THE ROLE OF THE PARENTS

Charles A. Sarnoff MD

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Latency provides a pathway for an autoplastic response to frustration. This permits adjustments to stress independent of parental pressures. Parents, however, can use the structure of latency as a conduit into the child's mind for the transmission of their culture to the child. This brings parental expectations into the child's world view and contributes to his character. Therefore, the encouragement of latency should be a major priority for parents.

The direct role of the parents of latency-age children in their lives is limited by the essentially internal nature of the phenomena involved in the production of latency. The maturational factors that make a state of latency possible by the age of 6 have to do with maturational ego and cognitive changes. The areas in which the parents have influence during prelatency contribute to the strength and coloration of latency-age phenomena. Parents make indirect contributions in the form of developmental influences during prelatency. The restless, angry, shouting parent serves as a poor role model for the latency-bound youngster. Beatings, seductions, and excited behavior on the part of the parents shatter the state of latency. The drives are stirred beyond the capacity of the structure of latency to neutralize them. Conversely, the calm parent who takes an interest in his child and his child's education strengthens the state of latency. The parent who introduces hobbies and helps the child to collect pennies, baseball cards, pebbles, and the like strengthens the ego structures upon which the restraint and calm of latency depends. Encouraging the latency-age child to fantasy is relatively rare in fathers. The reading of bedtime stories and fairy tales is the most common type of such activity. Few parents reach the degree of involvement in stirring fantasy that characterized the father of Soren Kierkegaard, who responded to his child's request to go out by creating fantasy worlds in the house through which they both wandered.

The child acquires information about the world and his own relationship to society as guided by the family. The age of latency is sandwiched between early childhood (ages 1-5), when the child learns about what is expected from him in relation to his family, and adolescence (ages 13-19), when the child learns about what is expected from him in relation to society as defined by his peers.

In the latency age period, parents can define behavior and establish patterns of reaction that set the templates for adolescent drive-discharge patterns. For those adolescents in rebellion, the parental guidelines provide the armatures around which the person can reconstruct his identity in the years of maturity.

There is an introduction of parental imagoes after the age of 6, which augments the important introjects of early childhood. Patterns of speech, cognition, and memory organization mature during latency years under the tutelage of and in identification with the parents. Although the basic structure of the personality is laid down by the age of 5 years, it does not follow that experiences subsequent to that time have no effect. Parents continue to mold the child until he or she reaches adolescence, and even beyond.

One question must be continually confronted in dealing with the role of parents in latency development: Can the role of the mother really be differentiated from the role of the father? In this chapter I base my descriptions on family units in which there is a strong differentiation of parental roles. The father can be recognized because he is physically stronger, feels less obligation to take primary responsibility for the child when the mother is present, is home less than the mother, and is, in his daily work, more directly confronted with the economic and financial stresses of supporting the family. He is forced to interpret to the family reality limitations, and to be watchful for the intrinsic nature of things rather than take things on the face value of the words that represent them. This is the father's role; but there is no obligate connection between these tasks and the sexual biological assignment of the parent. Women have assumed this role as well as men, even though typically it is assigned to the father. When the mother assumes the role, it is possible that there will result sexual identity confusion in the children. In shaping the development of cognition, the father, by dint of the pressures of the pragmatic imperatives that confront him in the day-to-day process of earning a living, emphasizes the practical. He contributes heavily to the training of the child that involves the logical thought processes (i.e., magic, verbal conceptual memory, abstract conceptual memory), which are recognized by his particular society as the means for apprehending, interpreting, and recording truth. The classical mother lends greater weight to the transmission of tradition, while the father reinforces styles of cognition that mediate survival in new situations and in the market place. The distribution of these chores, so sharp in primitive societies, is blurred in ours. Either parent may contribute, but the weight of influence is the father's in any society in

which the male must meet the world and wrest a living from it.

