using mainly quantitative data, a systematic literature review (SLR) methodically and transparently reviews data relevant to a research question (Mulrow & Cook, 1988). Such a review is conducted by way of a systematic assembly of original studies or literature that are appraised for quality, synthesized and interpreted (Glasziou, Irwig, Bain, & Colditz, 2001).

The systematic literature review is modified in two respects. First, because evidenced based practice was originally designed for medical practice utilising mainly quantitative data, this approach has been modified to include qualitative research, which is more suited to psychotherapy. Second, the review has been modified to include clinical vignettes from my practice as a way of illustrating and integrating theory and practice.

### *Search Criteria*

As this literature review is on the psychoanalytic understanding of the pre-Oedipal father, I chose to focus on the works of psychoanalysts beginning with Freud, Klein, Winnicott and feminist writers Horney, Chodorow and Benjamin and others, as a means of providing a history and context of the development of theory concerning the pre-Oedipal father.

Attempts have been made to minimise bias by using explicit search criteria. I have used (Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing (PEP) Archive 1, Version 6) database, which serves as the principle electronic database for psychoanalytic literature. I used keywords and combinations such as pre-Oedipal father\*, and preoedipal father\*, father\* and infancy. Although the term ‘infancy’ is normally used to describe the period from birth to 12 months approximately, in psychoanalytic literature, it is frequently used in reference to the mother-infant dyad and the period leading up to the Oedipal complex, where the infant begins to separate from the mother. The table below outlines my search topics and the results.

*Table 1.1 PEP search*

Number	Search term	Search type	Number of hits	Number relevant
1.	Pre-Oedipal father*	Para	284	55
2.	Pre-Oedipal father*	Article	>1,000	4
3.	preoedipal father*	Para	607	7
4.	Father* infancy	Para	371	4

Searching the term ‘pre-Oedipal father\*’ (which includes father/s/ing/hood) returned over 1,000 hits under ‘articles’. Due to high number of hits under ‘articles’, a further search was conducted under ‘pre-Oedipal father\*’ under ‘paragraphs’ and this returned 284. Faced with this amount of data, the ranking function was used to make the search more manageable. Ranking ensures that those articles featuring the term ‘pre-Oedipal father\*’ the highest number of times (in this case per paragraph) are most likely to be at the top of the list indicating a potentially high relevancy.

Further searches were conducted under ‘preoedipal\*’ and ‘father\* infancy’ under ‘paragraphs’ and results are as above. The ranking function was also applied to these searches.

From the above searches, the first 100 results from each search were cross-checked and results showed most of the articles were similar to those that appeared on the other lists and vice-versa. Those that only appeared once were noted and viewed with the first 100 results from all four searches (refer Table 1.1.). Those considered relevant have been included in the literature review.

In addition to books and the PEP, I conducted *ad hoc* searches using Google, which directed me to articles on PEP, books and other sources of literature. Additional material was sourced from reference lists of the search results from PEP and other psychoanalytic literature. At this point, there was a sufficient quantity of literature to reach a point of data saturation where no new understanding arose (McKibbin, 1999).

### *Inclusions and Exclusions Criteria*

Due to the high volume of literature obtained and the word count requirements, I have concentrated on normative development, although some reference will be made to pathology. I offer an overview but do not delve deeply into gender identity, penis envy, the rapprochement stage and differences for the boy and the girl, as these are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Single parents, same-sex parents and fathers as the primary caregiver, different parenting styles in different cultures are acknowledged. Likewise the impact of trauma, sickness, disability, loss and adoption on the pre-Oedipal father/child dynamic and how they may affect the child's emotional development are recognised, but only a passing reference has been made where relevant.

The material on the pre-Oedipal period appears to be dense and complex, thus, any one of these topics will bring up enough material for a dissertation within itself and for pragmatic reasons have been restricted.

## Chapter 3 - Psychoanalytic Understandings

### *Introduction*

In this chapter, I discuss the changing psychoanalytic understanding of fathers in the pre-Oedipal years, beginning with Sigmund Freud and followed by the works of early object relations and attachment theorists and their modification of Freud's theories. I include clinical vignettes from my practice to illustrate theory.

### *Drive theory*

#### *Freud*

Freud introduced the importance on the father's role in the Oedipus complex which he revised three times and occupied a central place in his thinking. In discussing the role of the father, many psychoanalytic writers make reference to the Oedipus complex, a stage of development that Freud believed was pivotal to emotional development for both sexes (Freud, 1905/1953). Although this review concentrates on the pre-Oedipal period, references will inevitably be made to the Oedipal period as the two periods overlap, and as a means of tracing how the pre-Oedipal period contributes to subsequent stages of development.

The pre-Oedipal period includes the first three stages of Freud's psychosexual stages, which he called the oral stage (between birth to 12 months), anal stage (12-18 months) and the transition into the phallic stage (18 months-approx 3 years). It was Freud's contention that the early infant relationship was based on drive and that for both sexes the mother is the primary object of desire (Freud, 1931/1961b).

It was in his paper "Female Sexuality" that Freud (1931/1961b) first recognised the importance of the pre-Oedipal stage for both sexes, which for the girl begins with an intense pre-Oedipal attachment with the mother, followed by the phallic phase and penis envy. In referring to the boy's relationship with his pre-Oedipal father, Freud (1925/1961c) wrote: "As regards the prehistory of the Oedipus complex... we know that period includes an identification of an affectionate sort with the boy's father" (p.250).

In Freud's writings, the father appears in a variety of roles especially during the phallic-oedipal stage. Freudian theory recognises the father as an early object of

love and identification (Freud, 1925/1961c), an ego ideal (Freud, 1905/1953), knowledge (Freud, 1909/1955a), an object of envy (Freud, 1931/1961b), a powerful omnipotent godlike being (Freud, 1927/1961d), a protector (Freud, 1930/1961a) and a castrating authority (Freud, 1911/1958). Etchegoyen (2002) notes that Freud places less emphasis on the positive relationship with the father whom he describes as the 'ego ideal', which is the ideal of perfection that the ego strives to emulate, and more on the punitive aspects. However, Freud (1905/1953) also made more than one reference to the father as a caregiver, which also suggests a role as supporter for the mother:

But this father, whom he (Little Hans) could not help hating as a rival, was the same father whom he had always loved and was bound to go on loving, who had been his model and his first playmate, and had looked after him from his earliest infancy. (p. 134)

Freud noted that the period leading up to the Oedipal stage is different for boys and girls, but both start with an intense attachment to the mother. During the beginnings of the phallic phase, the girl becomes disillusioned with her mother for not giving her a penis, which was described as 'penis envy' (Freud, 1931/1961b). She turns to her father who possesses a penis, thus initiating the beginnings of the Oedipus complex and separating from the mother. Of the many criticisms of Freud's theories, it is the innate inferiority of the girl that has been rejected widely by feminist writers, who accuse Freud of sexism and phallocentrism (Chodorow, 1989; Horney, 1967). The role of the father in assisting the infant to separate from the mother is a theme many post-Freudian writers developed from many theoretical perspectives.

Similarly, the boy starts with an intense love for his mother, which changes into rivalry towards his father, but has a very different ending to that of the girl. Freud states that when the boy sees the girl does not possess a penis, he assumes the father has chopped off the girl's penis and that a similar fate may await him for desiring his mother.



### *Clinical Vignette*

Freud's idea of the infant needing a strong and powerful father, contributed to my understanding of my client James.

James presented with a gambling addiction that masked an underlying problem of impotency. In the family dynamics, James' father provided for the family but stayed in the background, while his 'strong and capable' mother played a central role. When the family experienced financial difficulties, it was the mother who 'saved them'. James described his mother as having high expectations of him, both academically and socially, which sometimes exposed him to situations that were frightening and traumatising. In these situations and others, James craved his father's support and attention, but did not receive it.

James is married to a woman he described as 'strong'. He does not feel he is an equal partner in their relationship, nor does he feel able to stand up to her. Instead he gambles to retaliate against her and to provide temporary escape from his feelings of powerlessness. Similarly, at work and in play, James feels powerless to express his true feelings and sometimes resorts to sabotage and manipulation to achieve what he wants.

In our therapeutic relationship, James idealises me and assumes I hold all power. From the beginning he presented a glossy façade to both impress and please me. Often he finds it hard to express his true feelings, and sometimes resorts to lying and manipulation to achieve what he wants.

Because James' father took a background role in his family and did not always protect him from his strong and powerful mother, it is likely that James has an internalised belief that women are powerful and men are powerless. I wonder if James would be more potent with his wife, family and out in the world, if he had a more powerful and potent father to identify with.

### ***Object Relations***

Although Freud did not go into detail about the pre-Oedipal years, he gave future psychoanalytic writers a place to begin thinking about the father's influence during this period. Many theorists such as Horney, Klein and others who were critical of Freud's ideas, modified or expanded them, rather than doing away with

them. Although many believe Freud's ideas were 'phallogentric', they were rooted in the cultural norms of that generation, this context makes his curiosity and empathic understanding of children both pioneering and radical.

During the 1940s to 1950s, there was a shift in perspective where the focus moved from the father to the mother-infant, the infant's early dependence on mother and conflicts over separation and individuation. The focus on mothers was largely attributed to female psychoanalysts such as Helene Deutsch, Karen Horney, Anna Freud, Melanie Klein and Margaret Mahler, who were referred to as the 'Mothers of Psychoanalysis' (Sayers, 1991). They conceptualised the mother-infant dyad as the primary relationship with the father being the secondary, thus recognising the father in an earlier role than the one played in the Oedipus complex.

