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Phenomenology of Mother-Son Psychological Boundary Violations

by

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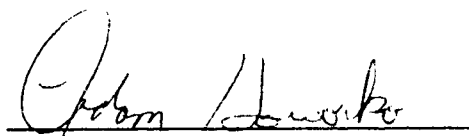
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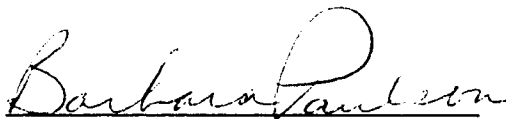
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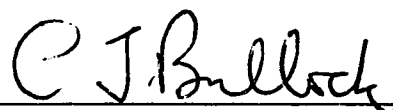
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in
Counselling Psychology.



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DEDICATION

Soli Deo Gloria!

ABSTRACT

A phenomenological investigation of male survivors of psychological boundary violation by their mothers was conducted. Six participants shared their experiences in structured, audiotaped interviews with the researcher. Subsequently, transcripts were analyzed to identify common and important themes from the narratives. The study revealed six emergent themes of lived experience among the research participants. Four themes common to all participants were: 1) Feeling used, 2) Ambivalence in relationship, 3) Feeling Vengeful/Anger, 4) Loss of Autonomy. Two other important themes were: 1) Feeling Alone, 2) Feeling Guilt and Shame. A higher order theme related to all themes was named Turbulent Emotional Conflict. Other issues related to psychological boundary violations were: men's difficulty in other relationships, difficulty articulating their feelings, accepting self-blame for the abuse, and reluctance to seek professional help. The themes were discussed using current literature. Suggestions for future research were offered.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

A parent-child boundary violation is likely to occur when a child is pressed into service by parents to meet their own needs without considering the well-being of the child. For example, a divorced mother asks her eight-year-old son to stay inside to do the housework while she gets herself ready for a date instead of letting him play outside with his friends. Another example of parent-child psychological boundary violations is when the parent conscripts the child to assume an adult role (Allen, 1993). In this case, the child would nurture and provide guidance for the parent, as the parent seeks emotional support from the child. Serving as a surrogate spouse would be another example where the child becomes a substitute for spousal intimacy (Bradshaw, 1992). The child's emotional resources serve to meet the needs of the emotionally starved parent. As a result these children do not have the emotional resources to meet their own needs.

The author's interpretation of psychological boundary violation entails a parent taking advantage of the child to meet their own needs irrespective of the child's needs. However, at this point a clear elucidation of men's psychological boundary violation has not been articulated thereby necessitating a study at this time.

Parent-child boundary violations are not well researched, especially in dealing with males. Studies in the area of parent psychological boundary violations are long overdue. Currently, there has been only one study conducted which describes adult daughters' memories of living through a childhood in which their psychological boundaries were violated by their mother (Herrewynen, 1994). This study examined the mother-son dyad. I chose to do this study to explore the experiences of adult sons in relation to their mothers. In my private practice I observed many mother-headed households with sons expected to assume a greater responsibility than was usually expected of a child. Also, older men reported their frustrations of growing up in a home situation with a poor relationship with their mothers. This piqued my curiosity to explore mother-son boundary violations as recalled by adult sons. It may be anticipated that men who have poorly functioning mother-son relationships are adversely influenced in their development, leaving them with deep emotional wounds and adversely affecting other personal relationships (Janus, Burgess, and McCormack, 1987; Kilgore, 1988). However, the intent of this research is not to test a hypothesis about the long-term effects of psychological boundary violations but to understand the son's experiences of the phenomena of psychological boundary violations.

In chapter two, a literature review encompassing healthy and unhealthy family characteristics, boundary formation, mothering styles, male sexual abuse, mother-son incest and literary portraits of mother-son boundary violations are presented.

Chapter three provides the philosophy of phenomenological research methodology exploring the experiences of mother-son psychological boundary violations.

In chapter four a description of the participants in terms of age, background and other relevant data is presented. Sample size and the criteria for participant selection is explained. As the human observer is the primary data gatherer in qualitative research, the researcher offers his own presuppositions about the phenomena under investigation. The researcher describes the interview process and how the data was collected. A systematic hierarchical thematic analysis of the data demonstrates common and important themes that emerged from the data of sons' experience of psychological boundary violations.

In chapter five, the results of the analysis of the individual and between participants is presented. A higher order theme is also presented.