One searches in vain for a biological basis (correlate and determinant) that places males in this position (of dominating the development of abstract conceptual modes of memory and thought). The opposite actually seems to be the case. "Females, on average, surpass males in several language skills, including articulation, comprehensibility, fluent production, use of verbal information in a learning task, and rapid production of symbolic codes or names" (Wittig and Petersen 1979). Yet, these are the very skills that are developed by the father in teaching the child how to think for his world. Evolutionary reason for woman's preeminence in word usage is offered by Mead (1958), who points out that delayed puberty, which evolved in mankind before language, shortened the childbearing period and thereby prolonged the woman's life. Man still hunted and died young. Woman was able to live long enough to develop and pass on to the progeny of the tribe patterns through which the evolution of new language skills could be guided (see Sarnoff 1976, pp. 355-357). Women, consigned by childbearing and their smaller physical stature to the hearth, became the guardians of the homely crafts and traditions, while men took up the bow and confronted the world beyond and its dangers. As society evolved into a structure woven about an organized market place, and the means of making a living shifted from wielding tools of strength to the manipulation of symbols and abstractions, the role of breadwinner did not shift to the better-equipped female, but remained with the male whose strength lay in physical power, size, and the more basic "superior performance on visuo-spatial tasks, mechanical and mathematical skills" (Wittig and Petersen 1979, p. 50). Thus, the female, who is better equipped to teach nimble feats of logic, is pushed aside. The father, whose true strengths are elsewhere, is forced to hone his cognition. The classical mother is not. Therefore, the father typically serves as the intermediary between the child and the real world "out there," and conveys to the child the styles of thought that the child will need to make his or her way.

The Father and Cognition in Latency

The cognitive progressions of latency-age children are many. Here we shall focus on thought patterns associated with the child's apprehending, understanding, and coding for memory of his experienced world. Awareness that the cognition of children differs from that of adults was reflected upon by Visgotsky [as quoted by Luria (1976)]: ". . . Visgotsky observed that although the young child

thinks by remembering, an adolescent remembers by thinking" (p. 11). Indeed, there are three levels of memory development that characterize the memory cognition of the latency-age child. At the earliest, the child remembers total experiences on a perceptual affectomotor level (affectomotor memory organization). With the development of the capacity for a state of latency, words and verbal symbols move into the primary position as the carriers of memory (verbal conceptual memory organization). As the child moves into late latency, about the age of 9, the ability to recall through coding, in the form of awareness of the essentials of what has been perceived, provides the child with an exceptionally accurate, undistorted, and highly efficient means of storing data for later use in interpreting new experiences (abstract conceptual memory organization). There is no requirement that this skill be developed. In many societies it is inhibited by the nature of the educational processes (see "The Work of Latency" in Sarnoff 1976). The father of the latency-age child is an important source of the pressure to develop this type of memory organization in our society. Industrial society is organized through this memory organization (i.e., keying into the intrinsic nature of problems and situations so that they may be solved through the use of prior experiences with similar situations). Religious societies are organized around the verbal conceptual memory organization (i.e., resolution of problems through precedent and ritual, establishment of truth through revelation of the word of God).

One should be alert to the hazard of confusing memories that are conveyed in words with the type of memory organization involved. All three forms of memory operation can achieve recall through the processing into words of the data that one wishes to communicate to another person; only the verbal conceptual form codes awarenesses into words for retention in memory.

Psychotherapeutic Considerations: The Therapeutic Process as a Form of Parenting

This aforementioned differentiation is vital for the child therapist, who must at all times be cognizant of the memory modality that is being used by the child, as well as the potential of the child to use more mature ones. At times it is necessary, as a therapeutic maneuver, to bring the child to the most mature level in order to improve his ability to communicate, to function, and to use and retain the insights of child therapy.

There is a vicissitude set aside for the memories and motives of children that have been repressed

before they have found their way to a form in which they can be understood and confronted. These motives grow and develop unbridled by reflection, wisdom, or logic, all of which relate to the abstract conceptual memory organization. For the therapist to bring reflection, wisdom, and logic to bear on such motives it is necessary that they be transformed into characters of rhetoric. Only then, when the concepts can be processed into words, can the logical capacities of the mind of the child in therapy be focused on them. More than words is involved. Words help to make what is knowable transmissible. Without the cognitive metamorphosis that makes motivation knowable and then transmissible, child therapy is limited to a set of simultaneous monologues; and therapy is then no more than a battle between a disciplined battalion in search of a woodland victory and a disinterested band of spirits cavorting in the forest canopy above their heads. There is no real contact.

When the therapist helps the child to find the concept and the words to express it, the role of the therapist and the role of the classical father in regard to the latency-age child become similar. To this extent, the therapy of a latency-age child transcends the ordinary goals of adult therapy. Even the ordinary pedagogical aspects of child therapy are transcended. In effect, such teaching is akin to parenting. Fulfilling cognitive potentials in a child expands the child's social and occupational horizons, as would be the case if the child had other parents.