### *Klein*

Melanie Klein was a key transitional figure between the drive/structure model and the relational/structure model (object relations). Klein was also one of the first psychoanalysts to focus on the infant. Of Klein's contribution, it was said: "Freud acquainted us with the child in the adult and Klein with the infant in the child" (Sayers, 1991, p. 219).

In Klein's object relations theory, the internal father is both an object of rivalry and of desire. However, she was not clear about the infant's need for a separate relationship with the father (Etchegoyen, 2002). Klein's main focus was on the primary relationship of the child to the mother's body (in particular the breast and womb). According to Klein, love and hate become differentiated from each other in the infant's life. She explains that both good and bad aspects of the self are split and projected as love and hatred first onto the mother (first object) and later onto the father (second object) (Klein, 1975).

It was Klein's view that between the ages of three to six months, when there is considerable integration of the ego, that changes occur in the nature of the infant's object relations. Klein contends it is at this point when the infant fears losing the mother (paranoid anxiety) and has a desire to repair this loss (depressive anxieties) that the father becomes the object of desire. It is the father who enables the infant to tolerate frustration towards the mother and the infant begins to internalise the father as a real object, which Klein refers to as 'penis introjection'. Klein (1975) suggests that the infant has *a priori* awareness of the penis and the infant searches for aspects

of the father (his penis) as well as other part-objects such as breast, babies and milk in the mother's body. Klein's view concerning the origin of objects (for example the father's penis) is that they are inherent, an idea that Freud (1912/1955b) alluded to in "Totem and Taboo" when he referred to a 'phylogenetic inheritance' containing memory traces and images.

Unlike Freud, Klein (1975) believes the Oedipus complex occurs because of deprivation of the breast rather than the discovery of the lack of penis and that this occurs during the first year of life around the time of weaning. However, Klein cautions that if the infant has not developed a strong bond with the mother before being disturbed too early by rivalry with the father, the infant may perceive the father as a hostile intruder. Contrary to Freud, Klein believed that it is not the father who is the first internalised object, but the mother, and that this occurs before the phallic stage (Sayers, 1991).

A criticism of Klein's thinking is because the parents represent a loving and nurturing image that serves as a counterpart to the child's inherent aggression, the unique nature and individuality of each parent's personality is missing (Greenburg & Mitchell, 1983). Similarly, Sayers (1991) observes that Klein attended to the internal world to the neglect of the external world such as the real relationship with the father and mother. However, Greenburg & Mitchell (1983) contend that it was Klein's work that made possible the contributions of Fairbairn and Winnicott, both of whom added to the body of theory concerning the pre-Oedipal father.

### *Fairbairn*

Drawing on Klein's ideas, W. Fairbairn, a British object relations theorist developed a 'pure' object relations theory, in which he viewed libidinal energy as object seeking, rather than 'pleasure seeking' as stated by Freud. According to Fairbairn (1952) the father comes a poor second to the mother who is the 'most significant whole object' and it is not until just before the Oedipal phase, that the father becomes more significant to the infant. Fairbairn describes the relationship with the father, as one that recapitulates the earlier relationship with the mother where the child seeks a relationship based on infantile dependency. As with the mother, the infant experiences the father as gratifying and then ungratifying, in which the infant internalises an exciting object, a rejecting object and the ideal object. Fairbairn contends the infant later combines these two sets of objects with the

infant's ego, and through processes of layering and fusion forms a single exciting object, a single rejecting object and a single ideal object.

Fairbairn (1952) asserts that the infant experiences the opposite sex parent as the more seductive and exciting object and the parent of the same sex as punitive and restricting, which is similar to what occurs in Freud's phallic stage. Fairbairn (1952) also takes into the account the 'real relationship' with the father and mother as having an influence on how the child may relate or internalise the father.

One of the criticisms of Fairbairn's theory is that the 'internal and external objects' are limited to fulfilling 'infantile dependency', while other developmental roles that the father may satisfy are overlooked (Greenburg & Mitchell, 1983).

### *Winnicott*

Another object relations theorist to emerge was Donald Winnicott, a British-born paediatrician who continued to emphasise the infant's early relationship with the mother. In his paper "The capacity to be alone" Winnicott (1958) says that when an early infant is in a state of 'absolute dependency' on the mother, the father is not known to the infant. Winnicott (1968) is well known for his notion of the 'good enough mother', in providing a facilitating environment that is fundamental for the infant's development. He adds that the mother does not have to adapt perfectly to the infant's needs to be 'good enough' because the infant can learn from the experience of frustration (Winnicott, 1953).

Due to his emphasis on the mother's role, many accuse Winnicott of neglecting the role of the father. However, Winnicott explained that the 'good enough mother' was a term that described a quality and attitude of parenting and that this included fathers, meaning that fathers could be 'good enough mothers'. He added that the paternal came later, but again was referring to the quality and attitude of the parenting, rather than the 'actual' father (Winnicott, 1968).

Where Klein took us back to infancy, Winnicott took us back to the infant's conception, as this is where he thought the father's role began. Winnicott (1960) held that from conception forward the father is responsible for "dealing with the environment for the mother" (Winnicott, 1960, p.43). During the pre-Oedipal years, the father's initial role was of protecting the mother/child relationship as it developed, to provide a secure environment for the mother, which in turn enabled her to provide a facilitating environment for the baby (Winnicott, 1960).

In Winnicott's writing, the father plays a number of roles but usually in relationship with the mother. He stated that the father enables the infant to view the mother as different to the father and identifies qualities such as 'liveliness', which he claims vastly enriches the child's world (Winnicott, 1964). It was Winnicott's belief that a strong relationship between the father and mother provides security and safety to the infant and a buffer against the hate that the infant can generate towards the mother. Winnicott (1964) adds that a healthy sexual union between parents provides the infant a "rock to which he can cling and against which he can kick" (Winnicott, 1964, p.115) and can later assist in resolving triangular struggles.

According to Winnicott's writings, the father does have an actual relationship with the infant, however "it depends on what mother does about it whether father does or does not get to know the baby" (Winnicott, 1964, p.81). The actual father becomes an internal model of work and the world when he goes off to work each day, and this is represented internally.

What appears to be missing from Winnicott's writing is the role of the father as the one who separates the mother and infant (Phillips, 1988). There also appears to be little knowledge, implied or direct about what it is like for the infant to be fathered (Phillips, 1988). Some criticise Winnicott for neglecting the role of the father (Phillips, 1988), however considering that he came from a generation where fathers played a very traditional role, Winnicott not only paid attention to the father, but the 'quality and attitude' (Winnicott, 1968) of parenting that he describes is both modern and pioneering.

### *Clinical Vignette*

Winnicott's thinking about the importance of the father supporting the mother to enable her to be available to the infant, contributed to my clinical work with my client Jen.

Jen is the child of a narcissistic father who failed to support her depressed mother, insisting his needs came first in their relationship. Consequently, it appears that Jen's mother was unavailable to provide the 'good enough mothering' that Jen needed in infancy. When she was a teenager, Jen's father abused her. Later Jen when her mother found out about the abuse, Jen did not receive the support she needed and felt abandoned.

In sessions, Jen would often appear clingy and whine like a young child, while talking about her feelings of abandonment by her mother. At other times, she would regress and cry like an infant for her mother, which left me feeling confused as her behaviour did not fit that of a 14 year old (the age she was abused). During these times in my counter-transference, it felt as if Jen was crying out to be held and at other times as though a hand was pumping at my heart. It is only in hindsight that I realised this sensation was similar to a baby sucking at the breast. I was surprised that in my counter-transference, instead of feeling maternal warmth, I would feel a mild sense of irritation at her neediness as it seemed inappropriate for a teenager. I wondered if I was experiencing the ambivalent feelings of her depressed mother who was unable to meet all of Jen's needs resulting from Jen's father's insistence that his needs come first.

Jen's father did not provide support to her mother, thus it is likely that Jen's mother was unable to provide her with what Winnicott describes as 'primary maternal preoccupation'. The clinging whining quality and her crying reminded me of a young child and my counter-transference suggests that there may have been a maternal deficit with origins in the pre-Oedipal period. It is interesting that I no longer feel irritation when she regresses, as what she longs for seems age-appropriate considering her early loss.

### ***Individuation and Separation***

#### ***Mahler***

Margaret Mahler, an American-based psychoanalyst extended the mother perspective with an emphasis on the child's conflict over individuation and separation and the need to achieve autonomy. The father was viewed as an important and significant figure who is available to assist the child in separating from the mother. In Mahler's theory, the development of the child takes place in phases, referred to as - the normal autistic (first few weeks), normal symbiotic (up to five months), separation-individuation phase (sub-phases from first few months to 16 months) and rapprochement (15 -24 months) (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975).

It has been said of Mahler's work: "Mahler was able to directly observe, that which Freud could only reconstruct" (Lamb, 1981, p.2). Mahler's work marked the beginning of research on the father's role in early triangulation, when the infant at

around 18 months begins to notice the existence of the parental couple (Abelin, 1975; Mahler et al., 1975). It has been noted that it is during the rapprochement stage that the father appears as a stable image (Mahler et al., 1975) and becomes an important figure in his own right (Mahler & Gosliner, 1955), rather than a secondary object.