Chapter six is the final chapter that will include a discussion of the results and past literature illuminates the major results of this study and their significance in relation to psychological boundary violations in the mother-son relationship. Any limitations of the study are discussed at this time. As the study concludes, ideas for future research are offered.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore mother-son psychological boundary violations as recalled by adult sons. Common and important themes describing the phenomena of mother-son psychological boundary violations were described.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

Preface to Literature Review

A literature review for a phenomenological study of mother-son psychological boundary violations was difficult because directly related research was sparse. Related areas of pertinent research were chosen to give a sufficient analysis of the phenomena being studied.

Importance of Family

Historically, people have needed each other in order to survive. The frailty of the human species was largely overcome in early history through cooperative efforts in orderly groups. In contemporary society, people largely rely upon technology to counteract the threats of the environment or other groups, but still need the emotional support of other people—especially the family—in order to survive as healthy human beings.

Numerous textbooks have tried to evaluate one of humankind's oldest and ever-changing institutions—the family. The following are a few basic assumptions about the function of the family. The family is the basic unit of human organization, although its strength and form vary greatly across cultures and time. Most descriptions are related to two-parent nuclear family systems, with less attention paid to the importance of ethnic or class differences among families, or to family variations (single parent or stepfamilies). However, if defined functionally, the family is essentially universal. Generally, many of us will spend a good part of our lives within a family unit. Another assumption is that "the fully functioning family can act as a buffer against mental and physical illness" (Cox, 1981, p. 14). It is important that the word "can" is emphasized. The family can do this if it is well integrated, fully-functioning, and successful. This is an ideal and one must realize that not all families will approach it. Yet ideals are important. They can give us direction and goals toward which to move.

The family becomes increasingly important to its individual members as social stability decreases and/or people feel more isolated and alienated. As families have become smaller and more isolated from societal supports because of industrialization and alienation processes, intimate relations within the family have become more intense, more emotional, and more fragile. For example, if a child has no other significant adults with whom to intimately interact besides his or her parents, then the emotional interaction with the parents becomes crucial to the child's development. If this interaction is positive and healthy then the child develops in a healthy manner. On the other hand, if it is not

and the child has no other source of intimate interaction, then the child could develop in an unhealthy manner. The family, in a sense, is a 'hot-house of intimacy and emotionality' because of the close interaction and intensity of relationships. It has potential to do either great good or great harm for its members. Since it can do the latter, it becomes even more important to understand how it can help its members towards health. As well we need to understand how unhealthy characteristics impact the development of the family.

Healthy Family Characteristics

Family scholar, Urie Bronfenbrenner, asserts: "The family is the most human, the most powerful, and by far the most economical system known for making and keeping human beings human" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 15).

The healthy family is characterized by having its members (1) feel comfortable about themselves, (2) feel good about other people, and (3) be able to meet the demands of life.

Healthy Families Feel Comfortable About Themselves

Healthy families are not overwhelmed by their own emotions—by fear, anger, love, jealousy, guilt, or worry. They take life's disappointments in their stride. They have a tolerant, easy-going attitude toward themselves as well as others; and they can laugh at themselves. They neither underestimate nor overestimate their abilities. They can accept their own shortcomings. They respect themselves and feel able to deal with most situations that come their way. They get satisfaction from simple everyday pleasures (Shorter, 1975; Ziglar, 1984).

This description recognizes that people's lives have negative aspects—fear, anger, guilt, worries, and disappointments. However, healthy families can cope with such negative aspects of life. They can accept failures without becoming too distraught or considering themselves failures. (Maslow 1968, 1971). And, what is more, they can laugh at themselves, which is something maladjusted people can seldom do.

Healthy Families Feel Good About Other People

Healthy families are able to give love and consider the interests of others. They have personal relationships that are satisfying and lasting. They expect to like and trust others, and take it for granted that others will like and trust them. They respect the many differences they find in people. They do not push people around, nor do they allow

themselves to be pushed around. They can feel part of a group. They feel a sense of responsibility to their neighbors and country (Evans, 1991; Ziglar, 1984).

Healthy Families Are Able To Meet The Demands Of Life

Healthy families do something about their problems as they arise. They accept responsibilities. They plan ahead and do not fear the future. They welcome new experiences and ideas and can adjust to changed circumstances. They use their natural capacities. They set realistic goals for themselves. They are able to think for themselves and make their own decisions. They put their best effort into what they do, and get satisfaction out of doing it (Evans, 1991; Ziglar, 1984).

Unhealthy Family Characteristics

There is a wealth of data linking family breakdown with poorer general health as well as decreased emotional and psychological stability in children and adults.

Karl Zinmeister, an adjunct scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, relates:

There is a mountain of scientific evidence showing that when families disintegrate, children often end up with intellectual, physical and emotional scars that persist for life.... We talk about the drug crisis, the education crisis, and the problem of teen pregnancy and juvenile crime. But all these ills trace back predominately to one source: broken families (Zinmeister, 1990, p. 53).