Shakespeare conveys this meaning well, in a speech made by Prospero to Caliban (*Tempest*, Act I, Scene 2, 353). Prospero, it will be remembered, has raised Caliban from a creature of beastlike sensibilities to the level of adult human awareness. In speaking of this feat, Prospero says:

> "[I] took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
>
> One thing or other: When thou didst not, savage,
>
> Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
>
> A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes
>
> With words that made them known . . . ."

The role of the parent goes beyond teaching the child words with which to name and remember. The parent can also help the child to find ways of understanding what he sees in terms of abstract reductions of the phenomena under study, so that knowledge of the very essence of events can be coded

into memory. From this grows a capacity to integrate and interpret new experiences in terms of their intrinsic nature. Past experience becomes the guide, and perceptions and interpretations based on verbal stereotyping are cast off. Because of his position in closer contact with the practical world beyond the family unit, to the father falls the greater share of the burden of transmitting and encouraging these memory skills. We have already noted differences in the roles of father and mother in this area.

Boy/Girl Differences

What are some of the factors that cause latency-age boys and girls to respond differently to training in memory through abstract coding? Boys tend to be more successful in this pursuit than girls. Why do girls lag? As Harris (1979) has pointed out, "Given their earlier and superior linguistic abilities, it is conceivable that females, more than males, tend to code visual-spatial information linguistically—and, consequently, less efficiently in many instances" (p. 52). Another factor is sex-role expectation. Boys are expected to perform better in mathematics and spatial areas, whereas girls are expected to excel in verbal skills. There is actually a pattern of results on aptitude tests that is called feminine patterning, "that is, a higher verbal than mathematics score" (Radin 1976, p. 244). Although sociocultural factors have been blamed for this difference, Harris (1979) suggests that an "exclusively sociocultural analysis of male mathematical superiority cannot stand" (p. 52). Indeed, it is a repeated finding that in the absence of the father, boys take on the feminine pattern in aptitude test scores. The boy whose father is absent experiences a lack of the parental influence and model for the identification that could encourage the fulfillment of potential, which in girls appears to be on the average not as great (Harris 1979).

Father/Mother Differences

Tolerance of ambiguity is more tolerable in the keeping of a home than it is in the world of business, where tolerance of ambiguity brings disaster. The classical father brings to the approach to new experiences a background of intolerance to ambiguity. The child who identifies with such a father has a strengthened approach to fresh and new problems. Absence of this demand for stringency in approach can lead to inexact interpretation of events and a willingness to let words and slogans influence the interpretations of events. The capacity for tolerating ambiguity, according to Radin (1976), "may well hinder the ability to solve complex problems; jumping to a solution before examining all aspects of a

problem should surely reduce the child's problem-solving competence" (p. 247). The girl who identifies with her mother (the "classical mother") would then bring less stringent demands to later tasks.

The following case illustrates that parental biological sex assignment is less important in this regard than the parent's actual experience and social-role assignment.

> Jimmy was 4 years old when his father lost his eyesight. Unable to deal with this sudden loss of function, the father, at age 35, withdrew from any attempt at gainful employment and took over the care of the house and the cooking, while his wife, who had been a lawyer, returned to work. The mother, who had been passive and dependent, looking to her husband to guide her steps even in matters as simple as voting, was thrust into the position of breadwinner. At first, she found herself taken advantage of in the business world, and even the object of a swindle which reduced the family's meager resources to the point of bankruptcy. The family home was lost and the children (there was one brother, aged 8) placed briefly in a normal child-caring institution. Jimmy's mother learned quickly. She stopped taking people at face value and turned from using intuition to applying reasoned-out principles based upon past experiences to solve the problems of livelihood that confronted her. Her professional skills improved. Her husband, in the meantime, carried on the household chores, protected from the pressures of the outside world. In analysis, Jimmy gave clear indication that his identification was with his mother. Problems of sexual identity loomed strongly in his analytic work. His mother's role as the "classical latency father" transmitted to him the basis for a cognition that greeted the world with little room for ambiguity in the way he classified new information, and little in the way of vagueness in his later recall of the event.

The influence of a single parent who emphasized word meaning over abstract concept implications is to be seen in the following case.

