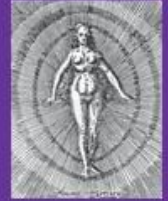


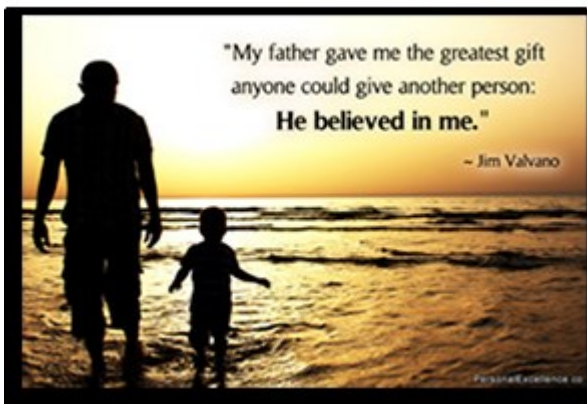
CHARLYNE GELT, PH.D.

Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



Father's Day . . . Father Hunger by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.

Fatherhood: filled with problems, worries, dilemmas, and joy. If you have ever wondered 'What is your role' as a father, you are not alone. Currently, a hunger for the masculine father figure exists in crisis proportion in the American family – a hunger for someone who presents as a steadfast, focused, goal-directed and compassionate guide for young males. Mature male guides are desperately needed to mold, influence, and function alongside the strength of an intelligent, nurturing, maternal figure. Men are most capable of awareness, expressiveness, emotional intimacy *and* productivity.



In celebration of Father's Day, your one day off is here! *Happy Father's Day!*

Identity is a Big Issue

For a man, the psychological significance of his work can hardly be overstated. Historically, men more often than women, were judged by what they do and what they provided, rather than who they were. Thus, work has served as a man's major source of identity, self-worth and self-esteem. Men and women have been led to believe that the successful man should be fiercely competitive, self-absorbed, uncaring and power-oriented. Women learned to honor and value, or use a man, for what he could

provide and those women who still live from that Myth of Dependency still look to men in terms of work productivity, measuring them by what they can offer in terms of their potential, of earning money and social status. This drive for power has driven some men into an elite corporate power structure and others, for whom this is an unattainable goal, into a sense of powerlessness in an ever-increasingly competitive, corporate global market. Marketing of products that appeal to the power-hungry male and the media's creation of a fanciful male mystique has only intensified men's insecurity, confusion and inner conflict.

Historical Role In an agricultural economy, each family member was an essential contributor and therefore cooperated in order to meet the family's survival needs. Family roles were clearly defined, one-room schools emphasized cooperative learning, and life and death may have depended upon a respectful balance between man and his natural environment. These factors, emphasized by rituals and celebrations, increased a sense of belonging to a family unit, (WE).

The industrial economy focused on achievement and production goals which were measured fiscally by comparison to the competition. With the onset of the industrial revolution, men left the home and farm to work in factories, bringing with it a transformation in men's traditional roles. Educational achievement, too, began to be determined by state guidelines rather than family, tribal or cultural needs. At this juncture, meeting the desires of the personal self (I) began to become more highly valued, more important, than the family unit (WE).

Driven by Desire Today, parents have become increasingly removed – both emotionally and physically – from their families due to the pressures of work, home, heavy mortgages, and in many cases, the conflicting demands of divorce, remarriage and step-parenting.

Although more couples must work to meet the family's basic needs, the crisis I speak of is about feeling pressured to attain "the wants", for external material gratification that lies outside the family system. This drive for monetary gain has led to the absence of the emotional presence of a father figure in the home. A lack of communication and coping skills to effectively deal with demanding, competitive and changing societal expectations has led to a deterioration of the strong male role model to serve as an influential guide, protector and provider for the family. There exists in the American family, an unmet hunger for the father who is emotionally available and can provide an important masculine role model alongside the strength of an intelligent, nurturing, devoted, maternal model. The father molds and influences a son through affection, direction, structure, and involvement or through his absence and disregard.

Wants vs. Needs

In our fast-paced technological society, wants and needs often get confused. The family gets caught up focusing on achievement and the acquisition of material goods which leaves fewer parents available to tend to the emotional needs of the developing family. The result in an erosion within the American family of a father figure who can offer that sense of mature masculine identity to his son. A primary need, to feel as though one belongs within the family, is being substituted with objects that offer little feedback to the child as to his/her value within the family. Without that sense of belonging, the emotionally hungry child becomes an immediate gratification junkie who grows into a pseudo-mature adult without a sense of his own identity. The divine, true self within is lost or drowned in a "sea of things," led astray by the pied piper god of material goods. Immature males who act-out their anger and hostility have found it "normal" to turn to gangs for a sense of family, and drugs and alcohol to fulfill an emotional hunger. As evidenced by the explosion of young males in the prison population, many young men feel powerless, lost, discouraged, confused and without identity. They have turned to alcohol to quench their fears of failure and powerlessness, to drugs to soothe their emptiness, to gangs to give them a sense of identity and family, and to suicide as a statement of their hopelessness.

Psychotherapy offers a unique service helping stressed out individuals and families create structure, redefine roles, and create a healthier balance. Emotional survival of the family in today's service-focused, rapid-access technological, global economy requires a balance, between self and family goals, between work and home environments, between the father's need to provide and compete in the work environment and the child's emotional hunger to experience the father as a strong presence, a guide. A balance of autonomy and belonging can walk hand in hand with the need to feel one's unique individuality.

Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D. received her doctorate from Pacifica Graduate Institute. She practices in Encino working with individuals, couples, families, and groups. She can be reached at 818.501.4123.