No single solution has ever been established that will be the panacea for the broken family. However, in dealing with any of the above "ills", a society or family must begin with communication if it hopes to restore itself.

Communication is ongoing in every family, either verbally or nonverbally. However, communication can be used for destructive purposes. For example, in a unhealthy family, yelling and name calling can erode the character of the recipient. Ignoring a family member over a disagreement is another style of communication that has damaging consequences.

"Inflexible systems" is another characteristic of an unhealthy family system (Nichols and Schwartz, 1991). In this type of family situation, some members can be "so rigid that it is virtually impossible to grow up in them [families] healthy and normal" (p. 531). For example, the rules may be so stringent that the tension they create stunts the development of its members. Bowen (1966) described this type of interpersonal boundary inflexibility as a tendency to be either too emotionally fused or undifferentiated

so that its members lack "a defense against a basic lack of psychological separateness" (p. 358). The separateness protects and enhances the integrity of individuals, subsystems, and families.

Within a family, boundaries differentiate subsystems (i.e., parent-child), and help define the separate subunits of the overall system. Minuchin (1974) contends that "such divisions must be sufficiently well defined to allow subsystem members to carry out their tasks without undue interference, while at the same time open enough to permit contact between members of the subsystem and others" (p. 55). Boundaries thus help safeguard each subsystem's autonomy while maintaining the interdependence of all of the family's subsystems.

Defining a Boundary

Katherine (1991) points out that "in a healthy family a child is helped to individuate, to develop a self-concept separate and unique from other family members" (p. 5). Healthy boundaries develop within healthy families. Katherine further states that "We come to see ourselves as clearly separate from others, yet not too distant, and if our boundaries are intact we have a sense of well-being. Healthy boundaries are flexible enough that (the person) can choose what to let in and what to keep out" (p. 8). What is suggested is that a healthy family allows its members to grow and differentiate from each other. Bradshaw (1990) has a similar view and asserts that "without strong boundaries one cannot know where they end and where others begin. Such a person has trouble saying no and knowing what they want" (p. 18). Herrewynen (1994) suggests that "a healthy family allows its members to set emotional and psychological boundaries around themselves and to say "no" to other members without threat of being abandoned or attacked" (p. 6). Minuchin (1974) says the "boundaries are the rules defining who participates in a subsystem, and how... [and] further argues that subsystem organization within a family provides valuable training in developing a sense of self" (p. 53). Minuchin would seem to suggest that a healthy family has a "sense of self" and does not expect members from one generation to fulfill duties that belong to another generation. It can be stated that a healthy family with clearly defined boundaries between the subsystems allows children to play like children, and allows the parent(s) to exert "executive authority" over family concerns. Thus the function of boundaries is to protect the differentiation and communication of the members of the family. Goldenberg and Goldenberg (1991) state that "in an ideal arrangement, the clarity enhances the family's overall well-being by providing support and easy access for communication and

negotiation between subsystems whenever needed, while simultaneously encouraging independence and the freedom to experiment by the members of the separate subsystems" (p. 170).

For proper family functioning, the boundaries of subsystems must be clear. Minuchin (1974) says:

They [boundaries] must be defined well enough to allow subsystem members to carry out their functions without undue interference, but they must allow contact between the members of the subsystem and others. The composition of subsystems organized around family functions is not nearly as significant as the clarity of subsystem boundaries. A parental subsystem that includes a grandmother or a parental child can function quite well, so long as lines of responsibility and authority are clearly drawn (p. 54).

In this type of well-functioning arrangement, a child can begin to make his or her own decisions concerning their own lives as they become more mature and parents can "let them go" as a natural part of the life cycle. Furthermore, the autonomy of members is not sacrificed, but at the same time the boundaries remain flexible enough so that care, support, and involvement are available as needed. Finally, as healthy relationships are developed one's identity is positively shaped.

Developmental Theories of Healthy Boundary Formation

This section will look at attachment, separation-individuation, second individuation process, and the feminist view of separation-individuation.

Attachment

The seminal work of John Bowlby (1980) on attachment theory describe the conditions necessary for the healthy development of a child to an adult. Attachment theory is described in relationship to boundary development as follows:

a) Attachment behavior is conceived as any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or retaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual. So long as the attachment figure remains accessible and responsive the behavior may consist of little more than checking by eye or ear on the whereabouts of the figure and exchanging occasional glances and greetings. In certain circumstances, however, following or clinging to the attachment figure may occur and also calling or crying, which are likely to elicit caregiving (p. 39).