### ***Attachment Theory***

From the 1950s to 1960s, Bowlby extended the theories of the mother-infant bond from an attachment perspective. A British psychoanalyst, Bowlby (1988) argued that attachment was a primary rather than secondary need and that the development of a secure base was essential to healthy development. This differs from Freudian theory, which suggests that if libidinal drives fixed on different objects (from the mother to the father), then former attachments would be broken and a failure to break an attachment effectively would constitute a trauma that could lead to later psychological issues. Bowlby (1969) criticised Freud's theory based on 'hunger gratification' stating that the infant is born with a propensity for attachment.

While the mother is usually the first person with whom the infant forms an attachment, attachment theory moves the father from a supporting role to a new position of being able to provide a secure base for the child as a primary attachment figure (Bowlby, 1988). Attachment theorists propose that infants can develop a secure attachment not only to the mother, but also to fathers and siblings, and that attachment is an essential developmental milestone during the early years (Bowlby, 1988). Increasingly, the father is perceived as an alternative attachment figure and a bridge to the external world (Bowlby, 1988; Muir, 1989). Thus, the father's role as an additional attachment figure is also important (Bowlby, 1988). While it is believed that if a child has a secure attachment to the mother in the early years this leads to optimal emotional health, if there is also a secure attachment to the father, then development is further enhanced (Target & Fonagy, 2002).

Similar to Winnicott (1960), Bowlby perceived a role for the father in protecting the mother-infant relationship to allow the mother to be available for the infant. Bowlby (1969) describes a more active role for the father later on, when he can intervene to have his own relationship with the child and encourage healthy separation. The father does this by going off with the child, knowing that the child

can be returned to a secure base, which has already been developed with the mother (Bowlby, 1969; Trowell, 2002).

The idea of the father occupying a developmental space traditionally reserved for the mother was supported by studies where the father was the first attachment figure (Karen, 1998; Main & Weston, 1982), and studies where children showed no preference for mothers over fathers (Karen, 1998; Lamb, Thompson, Gardener, Charnov, & Estes, 1984; Main & Weston, 1982). However, it has been noted that although there is an attachment to both parents, infants prefer their mothers when they are distressed or anxious (Bowlby, 1969; Lamb, 1981).

One of the advantages of attachment theory is that the individual characteristics of a particular father do not get lost within a generic-gender-specific role, as there is evidence that the individual father's attachment style occurs independently of the mother's style of attachment. Karen (1998) asserts that the father's attachment to the infant has almost as much effect as that of the mother's.

Attachment theory has been criticised by some feminists and working mothers, who claim that attachment theory supports the stereotypical view of limiting the role of primary caregiver to women (Karen, 1998). However, Karen (1998) explains that mothers are the main caregivers because they usually fall into this role. Nevertheless, the father or others can be an attachment figure.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has provided an overview of the changing psychoanalytic thinking about fathers beginning with Freud through to Bowlby. Most psychoanalytic ideas about fathers have their origins in Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex, a stage of development that was believed to be most significant for both the boy and girl. Many of the early theorists such as Freud and Ferenczi, were accused of 'phallocentrism' due to their focus on the father. Later female psychoanalysts such as Klein along with the emergence of object relations theories conceptualised the mother-infant dyad as primary and the father's role as secondary. With the introduction of attachment theory, Bowlby followed Winnicott's mother-infant theme, and introduced the possibility of the father as an alternative or primary attachment figure.

Each of these theorists from Freud through to Bowlby were pioneers in that they contributed something new and unique to how we think about fathers. Although



they did not necessarily build on each other's theories, each stimulated a different way of thinking in the other, and each have become well-known in their own right. The next chapter reviews the literature from psychoanalytic writers who are less known, but whose contribution is equally valuable.

## Chapter 4 - Further questions about fathers

### ***Introduction***

In this chapter I review the psychoanalytic literature on the pre-Oedipal father from the 1950s to the present time. The period from the 1950s was a time of dramatic social change with the rise of feminism, more women entering the workplace and the introduction of birth control, all of which brought about changes to the basic structure of the traditional Western family. Some of these changes include an increase in single parent families, working mothers, absent fathers as well as hands-on fathers, all of which affected the role of the father. Now, more than ever, the role of the father is undefined. What does this mean for the father and the infant? This chapter continues with the themes: the father's relationship with the mother; the father assists the infant to separate from the mother; the father as an internal object (the intrapsychic father).

Since the 1960s there has been a growing body of evidence in the form of direct observational studies (Abelin, 1975; Burgner, 1985; Herzog, 2001) and patient case studies that supports the understanding that the father occupies an important and unique role in the infant's development. This has resulted in "an increasingly complex, multi-dimensional model of the father" (Liebman & Abell, 2000).

### ***The father's relationship with the mother***

In the literature reviewed, there is recognition of the father's relationship with the mother and its effect on the infant's development. In reference to the mother-infant relationship Winnicott (1960) observed "there is no such thing as an infant" (p.39). It can also be said, there is no such thing as the mother-infant dyad without the father.

### ***The supportive father***

In both historical (Winnicott, 1964) and recent (Marks, 2002) psychoanalytic literature, the importance of the pre-Oedipal father's role in supporting the mother has been discussed. From the time of the infant's conception, the father's support is valuable for both the mother and the infant. Stoller (1979) states that one of the important functions of the father is to serve as the mother's main support. Meltzer

(1979) asserts the function of the father is to protect and supply the mother-infant relationship and that this seems to be in keeping with psychic reality.

Marks (2002) explains that long before the infant's birth, the father offers the mother some relief by providing an important place in his mind for the infant. According to Marks (2002), the knowledge that the father is thinking about the infant allows the mother to think "of the child who also exists in someone else's mind" (p.97). This knowledge also allows her to "risk forgetting her child, even risk hating her child – she can hand him over (in her mind) to the father" (Marks, 2002, p.97).

Marks (2002) adds that after the infant's birth, the father is expected to negotiate a new relationship with the infant, while simultaneously maintaining a relationship with the mother; tolerating that he may be at times excluded from aspects of the mother-infant relationship. In thinking about the father's support for the mother, several writers (Benjamin, 1988; Diamond, 1995; Quinodoz, 1994; Stern, 1980) have written about the importance of the father providing the mother with relief from the baby by becoming emotionally involved and interested in both the mother's and infant's wellbeing. Stern (1980) explains that the father needs to protect the intense and primary mutuality of the mother-infant relationship. It has also noted that the infant benefits when the father is available to both mother and infant (Forrest, 1966). Forrest (1966) notes "the more snugly the infant is cradled in the arms of a mother herself circled by the protective care of the father, the stronger is the integration of the infant ego" (p.2)

As previously mentioned Winnicott (1964) contends the father's support of the mother allows her to contain her feelings of hate, anger and frustration towards the infant without destroying the mother-infant dyad. Similarly, Lebovici (1982) states the father needs to be able to absorb the child's aggression that is likely to be generated within the mother-infant dyad.

Kramer (1978) claims the father plays several roles, one of which is to be libidinally available to the mother as a source of emotional support in a two-way-give-and-take relationship. An aspect of this relationship is the father providing the mother with narcissistic and sexual satisfaction, so that the infant does not need to fulfil these needs which might lead to prolonging of the symbiotic stage (Henderson, 1980; Liebman & Abell, 2000; McDougall, 1989)

In some cases, the father is required to provide 'fathering' or 'mothering' for the mother within their adult relationship (Tuttman, 1986). Mothering can bring up

experiences from the mother's past, that may interfere with her availability to the infant. If a father is mature enough to provide 'fathering' for the mother, this takes the pressure off the mother and allows her to be a child and be taken care of as required.

### *The 'parental couple'*

One of the unique aspects of the father's relationship with the mother is that he has (or has had) a sexual relationship with the child's mother (Marks, 2002). Marks (2002) explains the presence of this relationship in the parent's mind is important to the infant during the pre-Oedipal years. He states:

I suggest that the presence of a sexual father and mother couple, in each of the couple's minds, determines both the extent to which a woman will welcome her sexual partner into the relationship she has with their infant, and whether or not he will be able to become involved. This configuration, in each of the partners' minds will affect whether or not their child can have in its mind a linked mother and father. It also lays the ground for the development in the child of a certain creative kind of mind and the capacity as an adult and parent to welcome a sexual and potent father (Marks, 2002, p. 93).

There is some evidence that if the 'parental couple' is missing in the mother's (or father's) mind, it can lead to an impairment to the infant's capacity to think clearly (Feldman, 1989). Feldman asserts that if the internalised parental couple is absent or impaired in the infant's mind, then the ability to think creatively and to allow ideas and thoughts to interact and draw to a conclusion may become impaired.

Further evidence is offered by McDougall (1989), who describes a client in which the paternal image is either impaired or absent from the client's mind, because the father has had a limited role in the mother's life. She explains that in these circumstances the absent or impaired paternal image can be experienced by the pre-Oedipal infant as being forbidden to think 'about the father', and consequently can impact on cognitive abilities. This idea is also supported by Marks (2002) who cites evidence from child development research and clinical cases of adults that suggest a

link between the parents' early experience of the poor conjunction of father with mother and impaired cognitive and social development.

There is some evidence that the missing parental couple in the infant's mind can lead to pathology (Etchegoyen, 2002). In his work with sexual deviants Limentani noted there appears to be an absence of the father in the transference (Limentani, 1989). Further evidence that the missing pre-Oedipal father can lead to pathology is offered by Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985) who explains that the sexual deviant minimises or eliminates the father's role and consequently the generational difference because he wants to be the object of his mother's sexual desire.

