RELATIONAL FATHERING:
SONS LIBERATE DADS

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Fathers & sons participate in growth-fostering relationships.
Myson/Myself
In Relational Fathering connection & mutuality are central.
Power of Fatherhood

Fathering may open men up to “powerful & creative forces of connection which have been masked for years.” Bergman 1991
Power of Fatherhood

“Relational Fathering is truly transformational.”

Watson-Phillips 2006
Fathers (2005 – 2014)
Fathers
Fathers
Relational Competence

Intra-personal Skills:

Knowing Father’s Heart

- Self awareness
- Self empathy
- Relational authenticity
- Awareness of one’s interiority
Relational Competence
Inter-personal Skills:

* Touching Son’s Heart*

- Awareness of behavior’s impact on others
- Attunement to son’s interiority
- Relational awareness & empathy
- Continuity of relatedness
GROWTH-FOSTERING RELATIONSHIP

RELATIONAL COMPETENCIES

SELF-REVISION

CONNECTION

MUTUALITY

IMPACT

TRANSFORMATION

Relational Fathering ↔

Relational Fathering Model

Carol Watson-Phillips, PhD, revised 2015
Self-Revision

- Less egocentric
- Grounded
- Self confidence
- Self agency
- Self fulfillment
- Self care
Self-Revision:

A New Self-Definition

- Being part of something larger than oneself, in connection with another and the world.

- New definition of masculinity
Dean: *Caring* for people. *Being in a relationship defines* what it means to be a man. For me it is how well can I relate to my son. How well does he respond to me? I think that for me it’s more profound. *Being in relationship with my son defines my masculinity!*
GROWTH-FOSTERING RELATIONSHIP

RELATIONAL COMPETENCIES

CONNECTION + MUTUALITY → IMPACT

SELF-REVISION → TRANSFORMATION

Relational Fathering ↔

Relational Fathering Model

Carol Watson-Phillips, PhD, revised 2015
CORE RELATIONAL SELF

Our inborn capacity for relationship. Our tender inner being, authentic, relational self.
Josh: *I feel loved ‘just because.’*

Brian: *My sons don’t judge me.*

Rick: *My son adores me!*
Sons Invite Fathers

Sons, in inherent eagerness for connection, instinctively invite their fathers into relationship.
Sons Liberate Dads

- Emotional resonance
- Emotional freedom
- Psychological safety
- Reconnection of core selves
- Co-Identity with sons

Myson/Myself
Shawn: My relationship with my sons brings a level of joy. It just touches a whole different part of my being. To me it’s spiritual. It’s just pure love -- a basis for life & wanting to live.
Emotional Freedom

- Inhibition
- Evaluation
- Fear of evaluation
- Relational fear
- Shame around vulnerability or humiliation.
Psychological Safety

- Security
- Comfort
- Safety to be oneself
Core Relational Self

- Freedom to be themselves
- Be comfortable, silly, not worry about what anybody thinks
- Feel more themselves
- Become more authentic
Co-Identity with Sons

- Revisit childhood, re-identify & reunite with childhood Self

- **Myson/Myself**: Seeing himself in his son or son in self
Myson/Myself

Bob: *I think that being around Matthew is a big part of an awakening of a different model and different idea of being...through the real joy of loving and just accepting this little guy – in a certain sense I’m loving and accepting myself.*
Dan: What I find is that I'm actually reliving my own past through Jacob as we play, which allows me to feel like a child again. It's not just empathizing with him, but it's actually re-experiencing my own childhood. That's what I feel when we're playing together. I'm reliving what it was like for me when I was a kid.
Dan: *In some way he’s part of me. He’s come from me. Pretty affirming in that I ascribe those qualities to myself. It’s like I’m seeing the best parts of me in him.*
Dan: *Playing with Jacob seems like going back in time to this earlier part of myself. It allows me to be myself as he is himself.*
PING! Transformation allows for new experiences, perceptions, emotions and reflections. Phwet!
TRANSFORMATION

Bob: *I feel* it in that moment, a little twist on the inside a little *pop*. There's a little *phwet*. That phwet is the imagining myself in a different way. I learn love from him in that moment of just pure love. That’s what it is – just pure, unreserved love.
Bob: The heart and mind are synchronized. The little pop, that's the awakening. That's that ping that internal ping of like ‘Hey, I'm a different guy.’
IMPLICATIONS

Fathering can be seen as relationship rather than a role.
**IMPLICATIONS**

- Men can be seen as growing in connection.

- Connection is central to parenting practice.

- Fathers’ voices can enter into the larger discourse on parenting theory & practice.
IMPLICATIONS

- Relational fathers offer new models & cultural images.
- Notions of masculinity can & do shift.
- Nurturing can be viewed as legitimate male activity.
Power of Fatherhood

“The infant holds the father as much as the father holds the infant.”

Osherson 1986
Sons Liberate Dads

“The child is the father of the man.”

(Wordsworth, My Heart Leaps Up)