> Frank's father had deserted the family when Frank was 3. Without a father in the house, the child had identified with the high tolerance for ambiguity that characterized his mother's approach to the evaluation of issues and situations. The mother returned with the child to live with her parents. Although she held a part-time, noncompetitive job, her main source of support was her father. At the time Frank was seen, his grandfather was living in Florida, as he had been for a number of years. His mother had recently remarried. For eight years he had been a one-parent child. His own father was scarcely visible, contributing only minimally to his support. The boy was quite rejecting of his mother's new husband. In essence, his position of primacy in the household had been usurped. He was consciously resentful and took pains to disobey, provoke, and keep distance from his "new father." When the time came to go to camp, he expected to be sent by the new father, who was expected to provide the money for something that was the "right of every boy" who lived in the affluent community into which they had moved. He did not feel that he needed to be polite or thankful. He held these views as a matter of course, and without conflict. The fact that his real relationship with this man, which had all the intrinsic characteristics that pointed toward a situation in which there were no ties and nothing owed by him or to him, could not support such a demand was beyond him. He proclaimed his right "de jure" and complained bitterly of mistreatment when his new father requested some sign of gratitude.

An example of the transmission of ambiguity tolerance from parent to child is revealed in the following interchange:

Q: (Therapist) What will you do for Thanksgiving?

A: Have dinner. People come to the house.

Q: Who is coming for Thanksgiving?

A: Company.

Q: Who?

A: I don't know.

Q: Doesn't your mother tell you?

A: When I asked, she said, "You'll see when they come."

"The literature on cognitive style tends to support the view that boys' approach to problem solving is influenced by their relationship with their fathers. . . . The link between fathers' behavior and girls' cognitive competence (is) negligible. Girls tend to establish a cognition in identification with their mothers." (Radin 1976, p. 249). The father who responds to his daughter according to sex stereotypes (treating her in a fashion that elicits a traditionally "feminine" reaction) may reinforce this and retard her intellectual and academic development. If, however, the father sets up a relationship in which the girl can model her intellectual efforts and achievement motivation after the abstract conceptual pattern, the father can heighten abstract memory skills in his daughter. Too much paternal warmth may interfere with such development in a late-latency-age girl whose oedipal strivings must be counteracted by withdrawal from the father.

The Contribution of the Parents to Self-Image

The image of the self and the self-esteem that is derived from it undergo a remarkable vicissitude with the onset of the latency age period. Before 5 years of age, self-esteem was associated to an important degree, but not exclusively, with the attitude of the parent to the child. This can produce a precarious situation, for the depressed or uncaring parent may not pay attention to the child. Such neglect may leave the child feeling unworthy in spite of great competence. Parental love supports self-esteem; and, in turn, parental love is encouraged by behavior on the part of the child that demonstrates the child's ability to conform to the parent's demands in the behavioral sphere. After the age of 6, although this pattern

persists and continues to contribute to the self-image, an important overlay is added: a portion of the child's self-esteem begins to be derived from the attitudes of society. At first this is constituted by those areas that are preferred by the parents. Later, the influence and values of the teacher are felt. By the end of the latency years, peer pressure begins to define the skills and behaviors by which self-worth is judged. At the onset of the latency years, the large world begins to define self-esteem, making the attitudes of the parent to the child less important and, at times, least important. One thing, however, is certain: parental expectations encourage this change, as does the child's desire to avoid passivity at the hands of the parents.

When the child begins to go to school, leaving home in the morning just as fathers ordinarily do, he leaves the world of the mother and begins to explore the outside world. The behavior and the symbols that indicate success in this new world (if they are not too ambiguous) become elements to strive for. In addition, the ability to succeed in these pursuits becomes a measure of one's worth. Here is the key to the role of the father in the self-esteem and self-image of the child. The child uses the symbols of success in society as tools to overcome the sense of humiliation felt by small children thrust into a world populated and, in large measure, controlled by grownups. The child invokes the parents' big cars, physical strength, large size, athletic ability, clothing in style to demonstrate his competence and shore up his self-esteem vis-a-vis his peers. At times these are private thoughts; sometimes they are loudly espoused, as in the song duels of the Eskimos (see Hoebel 1954).

An example of a "word" duel follows.