In another instance Limentani (1989) notes the phenomenon that he refers to as 'vagina men', who are men who have not negotiated the castration complex, and therefore are missing the internalised parental couple because of an absence of the pre-Oedipal father. Consequently, there is a complete absence of an internalised prohibiting and positive father, which he explains is not a defence against homosexuality, but a defence against primitive anxiety by identification with the mother, rather than a relationship based on choice of object. In referring to 'vagina man', Mitchell (1998) suggests that this way of operating by way of identification with the mother, lack of boundaries and poor sense of self with primal rage and jealousy may fit the prototype of the child abuser.

However, there is evidence that the internalisation of the 'parental couple' is possible without an actual 'parental couple'. Abelin (1975) cites a pilot study of children of lesbian mothers in Los Angeles, which illustrates this idea. Abelin discusses the example of a five-year-old girl, who was artificially conceived by a mother who had no relations with males except a brief contact with a grandfather at aged three years. This girl still had a concept of a father in her mind and was a feminine little girl. The implication is that this is due to the mother having a concept of a father in her own mind which the girl was able to internalise herself.

### *Clinical Vignette*

Liz was raised in a home where her father was not actively involved in her life having left when she was five years old. Her mother frequently expressed that he was a disappointment to her, both as a husband and a father. Liz's mother, however, had a good relationship with both her own grandfather and father, which contributed to the internalised parental couple that she carried in her mind and shared with Liz.

As an adult, Liz has enjoyed a healthy, long-term relationship with her husband, who she describes as ‘a good father’ to their children.

Liz’s history illustrates the thinking of Marks (2002) that the internalisation of the parental couple appears possible without an actual parental couple. The internalised image was sufficient to allow Liz to recognise the qualities she felt a father should possess in her husband. However, without an actual father to provide a test of reality, Liz can at times be idealising and devaluing of men, especially those who are fathers. This has recently been brought into consciousness in therapy and appears to be one of the losses of not having an actual father who was actively involved in her life.

Liz’s thinking also appears affected by her mother’s criticism of her father. Prior to therapy, Liz experienced her thoughts being blocked when thinking about her father. Similarly, Liz sometimes experiences her thoughts being blocked in academic situations such as creative writing. In therapy, Liz has become conscious of her feelings of guilt about desiring a father, because she wanted to be loyal to her mother who had been both mother and father to her. Liz is still unable to connect to some feelings about her father, but is aware that she projects her feelings onto strong and powerful men whom she idealises. Liz’s dynamics support the thinking that cognitive abilities can be affected if a child has been forbidden to think about the father. It is likely that Liz has internalised a whole parental couple, but a split father within the parental couple, because Liz internalised her mother’s feelings of disappointment about her father as being forbidden to need a father.

### ***The intrapsychic father (internal father)***

A theme throughout the literature regarding the pre-Oedipal father is the ‘intrapsychic’ or ‘internal father’. According to Davids (2002) “the idea of an internal world is central to object relations theory” (p.67), therefore even in the absence of a physical or emotional father, an intrapsychic father can exist. The intrapsychic father is created through a complex interaction of innate knowledge, the mother’s relationship with the actual father, the mother’s internalised father and the infant’s actual relationship with the father.

### *The second object*

Many writers (Abelin, 1975; Chodorow, 1989; Klein, 1975) agree that the father is the second object in the child's life after the mother who is usually the first object and primary caregiver. Eugenio Gaddini offers a slightly different perspective. Gaddini (1976) agrees the father is the second object after the mother, but explains that the father is the first object in the infant's life to come from the external world. He explains that the infant experiences the mother as an object that comes from within because they are experienced as one. Similarly, Mahler (1975) believes that the father (unlike the mother) enters the infant's consciousness from the outside. It is believed that the first image of the father appears a few weeks after the mother's image (Abelin, 1975; Klein, 1975).

Dauids (2002) questions how the father becomes the second object, even though there may not be an actual relationship with the father. Some writers (Gaddini, 1976; Money-Kyrle, 1978) suggest that an innate knowledge of the breast, penis and parental couple enables the infant to recognise the father and this together with the infant's experiences, contributes to the internalised father. Some of the earlier psychoanalysts (Klein, 1975) and Freud (1912/1955b) discuss the infant's *a priori* knowledge of the father's penis.

Dauids (2002) maintains that the internalised father and internalised mother are seen as two distinct objects in the mind of the infant, each occupying its own domain. He adds that the mother's domain is that of nurturing, comforting and attending to the infant's needs, whereas the father's domain consists of boundary setting and reality testing which assists the infant to delay gratification. The father is positioned between the mother and infant.

Because an infant needs more than biological survival to evolve into a healthy adult, the father's role complements the mother's and is just as essential. From a Kleinian perspective Dauids (2002) states that the father as the second object can become a 'container' for the split-off aspects of the infant's intolerable experiences with the mother. Furthermore, Wisdom (1976), also from a Kleinian perspective explains that the father encourages the infant to tolerate frustrations, not be overwhelmed and to bear difficulties. A similar perspective concerning the father as a second object is offered by Demby (1990) who theorises that because the father does not experience the infant's aggressive impulses as threatening, he is able to

assist the infant to control or express them in a non-destructive way. Contemplating the idea of the father as an emotional buffer, Mischel (1958) states that one of the best predictors of an infant's ability to delay gratification is the presence of the father in the home.

*Does the intrapsychic father have to be the actual father?*

In discussing the internal father Marks (2002) questions whether the second object has to be the actual father or even if the father's role has to be played by a male. Davids believes it is the functions that the father performs that emerge as the internalised father irrespective of whether it is performed by the actual father. Samuels (1996) takes an extreme view in that he believes the role of the father and the mother can be carried out by the same parent, and that these roles are not necessarily gender related. The question of the one parent playing both roles and its implications is an important question that is relevant for current times considering the increase of single parents.

In the absence of the actual father, Izzard & Barden (2001) assert it is essential that the mother's internal relationship with her own father or the male aspects of her psyche provide the 'father's role' for the infant. That the mother contributes to the infant's internalised father is a view shared by many writers (Atkins, 1984; Davids, 2002; Lanksy, 1989; McDougall, 1989). McDougall (1989) maintains that the manner in which the mother handles the infant will imply the presence or absence of a third.

Evidence reveals however, that it is not only the mother, but that other people in the infant's life can contribute to the creation of the internal father (A. Freud & Burlingham, 1944). It was noted from observational work at the Hampstead Nurseries in England during World War Two, an internalised father can still develop in the absence of the actual father. Those involved in the observational work noted that children who had never seen their fathers, developed a fantasised image of the father, which was attributed to the experiences shared by other children who had left the nursery and seen their own fathers (A. Freud & Burlingham, 1944).

For these reasons, Davids (2002) concludes that it is impossible for a person to pass through infancy without an internalised father in the object world. This seems true of normal development, however in other circumstances this conclusion seems questionable given Limeunti's case of 'vagina man'.



### ***Father assists in separation from mother***

A widely embraced notion of the role of father, is that of facilitator of separation-individuation. Initially the father provides the infant with an early identification. It was Loewald (1951) who first wrote about the father's role in assisting the infant to acquire a sense of identity. A further understanding of this role was developed by the observational work of Margaret Mahler and her colleagues (Mahler & Gosliner, 1955; Mahler et al., 1975). However, it was Abelin (1975) who participated in observational work at the Masters Children's Centre under the direction of Mahler, who extended this thinking further and introduced the idea of the father's role in bringing about 'early triangulation'.

### ***Source of early identification***

Loewald (1951) explains the father provides an early source of identification that is 'exquisitely masculine' and lends powerful support against the danger of the womb. Loewald contends that the boy dreads re-engulfment by the mother and that an identification with the father provides support against a fear of fusion with the mother along with the threat of castration by the father. However, Loewald did not mention the father's contribution to the girl's development (Target & Fonagy, 2002).

During the practising sub-phase of the separation-individuation process from the mother, Target & Fonagy (2002) contend that the father encourages the infant's phallic attitudes. Greenacre (1957) views the role of the father during this time as both offering support to the mother and in making a unique contribution to the omnipotent qualities of the infant. He described not only the internal role of the father, but the actual role, which includes encouraging muscular activity, a sense of body self and exploration of space in the child.

Many writers (Burlingham, 1973; Pruett, 1987; Ross, 1979; Yogman, 1982) have noted that the father is more exhilarating, interactional, playful and stimulating in the way he relates to the infant compared to the mother. Greenacre (1957) adds the father represents something that is 'glamorous, powerful and mysterious' compared to the mother. It is noted that the infant is also aware of the subtle differences between the father and mother. Forrest (1966) writes:

Fathering and mother differ in some quality of essence, so that the child through the senses of sound, touch and empathic contact feels this difference, even in the similar parental expression of feelings such as tenderness, or acts such as holding. (p.2)

The role of early identification was thought to be the beginnings of separation for the infant from the mother, but it is during the ambivalence of the rapprochement sub-phase, that the father becomes a transitional figure who helps to consolidate self-constancy.

### *Rapprochement*

During the rapprochement stage the father represents the way into the world as liberator and powerful other. Mahler (1975) contends a stable image of the father is formed at the rapprochement stage of development, while Abelin (1975) states that during the rapprochement sub-phase, the father plays a crucial role in the disentanglement of the ego from the regressive pull back to symbiosis with the mother. Further, Abelin noted that girls attach themselves to fathers earlier than boys, and that boys do not recognise the rivalry with the father during the ambivalent child-mother interaction during the rapprochement period until the stage of the castration complex. Greenspan (1982) acknowledged the vulnerability of the infant who lacks the assistance of the third in their struggle to emerge from the dyadic relationship with the mother. He contends the father can assist the infant to mourn the loss of this relationship.

Abelin (1975) proposes that the father contributes to the infant's ability to form mental self-images and to think symbolically during the working out of the rapprochement crisis (18-month period). The father's relationship with the mother assists the infant to internalise a 'prototypical experience' and this is experienced by the infant as both 'traumatic and organising'. Abelin notes during his observation work of infants, the infant's awareness of himself develops when he notices the father relating to the mother which causes the infant to feel left out. When the infant's sense of self becomes suspended, he places himself in the father's place of desiring the mother and it is here that he first becomes aware of himself as a separate being and is the beginnings of 'early triangulation'. Marks (2002) adds the infant's awareness initiates the beginnings of the reciprocity and cognitive processes and

Mahler (1975) contends a stable image of the father is formed at the rapprochement stage of development.

Herzog (1980) cautions that during the rapprochement stage, the infant's development may be impaired if the mother is depressed, angry or too eager to 'share his bed'. Lebovici (1982) explains that the child's projected anger against the mother's regressive (imagined) pull requires the father's support and to assist in mourning the loss of the earlier mother-infant dyad. This is especially important if the mother is over-invested in the child.

Although there is evidence that the father's influence in supporting the infant's separation is important, observations of a boy named Michael (Abelin, 1975), indicate it may not be so.

### *A different role*

It was in Mahler's laboratory that Abelin's observations of a young boy called Michael showed that his relationship with his mother and father had a symbiotic quality. Michael's relationship with his father developed alongside his relationship with his mother, and they appeared to be alternate attachment figures. Here was some evidence that the role of mediator in the process of separation does not necessarily fall on the father. Target & Fonagy (2002) notes:

The father's and mother's roles may not be identical in terms of the child's psychic organization, but nor are their roles as clearly distinguishable as some psychoanalytic writers have assumed. Having two parents in different roles may indeed make an important contribution to the development of the self-representation, but this does not assign a specific role to the father. (p.51)

Similarly Spieler (1984) challenges the position of the father as the first stranger who enters the infant's world. He argues that both parents can be introduced simultaneously, and not sequentially as attachment figures in the infant's internal world. Likewise, Jones (2005) asserts that the father can perform " what has been traditionally seen as maternal functions" (p.23). That the father can play an alternative role such as an alternative or additional attachment figure is supported by (Abelin, 1975; Diamond, 1998; Herzog, 1980).

As previously noted, in attachment theory, the father can be the primary or secondary attachment figure (Bowlby, 1982). One of the strengths of attachment theory is it provides a different way of looking at the relationship between the father and infant because it takes into account the individual father's attachment history (Bowlby, 1982). Similarly, Lamb (1997) contends that both the father and mother can provide parental warmth, nurturance, and closeness to the infant.

The idea of the father in an alternative role is captured by Liebman & Abell (2000) who writes:

...beyond his role as the facilitator of certain critical developmental processes....is the father who is loved and needed in an unconflicted way. The bliss of loving union henceforth ascribed exclusively to the mother-child dyad has increasingly been recognised as an elemental aspect of the father-child relationship. (p.5)

With the many changes occurring to the traditional Western family, the possibility of the father playing an alternative role to that which he has traditionally played, both in his actual relationship and intrapsychically is a relevant question for our times.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has provided a review of psychoanalytic literature concerning the pre-Oedipal father starting from the 1950s to the present time against a backdrop of dramatic changes in society, the family and in particular, the role of the father. Some of these changes may have led to an increase of single parent families, more working mothers as well as absent and hands-on fathers, which have contributed to changes in the father's role.

Some of the writers from the 1950s reflect these changes, while others have expanded, challenged or modified the thinking of the early psychoanalysts. One of the differences between the early psychoanalytic literature and the literature from the 1950s is the number of direct observational studies (Abelin, 1975; Burgner, 1985; Herzog, 1980), an increase in patient case studies and a growing body of evidence that supports the understanding that the father occupies an important and unique role in the infant's development. This has resulted in 'an increasingly complex,

multidimensional model of the father' (Liebman & Abell, 2000) that is still developing.

## Chapter 5 – A Feminist Perspective

### *Introduction*

This chapter focuses on feminist perspectives regarding the role of the pre-Oedipal father. Most feminists during the 1960s and 1970s were critical of psychoanalysis, viewing it as contributing to the oppression of women and Freud's views as limited by the cultural bias of the time.

Feminist psychoanalytic literature concerning the pre-Oedipal father, mostly concentrates on feminine psychology, and consequently focuses mainly on the girl's experience. Many feminist psychoanalysts contend the girl has a very different experience to the boy during the pre-Oedipal years with the father (Benjamin, 1988).

The themes covered in previous chapters: the intrapsychic father, the father's relationship with the mother and the father who assists the infant in separation from the mother appear in the reviewed literature are discussed along with some new themes: the significance of the rapprochement sub-phase, the father's contribution to gender identity, penis envy and society's construction of gender. As explored in Chapters Three and Four, the mother's contribution both in relationship with the father and with the child is important and the reviewed literature emphasises the significance especially for the girl. A clinical vignette is included, followed by a discussion on how feminist theories have contributed to my practice.

### *A feminist view*

Many psychoanalytic feminists such as Karen Horney, Juliet Mitchell, Nancy Chodorow and more recently Jessica Benjamin, criticised Freud and the early psychoanalysts as 'patriarchal' and 'phallogocentric' (Etchegoyen, 2002).

Horney, a German-born psychoanalyst acknowledged Freud's work, but questioned his theories on sexuality, instinct theory and his notion of 'penis envy'. Horney (1967) believed that the girl might want a relationship with the father without envying his power.

Mitchell, a British social feminist, disagreed with Freud, who maintains there was no difference for the boy and the girl in pre-Oedipal stage as she believed this period was crucial to femininity (Mitchell, 1974) and describes the pre-Oedipal period as being obscured by the Oedipal stage, which she likened to a patriarchal culture. However, Mitchell also defends Freud and maintains that Freud was simply

describing, rather than prescribing what he observed at the time, a world where women were inferior in society.

American psychoanalyst, Jessica Benjamin, asserts that the pre-Oedipal father plays a vital role in assisting the infant's differentiation of self, which contributes to pre-Oedipal conflicts and later gender identity formation, and that this has particular significance for the girl (Benjamin, 1988).

Nancy Chodorow, another American psychoanalyst and feminist sociologist, criticised early psychoanalytic theory because she believed it reproduces the inequalities of a patriarchal society and that this has significance for the girl. Chodorow (1989) remarks that Freud overlooked the pre-Oedipal by concentrating on the Oedipal stage and thus violated a fundamental rule of psychoanalytic practice by not going to the root cause of the issue.

### ***The actual father***

Feminist psychoanalysts Mitchell (1974) and others are in agreement with traditional psychoanalytic writers (Davids, 2002; A. Freud & Burlingham, 1973; Marks, 2002) that the role of the pre-Oedipal father does not have to be played by the actual father as discussed in Chapter 4. Mitchell cites (Mannoni, 1970) who cautions against the prevalence of mistaking the father's function from the actual father. It is believed the masculine 'qualities' and 'behaviours' associated with the father, which are internalised and have a different effect on the infant. Benjamin (1991) supports Mitchell's thinking in her comments concerning the transference, that the idealised phallus of the pre-Oedipal father can be devolved on a male or female therapist.

### ***Father assists in separation from the mother***

Most of the psychoanalytic feminist writers such as Mitchell (1974) and (Chodorow, 1989) agree with earlier theorists (Abelin, 1975; Loewald, 1951; Winnicott, 1964) that the father symbolically represents the 'third' or the 'other', who assists in the separation of the mother-infant dyad. According to (Benjamin, 1988), it is during the rapprochement stage (Mahler et al., 1975) the pre-Oedipal father plays a crucial role for the child in assisting in separation from the mother. She states the rapprochement period is a vital transitional point in the psychic life of a child in resolving the conflict of holding onto the mother or moving away without experiencing loss.

Further Benjamin (1991) agrees with Abelin (1975) and Loewald (1951) and others, that the father during the rapprochement period represents power and omnipotence for both sexes. Benjamin (1988) explains that during the rapprochement stage, the infant's "love of the father is an 'ideal love': the child idealises the father because the father is the magical mirror that reflects the self as it wants to be..." (p.100).

Benjamin (1988) explains this is a difficult time for the girl compared to the boy, as she has to negotiate a delicate balance of separation and individuation with the aid of her father as an identificatory figure, while simultaneously forming a feminine identification with her mother. Benjamin (1988) and Chodorow (1989) caution if the girl has an excessive identification with the father that it may interfere with the development of a feminine identity. Furthermore, Benjamin adds the pre-Oedipal solution for the girl of escaping the mother and identifying with the father can leave the girl vulnerable to losing her mother's protection from a 'dangerous' father. This appears to be an ambivalent and vulnerable time for the girl and Deutsch (1944) summarised this struggle, when she noted the girl turns to her father, tentatively and with intensity but still not exclusively.