> Three children stood on opposite sidewalks. A girl and boy of 8 years stood to the north. A boy of 7 stood alone on the south side of the street; the 8-year-old boy was the target of his abuse. The girl cheered on the 8-year-old boy; her approval was obviously precious to him. "You don't know nothing," screamed the 7-year-old. "I do so," yelled his adversary. "What's more," said he, "my Daddy is taller than your Daddy." Immediately, the 7-year-old rejoined with, "Well, my Daddy is a lot more richer than your Daddy." Humbled, the 8-year-old looked down, mumbled, and then, recovering his composure, brightened as he threw the ultimate barb, "My Daddy is fatter than your Daddy."

I once worked with a youngster whose father beat him. I expected to hear him tell of his latest tragic confrontation with the father the day after a particularly severe altercation. Instead, the child busied himself with reinforcement of his shattered self-esteem through identification with his father, who that very day had acquired a new car. A man of modest means, he had traded in his small car for a station

wagon to facilitate the transport of his family. It meant something else to his 6-year-old son, who proclaimed to all who would listen, "My father has the biggest car."

Dostoevsky, in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), tells the story of 9-year-old Ilusha, who has been exposed to a scene in which his father is humiliated and stripped of dignity. His father had been dragged from a tavern by the beard in the presence of the child and his classmates. The child rushed to his father's side and humiliated himself further by begging the assailant to release his father while kissing the hand of the attacker. The father later says

> ". . . at that moment in the square when he kissed his hand, at that moment my Ilusha had grasped all that justice means. That truth entered into him and crushed him forever, sir . . ."

The following days, the child was teased by the other boys. He engaged in rock throwing. He developed physical illness, depression, and intense fantasies of growing up to be, unlike his father, a competent fighter who would return to take revenge on his father's attacker.

If the father cannot provide tools in the form of valued culture elements identified with the father for use in bolstering self-esteem, lasting elements of lowered self-image are added to the child's character. The father's lacks must be truly severe, for most children use the ego mechanisms, the structure of latency, to set aside their humiliations through the evocation of the fantasied image of the father as someone who could have the accoutrements of manliness and power if only he wished. Many times, while working in a residence for homeless normal children, I was confronted with youngsters who pointed with pride to parents who had failed them completely.

> An 11-year-old boy was taken from the "home" to an impressive mansion near Long Island Sound. The walls of the great room that formed the center of the mansion reached far above his small frame. He looked about as the guide spoke with self-impressed bravado about the cost and effort that the man who first built the house had expended. She fell into shocked silence when he interrupted her to say, "My Daddy could a' had a house like this, but he didn't want it."

In the normal child-care setting we learned to delay visits to parents until the children were 14 years of age. It was then, we found, that the children's impressions of their parents' capacities were sufficiently realistic and sufficiently disengaged from the need to protect themselves from feelings of humiliation for their impressions to be useful in contributing to or responding to realistic future planning.

In early adolescence the child is big enough and physically mature enough to enter the adult world. Sexual expression with partners may become a reality. In addition, intuitive responses to situations are replaced, as the result of cognitive gains, with realistic interpretations of events. At this time, the moment of disenchantment occurs. Fortunately, it is at a time when overvaluation of the father is not needed. At the moment of disenchantment, with the *need* to overvalue the father set aside, overvaluation of the father is torn aside by improved cognition and realistic symbolic elements in symbol usage. The father is then seen in true perspective within the context of the world.

Children need to overvalue the father in order to deal with their own feelings of humiliation. This is an effective manifestation of the structure of latency. At times, events involving the father are so distinct and strong that the defense fails and is followed by rage in reaction to the uncovering of the humiliation defended against. Children exposed to chronic humiliation of this sort (exposure to failure of family function or finances below the community norm) are often left with a permanent depression and a sense of low self-worth.

Summary

In the arena of family interaction, the latency period is a time devoted to the acquisition of culture in areas that are parentally approved, though outside the home. In prelatency, the culture elements that characterize the home are emphasized. In adolescence, the door is opened for influences beyond the boundaries of the home and the inclinations and wishes of the parents. In latency there is a drop in the degree of influence of parent on child. Culture, language, and social attitudes begin to establish nuclei that consist of elements beyond the interests and preferences of the parents. Parental influence continues its dominion in the areas of self-esteem, superego content, and sexual identity. Parents have a special influence on certain areas of development during the latency years. Cognitive styles of perception and understanding and the organization of memory take root in parental preferences, precepts, and examples that are conveyed to the child during the latency years.