### *Depression*

Rolphie & Galenson (1981) observed that during the rapprochement sub-phase, the girl becomes depressed and loses her exploratory enthusiasm, while Mahler (1975) and others attributes the girl's depression to genital awareness and in particular the boy's greater motor-mindedness. Benjamin (1988) disagrees with Mahler and explains it is the girl's inability to utilise her father in the separation from the mother to defend against her feelings of helplessness that can lead to depression, not feelings about her innate difference to the boy. Furthermore, Benjamin explains that the boy's active motor behaviour during rapprochement is due to the differences in the way both the father and mother encourage independence in the boy compared to the girl. A similar view is shared by Chodorow (1989) who explains the difference in the mother's behaviour with the girl could also be attributed to her double-identification her daughter. Because the mother identifies with her own mother who is female, through her identification with her daughter who is also female, the mother re-experiences herself as a child and this contributes to a stronger identification with the girl.



Fathers tend to respond more to their son's needs and form a more intense bond of identification, which is supported by Lamb (1981) and Gunsberg (1982). Further, the father may recognise in his son's need, his own need to dis-identify with his own mother which contributes to him treating his son differently to his daughter (Benjamin, 1988).

Benjamin (1991) adds that in addition to the mother's support towards independence, the boy is able to recognise himself in his father and to feel both protected and powerful like him. At this point, where the boy aligns himself with the father he feels like the 'one' who desires mother (Benjamin, 1993). Therefore the boy identifies himself, as the one who is 'able to desire', and the girl who identifies herself with the mother, becomes the 'object of desire'. At this crucial point, the girl who senses the father's withdrawal may retreat to the mother, and Benjamin maintains that it is here in her difficulty in separating from the mother, rather than her feelings of helplessness, that causes depression.

#### *The mother's role*

A consistent theme throughout psychoanalytic literature is that it is not only the father's role that is important, but that the mother's role, both in relationship with the father and the infant is equally so, especially during the rapprochement period. Feminist psychoanalysts support this idea and Chodorow cites Brunswick (1940) who maintains that the success of this turning away, is dependent on strength of the active and passive pre-Oedipal mother-infant attachment.

Chodorow (1999) states that the mother experiences the boy and girl differently and that her unconscious fantasies will be communicated to the child. In discussing the different experience for the girl and the boy Chodorow (1989), notes that the mother usually pushes the boy towards independence and identifies with him less. Feminist writers (Benjamin, 1993; Chodorow, 1989) observe that while the mother's behaviour during this time is often disadvantageous to the girl, that society contributes further to this dynamic. Chodorow (1989) explains if the mother perpetuates the boy's dependence, the father and society are likely to intervene and separate the boy from the mother. This is less likely to occur with the girl unless the father is actively involved. Chodorow notes that it is for this reason the mother usually pushes the boy towards independence and identifies with him less.

Some mothers find it difficult to separate from the infant because they depend on their infant to strengthen their self-esteem or meet other needs and consequently may discourage individuation (Chodorow, 1989; Herzog, 1980; Lebovici, 1982).

In some cases, the mother's resistance to the boy's separating, in combination with other factors can lead to transsexualism. In a paper about nine cases of transsexual males, Stoller (1979) noted that they shared a common history of mothers who discouraged separation and masculine behaviour in their sons, combined with fathers who were inadequate and both physically and psychologically absent, which prevented the boy from entering the Oedipal stage. Stoller explains in these cases, the boy did not experience himself as a separate being who could desire his mother without being her or being a part of her body and mind.

However, Stoller (1975) stresses this combination does not necessarily cause a boy to become transsexual, unless there is the rare occurrence of a number of factors that spark the reaction that was latent in the family, such as bisexual tendencies in the mother amongst other factors, but he also wonders if it were as simple as that. In response to Stoller's comments, Target & Fonagy (2002) suggests it is more likely to be the specific quality of fathering and mothering, which leads to difficulties in the child's gender formation.

### ***Gender identity***

Both feminist theorists and traditional psychoanalytic writers agree on the importance of the developmental milestone of gender formation. French feminist psychoanalyst, Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985) stated that a coming to terms with the differences anatomically of the girl and boy is a necessary narcissistic milestone and has significance because it coincides with the rapprochement sub-phase. There is evidence the establishment of gender identity occurs during the pre-Oedipal and pre-phallic stage of development, which is earlier than previously believed and that this has profound implications for psychoanalysis (Blos, 1984; Money, 1986).

Benjamin (1988) adds an important dimension to traditional psychoanalytic thinking about the rapprochement sub-phase. Benjamin states that there is now research and theory to support that a child's gender identity develops during the second year of life and is established by the third year coinciding with the rapprochement sub-phase, which is supported by Stoller (1968) and Fast (1984). It is

this conjunction, that Benjamin suggests contributes to and defines the symbolic role of the 'father' and the 'phallus' and this has particular significance for the girl.

Benjamin (1988) explains that during this crucial period when the child's desire is in conflict (about moving away from the mother) and there is a new awareness of gender differences, the role of the parents may become split to symbolically represent different sides of the conflict; with the father representing independence and mother representing dependence. Benjamin contends this devalues the mother's role and because girls identify with their mothers, it may 'subvert their struggle for independence'. Chodorow (1989) agrees with Benjamin, adding that the difficulty for the girl is that a feminine identity means to identify with a passive devalued mother and a rejection of her mother is a rejection of her feminine identification and herself. Furthermore, Chodorow explains that because the feminine identification with the mother is continuous with her early childhood identification; there is a major discontinuity in the girl's development of sense of gender identity, because she must transfer her affection to her father if she is to attain heterosexual adulthood.

Many feminist psychoanalysts agree the boy is at an advantage during this time, one reason being that he has more motivation to separate from the mother because he does not want to be associated with dependency. As previously discussed, society's perception of the father as the powerful other, is also advantageous to the boy in formation of gender identity. Chodorow argues that because men have power in our society, men define 'maleness as to that which is basically human' and therefore 'define women as not-men'. For the girl, the consequence may be that she defines herself by what she is lacking.

### *Penis Envy*

Of all of Freud's theories, it is the notion of penis envy that has aroused the ire of feminist psychoanalytic writers the most. Fitzpatrick-Hanly (1994) stated: "No other words, side by side, have caused such a strong reaction in twentieth century feminist thought..." (p.4). Although, feminists disagree on some level with Freud regarding penis envy, not all the feminist psychoanalysts agree with one another, however, most agree that the pre-Oedipal father represents more than the 'one' who possesses a penis.

Benjamin (1993) explains that the girl's feelings of helplessness during the rapprochement period and wanting to identify with the father have at times been misinterpreted as 'penis envy'. A similar view is expressed by Fitzpatrick-Hanly (1994), who notes that in some cases there may be the presence of strong identifications with the father and childhood wishes to be a boy, but stresses that this does not necessarily indicate penis envy. It is believed the transient identifications of 2-3 year olds with the father who assists in the separating from the mother, represents an essential role in the girl's development of autonomy (Rees, 1987; Spieler, 1984). Benjamin notes that psychologists have overlooked the girl's idealised love for the father, but recognised that the boy's early love and identification with the father during the rapprochement stage, when the father solves the child's conflict to be recognised as independent by the person that he depends on. It is commonly recognised that it is during the rapprochement sub-phase that the child recognises its own helplessness, which can cause a narcissistic blow and the girl seeks to repair this wound through identification with the father who is the embodiment of power (Benjamin, 1988).

It is in the identification with the father, where Benjamin (1988) believes the girl is seeking more than a repair of self-esteem. She contends that at this point, the girl becomes aware of her own will and that she is 'one' who has the ability to desire, and that the girl not only wants her father to recognise her desire, but for him to recognise and respect that she has a will. Benjamin cautions that if the girl's desire feels thwarted or ignored, then her longing for her father may be associated with pain and therefore tinged with masochism. This is significant for the girl and may shed light on the origins of why some women have a life-long pattern of choosing relationships with men based on masochism and submission. Benjamin states that if her desire is gratified, it can form the basis for autonomy for the girl.

Horney (1967), shares a similar view to Benjamin concerning 'penis envy'. She questioned why the girl would not feel an 'inner impulse' towards loving her father, without wanting the phallus (Fitzpatrick-Hanly, 1994). Horney made an important distinction between primary and secondary penis envy. She argues that the girl's early reaction to not having a penis is a passing phase, a disappointment and frustration during a stage of ambitiousness. However, if a girl's first turning to the father during the pre-Oedipal stage fails, a consequence may be a defensive investment in the phallic image and an intense and pathologic penis envy. Horney

(1926) explains that this may be attributed to a traumatic conflict with the mother and the girl is unable to identify with the feminine aspects of the mother that can lead to a complex she refers to as a 'flight from womanhood'. Horney further stresses this does not constitute penis envy or mean that the girl wants to be a boy. Chodorow (1999) argues that penis envy is dependent on the individual father, the mother, the environment and the child and how all of these factors come into play.

While Horney (1926) acknowledges that some neurotic women may feel 'penis envy', she contends it is just as likely that 'womb envy' may occur in males because both sexes had something to offer that arouses envy in the opposite sex. Similarly, Izzard & Barden (2001) and Klein (1928) discussed the notion of womb envy, and the possibility of boys feeling envious of girls because they can have babies. Brunswick (1940) also alludes to the notion of womb envy, in mentioning the age appropriate wish for a baby in the young boy, but this was not investigated or interpreted as womb envy.

Mitchell (1974) supports Freud's understanding of feminine passivity and proposed that psychoanalysts must logically accept the phallus in representing desire and in so doing, uncover the origins of woman's submission and the deep psychic roots of patriarchy. While Benjamin (1988) agrees with Mitchell, that we recognise and acknowledge the power of the phallus and its hold on the unconscious, she questions why the father has the power to begin with before it is equated to the penis. For Benjamin, it is society's perception that has contributed to the father being viewed as powerful, whereas for Freud and Mitchell the father is innately powerful because he possesses the phallus.

Some French psychoanalysts such as (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1970; McDougall, 1980; Torok, 1970) and American analysts such as (Chodorow, 1978) and (Dinnerstein, 1976) believe that both the father and the phallus are representative of a power that is separate from the mother. Their view is that the father and phallus represents a response to the omnipotent and all-powerful mother pre-Oedipal mother, referred to as a "beating back of the mother" (Benjamin, 1991, p.280).

Chasseguet-Smirgel (1970), extends Horney's thinking about the innate power of the female. She disagrees with Freud's image of the castrated mother, and states that it may in fact be the opposite. She explains that the boy may view his mother as powerless, but unconsciously she may be seen as very powerful. The phallus in this context represents a symbol of separation and 'revolt' from a maternal

power that is powerful and certainly not lacking. Here, Chasseguet-Smirgel has conceptualised the dual nature of the father's power to represent difference - both as a defence against the mother as well as the infant's wish to separate from the mother. However, Benjamin (1991) disagrees with Chasseguet-Smirgel that separation from the mother is necessarily a hostile process, and states that it represents an interest in the world, and that this is the core root of penis envy. Benjamin cautions that feminist thinkers do not accept defensive differentiation is the solution, and the answer lies in challenging the society's gender construction.

### *Changing perspectives*

It is Benjamin's (1988) contention that the mother and how her role is perceived in society contributes to the father being perceived as the one who represents power and excitement. She proposes that if the parents' roles were integrated rather than complementary, then both the mother and father can represent the 'exciting other'. Benjamin cautions that even if this occurred in individual families that this would not be supported by the way society views gender differences. Benjamin's proposal of an integration between the father and mother's roles is a possibility according to Fast (1984), who suggests the pre-Oedipal child does not associate limitations with genital differences. Similarly, de Marneff (1997) claims that children first notice gender-specific behaviours and genital difference before they organise gender meaning.

Dorothy Dinnerstein, an American feminist, expresses a similar view to Benjamin, that gender roles are created by society and are not innate (Dinnerstein, 1976). Dinnerstein advocates the concept of dual parenting as a means of changing the way the mother is viewed by the pre-Oedipal infant. Dinnerstein argues that because the mother is usually the primary caregiver, the infant is exposed to her shortcomings, which may contribute to an image of female inferiority, compared to the father whose absence conceals his shortcomings and make him appear more exciting.

### *Clinical Vignette*

Benjamin's proposal that we challenge society's construction and assumptions concerning gender identity has influenced my clinical practice with my client Jen (Chapter Three). Having been raised in a patriarchal family within a

patriarchal community as well as suffering abuse at the hands of an authoritarian father, Jen believes men hold power both in the home and in the world, and therefore represent power, protection, excitement and danger. Consequently, Jen perceives women as innately inferior and although intimidated by men, she ultimately turns to them for guidance and protection.

It is only in hindsight that I recognise that while I acknowledged that Jen's family, community and abuse trauma have contributed to her perception of men, I did not recognise that society's assumptions concerning gender may have also contributed to her internalised beliefs about men and but also all of her relationships and how she views herself.

Recently, I reflected to Jen that she seems to believe 'women are innately inferior compared to men', to which her response was a stunned silence because she found it incomprehensible that women may not be inferior. Benjamin and colleagues have provided a new perspective in my clinical practice concerning society's construction of gender, which has enabled me to become aware of my susceptibility to society's views especially when working with female clients.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has reviewed the psychoanalytic feminist perspective regarding the role of the pre-Oedipal father. Many feminist psychoanalysts are critical of psychoanalysis, viewing it as contributing to the oppression of women and Freud's views as sexist and 'phallogocentric'. Feminist psychoanalytic literature compared to traditional psychoanalytic literature regarding the pre-Oedipal father, tends to focus more on feminine psychology and emphasises girl's experiences compared to boy's. Some new themes emerging in the feminist literature include: the significance of the rapprochement sub-phase; the father's contribution to gender identity; penis envy and society's construction of gender was discussed.

Whereas the historical and mainstream psychoanalysts provides new ways of looking at the role of the pre-Oedipal father, they often build upon Freud's theories. Some feminist psychoanalytic theorists have challenged the very basis of Freud's thinking. In particular, this concerns the way society views gender differences, which Freud viewed as innate, but feminists believe is culturally based. This revolutionary way of looking at the pre-Oedipal father provides an entirely new perspective, in particular concerning the girl's development.

## Chapter 6 – Discussion and Conclusion

### *Introduction*

At the start of my literature review, I had many questions about the role of the father. As a therapist, I became fascinated with fathers due to the influence that my clients' fathers have had on their emotional development and in many areas of their lives. After reviewing the psychoanalytic literature concerning the pre-Oedipal father, I argue the pre-Oedipal father plays a pivotal role in the child's emotional development.

### *Theoretical Synthesis*

The many aspects of the pre-Oedipal father have been conceptualised by drive theory, object relations theory, attachment theory and feminist psychoanalytic theory. It was Winnicott (1965) who introduced the notion of the 'good enough mother' to describe a quality and attitude of parenting that is 'good enough' to provide for the infant's needs. While acknowledging the different theoretical perspectives from Freud through to the present time, I argue each writer has added a layer of understanding to what can be described as the 'good enough father' (Diamond, 1998; Jones, 2005; Samuels, 1996).

Winnicott (1953) notes that the 'good enough mother' is not perfect because "the object that behaves perfectly becomes no better than an hallucination" (p.94). He explains the mother's failure is essential as it enables the infant to "gain from the experience of frustration, since incomplete adaptation to need makes objects real, that is to say hated as well as loved" (Winnicott, 1953, p. 94). Likewise, the 'good enough father' is not required to be perfect, rather is allowed to fail to enable the infant to develop.

Many variables can affect the quality of fathering provided for the infant. These include the infant, the mother and others in the infant's life. However, it is not just the qualities or role of the father but the relationship between the father, mother and infant with all of its complexities that facilitates emotional development. Indeed depending on the circumstances and the fit between the father and the infant, the father may become the primary attachment figure for the infant (Jones, 2005). Chiland (1982) states:



.... nothing can be said about ‘the father’ in general. Something can be said only about a particular father conjoined with a particular mother, and about an absent father only in relation to the qualities of the mother. (p.377)

### *The ‘Good Enough Father’*

Under optimal conditions, the father plays many roles for both the infant and the mother. The notion of the ‘good enough father’ has been conceptualised by many theorists. These concepts are not a prescription for the ‘good enough father’; rather represent something of what he can contribute to the infant’s emotional development.

The father represents an early object of love and identification (Freud, 1925/1961c), knowledge (Freud, 1909/1955a), an ego ideal (Freud, 1905/1953), an object of envy (Freud, 1931/1961b), a powerful omnipotent godlike being (Freud, 1927/1961d), a protector (Freud, 1930/1961a) and a castrating authority (Freud, 1911/1958). Additionally, the father is a ‘penis introject’ (Klein, 1975), an internal object (Fairbairn, 1952) and an attachment figure (Bowlby, 1982).

From the infant’s conception, the father supports the mother by providing a secure environment, protecting the mother-infant child relationship, (Winnicott, 1960) tempering the ‘hate’ in the mother-infant dyad (Winnicott, 1964) while also meeting the mother’s sexual and narcissistic needs (McDougall, 1989). If required he may provide ‘fathering’ or ‘mothering’ to the mother (Tuttman, 1986).

The father is the ‘third’ in the mother-infant dyad and assists the infant in separation from the mother (Mahler et al., 1975). He provides a source of early identification and offers support against re-engulfment by the mother (Loewald, 1951). The father is a model of work and the world (Winnicott, 1964) and represents progression, independence, activity (Chodorow, 1989), boundary setting and reality testing (Davids, 2002). He assists in the formation of gender identity (Stoller, 1968) and finally he provides a real relationship for the infant (Winnicott, 1964).

### *The actual and the intrapsychic father*

Under optimal conditions, the actual (real) father offers both a real relationship and contributes towards the development of the intrapsychic (internal) father. The actual father, being a male, possesses qualities and attributes that are different to the mother.

It is not only his role that influences the infant, but the father by his very essence is different to the mother (Forrest, 1966) and the infant can distinguish these subtleties in his presence.

Object relations theory believes that in the absence of the physical and emotional father and an intrapsychic father can exist (Davids, 2002). Davids (2002) maintains that both the paternal and maternal representations occupy separate domains, with the father's domain involving boundaries, reality, and separation while the mother's domain involves nurturing and comforting. He explains that both father and mother can share these roles, as it is the functions that are performed by the 'father' and the 'mother', which contributes to the internalised father, and the internalised mother. Samuels (1996) argues that the same parent can play both the role of the 'father' and of the 'mother'.

#### *The mother's role*

In the father's absence, it is essential that the mother's internal relationship with her own father or the male aspects of her psyche provide the 'father's role' for the infant (Izzard & Barden, 2001). There is evidence that other people in the infant's life can contribute to the creation of the intrapsychic father, as noted by Freud (1944) where children who had never seen their fathers, developed a fantasised father image through the experiences shared to them by other children.

In reference to the mother's important role Balint (1993) states that the mother allows the father to have a relationship with the infant while she manages two intense relationships herself, namely with the infant and the father. Winnicott (1964) agrees it is the mother who decides the extent to which the father is involved both in the mother-infant relationship and with the infant. Later, the mother allows the father to assist the infant to separate from the symbiotic relationship with her (Mahler & Gosliner, 1955; Mahler et al., 1975).

#### *The father, mother and infant*

Under optimal conditions, both father and mother are attuned to each other's and the infant's needs. To paraphrase (Winnicott, 1960) "there is no such thing as an infant" (p.39). It can also be said, there is no such thing as the mother-infant dyad without the father. It is the complexities of these relationships that contribute to the

infant's development both intrapsychically and in the actual relationship with the infant

The father is one half of the 'parental couple' and the presence of this relationship in the parent's mind is important to the infant (Marks, 2002). As previously noted, if the internalised parental couple is missing in the infant, there is evidence that it can lead to social and cognitive impairment (McDougall, 1989) and pathology (Limentani, 1991).

#### *A feminist perspective*

Although feminist psychoanalysts concentrate on feminine psychology, their emphasis on the girl's development has illuminated otherwise obscured aspects of the father-infant relationship for both sexes. Feminist psychoanalysts agree on the importance of the father's role. However, they dispute why the 'father' has to represent power and independence while the mother tends to represent powerlessness and dependency. They argue that these qualities are shared by the father and the mother and are not innate but based on gender roles created by society, which has significant consequences especially for the girl in the development of gender identity (Benjamin, 1988; Chodorow, 1999).

#### ***Clinical Synthesis***

Psychotherapy is interested in the continuing integration of different parts of the self, thus an awareness of these earlier parts that have their origins in the pre-Oedipal father relationship will contribute significantly to progress in therapy and the healthy development and quality of life of the individual. I argue that an understanding of the importance of the pre-Oedipal father significantly contributes to all areas of clinical practice including assessment, diagnosis and treatment.

#### *The forgotten father*

The pre-Oedipal father dynamics can be neglected or overlooked in practice. As the father is considered the second object in the infant's life after the mother (Klein, 1975) his important contribution may be overlooked. In my own work, I realised I missed an important part of Liz's dynamic (Chapter 4). It is in hindsight that I recognise that in the absence of her father's support for her mother, as described by Winnicott (1960), Liz became the 'father' in her family. A sensitive

child, it is likely that Liz would have sensed her mother needed the support of a strong and masculine presence (Forrest, 1966) and compensated for this loss by becoming the 'father'. The loss of aspects of Liz's childhood spontaneity due to having to take on the responsibilities of a 'father' has been brought to consciousness in therapy to be grieved, repaired and integrated.

### *Complex dynamics*

The pre-Oedipal father dynamics' may manifest in many areas of a client's life. The father has an actual and an intrapsychic relationship with the infant, which contributes to the infant's emotional development in many areas. Consequently, the issues and symptoms that clients' bring may range from the subtle to the obvious and sometimes complex as seen with my client Liz. An understanding of the pre-Oedipal father assisted me in recognising the complexity of Liz's dynamics concerning her internalised parental couple. Liz had internalised a parental couple, but there was a split in her internal father that consisted of her own father whom she had blocked and her mother's internal father whom Liz had internalised. Knowledge of these dynamics allowed me to recognise the various layers of her internalised father and how they manifested in therapy.

### *Transference/countertransference.*

Knowledge of pre-Oedipal father dynamics can assist therapists' use of the transference/countertransference. The pre-Oedipal period includes the pre-verbal stage, therefore many clients who have experienced a deficit during this period may present with material they may be unable to cognitively recall or articulate. It is through relying on the transference/counter-transference that the therapist will be able to recognise whether the feelings that are being experienced in session belong to this period. This was illustrated with my client Jen (Chapter 3), where her clingy, whiney quality and infantile dependency reminded me of an infant. When clients are regressed in the pre-Oedipal stage they are very vulnerable and may want to be physically held. The issue of physically holding a client in therapy deserves more attention but is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

### *The therapist's pre-Oedipal father*

As both the therapist and the client bring their 'fathers' into the therapeutic relationship, knowledge of the pre-Oedipal father will assist therapists in becoming aware of the influence of their own father. I argue that it is important for the therapist to recognise how these dynamics may manifest in the therapeutic relationship.

While the challenge is to apply the findings regarding the 'good enough' pre-Oedipal father in practice, I am mindful of the parallel between the 'good enough' father and the 'good enough' therapist, in that it is not just the qualities or role of the father and the therapist, but the relationship with all of its complexities that facilitates emotional development.

### ***Limitations of study***

As with all studies, this literature review has limitations and consequently weaknesses. The literature on fathers is extensive and is one reason why this review is limited to psychoanalytic literature. However, this means that the review does not include valuable perspectives, insight and clinical data from other fields. Furthermore, the high reliance on the PEP database and ranking function for the selection of data may be problematic as this may miss some important papers. The *ad hoc* extensions made to this search could be criticised especially those sourced from internet searches because the sources of the quotes obtained in this way were sometimes not identified, although these have been limited to psychoanalytic literature, and others were sourced from reference lists of the search results from PEP and other relevant psychoanalytic literature.

The restriction to papers published in English implies a Eurocentric bias. This has implications in that the makeup of the Western family consists of the parent/s and child/ren rather than the extended family found in the pre-Industrial period and in various parts of the world that exists today. I am mindful of the limitations of the literature in that it may not capture the possible differences in the father's role where the makeup of the family is different to contemporary Western families.

Because of the imprecise usage of the term "infancy" in the literature I am mindful of what has been missed or glossed over by searching on this term.

In keeping within the bounds of the word limit, I have had to omit some areas of interest such as the impact of sickness, disability, adoption and trauma. These and

other areas such as possible pathology may have added valuable insights and would make interesting dissertation topics within themselves.

Finally, I am aware that my interest in the topic of fathers arises from my personal values, history, clinical observations and subsequent curiosity about fathers. This in itself brings a possible bias such as favouring fathers positively.

### ***Future directions***

As previously noted the literature on fathers is extensive. However, through undertaking this review, I am aware there is room for further research in several areas. In particular, there appears to be a gap in the literature on fathers and daughters compared to a reasonable amount of literature on fathers and sons. This is relevant because of the high number of homes where the father is missing and the possible effects of an absent father on his daughter.

The areas of possible pathology such as sexual deviancy and paedophilia, which may be associated with 'insufficient' or 'not good enough' fathering are a significant discovery that deserves further attention. This is important (not only for psychoanalysis) in areas such as early childcare and for schools, prisons, social service agencies and other services relating to children. Research in these areas could contribute to both prevention and rehabilitation.

The practice of psychotherapy is based on the relationship between the therapist and the client. Therefore, research on therapists and their fathers, and how this relationship affects the therapeutic relationship is an area that would benefit from further research.

### ***Summary***

The primary concern of this dissertation is to examine the contribution of the pre-Oedipal father in the child's emotional development according to the understanding of psychoanalytic theorists. The literature has been organised primarily chronologically beginning with Freud through to the present time and secondly thematically.

Several themes emerged regarding the role of the pre-Oedipal father and have remained consistent throughout the reviewed literature. These are: the father as an internal object (the intrapsychic father); the father's relationship with the mother and the father assisting the infant to separate from the mother.

Many psychoanalytic ideas about fathers have their origins in Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex, a stage of development that Freud believed to be significant for both sexes. Many writers make reference to this period when discussing the pre-Oedipal father. While mindful of the theoretical differences of each writer's diversity and acknowledging the many layers of understanding that have been added to the body of theory, I argue that what has been described (in all its complexity) are the qualities and functions of the 'good enough' pre-Oedipal father. It has been noted that the 'good enough father' does not have to be perfect to be 'good enough'. Also that many variables such as the contributions of the infant, the mother and others in the infant's life may affect the quality of fathering provided for the infant. In some instances, the father may become the primary or an alternative attachment figure.

Under optimal conditions, the actual father provides both a real relationship and contributes to the development of the infant's internalised father. The father in his very essence is different to the mother and the infant is aware of these differences. However, in the absence of the actual father, an internal father can still exist and dependent on the contributions made by the mother, the mother's internalised father and others in the infant's life. Likewise, the importance of the parental couple existing in the minds of both parents that is available to be internalised by the infant has been discussed. There is evidence that when the parental couple is either absent or impaired in the mind of the infant, that it can affect social and cognitive development and even lead to pathology.

While feminist psychoanalysts agree on the importance of the father's role, they disagree that the father is the only one who can represent power and independence and argue that this is due to society's construction of gender roles. It has been noted that feminist psychoanalysts' focus on female development has contributed to a deeper understanding of the father-infant relationship for both sexes, particularly in the area of gender identity.

### ***Conclusion***

This dissertation has traced psychoanalysis' gradual appreciation of the role of the pre-Oedipal father from the early works of Freud to more contemporary notions of the father-child relationship and feminist psychoanalysts. The complex dynamics of the role of the mother and 'parental couple' in relation to the role of the father and the many variables that may affect the quality of fathering provided for the

infant have been explored. Furthermore, the absence of ‘good enough fathering’ and its possible consequences and implications has been discussed.

While mindful of the complexities of the role of the ‘father’, and differing theoretical perspectives in the reviewed literature, I argue that the ‘good enough’ pre-Oedipal father plays a pivotal role in the infant’s emotional development. Knowledge of these earlier parts of our clients that have their origins in the important and often neglected pre-Oedipal father relationship will contribute significantly to many aspects of clinical practice.



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