- b) During the course of healthy development attachment behavior leads to the development of affectional bonds or attachments, initially between child and parent and later between adult and adult. The forms of behavior and the bonds to which they lead are present and active throughout the life cycle (p. 39).
- c) Many of the most intense emotions arise during the formation, the maintenance, the disruption and the renewal of attachment relationships. The formation of a bond is described as falling in love, maintaining a bond as loving someone, and losing a partner as grieving over someone (p. 40).
- d) Principal determinants of the pathway along which an individual's attachment behavior develops, and of the pattern in which it becomes organized, are the experiences he has with his attachment figures during his years of immaturity—infancy, childhood and adolescence (p. 41).

Since the goal of attachment behavior is to maintain an affectional bond, any situation that seems to be endangering the bond elicits action designed to preserve it; and the greater the danger of loss appears to be the more intense and varied are the actions elicited to prevent it.

Separation—Individuation

Mahler (1968) was the first to describe the concept of separation-individuation as the child's psychological separation from the symbiotic union with mother coupled with a growing awareness of becoming a separate person. Mahler conducted her studies with children in the first three years of their lives. Mahler describes an intrapsychic process which results in "the differentiation of the self from the symbiotic object" (p. 9). Mahler described symbiosis, a main development process, and four overlapping subphases of the separation-individuation process. The four subphases are: differentiation, practicing, rapprochement, and consolidation, where libidinal object constancy and a sense of individuality is gradually achieved.

Symbiosis

Symbiosis, the main developmental process, refers to an interdependence between the one- to five-month-old infant and his/her mother, a stage of preobject or need satisfying relationship, in which self and maternal intrapsychic representations have not yet been differentiated (Mahler, Pine, and Bergman, 1975). The mother's availability and

the infant's innate capacity to engage in the symbiotic relationship are essential at this point. This relationship marks the inception of ego organization by the establishment of intrapsychic connections on the infant's part between memory traces of gratification and the gestalt of the human face; there is a shift from inside the body, from the predominately visceral position of the autistic phase to the periphery, the sensory organs (Mahler et al., 1975). Here the world becomes increasingly cathected, especially in the person of the mother, the not yet clearly demarcated, bordered-off, and experienced self. The cathexis to the mother is the principal psychological achievement of the normal symbiotic phase. Cathexis in psychoanalytic terminology signifies a concentration of psychic energy upon some person or object. In other words, if an infant lacks physical stimulation, as is ordinarily accomplished by the mother's tender handling, then the result is a deficiency of peripheral cathexes. The significance of the mother's care in producing the shift from predominantly "proprioceptive-enteroceptive cathexis toward sensoriperceptive cathexis of the periphery is a major step in development" (Mahler, 1968, p.11). Proprioceptive-enteroceptive cathexis is defined as the connecting of the inner sensations, experienced as tensions, to the musculature aspects of the body. These sensations are then discharged by coughing, spitting, vomiting, squirming, crying (Mahler et al., 1975). Sensoriperceptive cathexis is defined as the connecting to the periphery of the body, particularly the sensory organs—tactile, near-visual, auditory. This step generally takes place at the end of the first month. This helps the child connect with the external world. A sign that successful differentiation has occurred is when the infant's attachment towards the father increases gradually. But the most conspicuous "turning toward the father" occurs at the beginning of the *practicing* subphase, when he becomes the "other", the "different" parent.

Differentiation

The differentiation subphase, from five to nine months of age, occurs when total bodily dependence on the mother begins to decrease as the maturation of locomotor partial functions brings about the first tentative moving away from her. Mahler (1968) has described this process as "hatching" or the "other-than-mother" world (p. 16). Characteristic behaviors that make possible the demarcation of self from nonself are visual and tactile exploration of mother's face and body; pulling away from mother to scan the wider world and look at her; checking back from mother to others. Mahler et al., (1975) believes this "checking back to mother" period to be the "most important fairly regular sign of beginning somatopsychic differentiation. In fact it appears to be the important normal pattern of cognitive and emotional development" (p. 55). Pleasure in

emerging ego functions and the outside world is expressed in close proximity to mother. For example, the child finds out what belongs and what does not belong to mother's body—a brooch, the eye glasses, and so forth. The child begins to discriminate between mother and he or she that looks, feels, moves differently from or similarly to, mother. This is the period of time as suggested by Mahler et al., (1975) when there is a differentiation of a primitive, but distinct, sense of separateness or “development of the body image” (p. 52).

Practicing

The differentiation subphase is overlapped by the practicing subphase, from nine to fourteen months. It is a period in which the exploration of the environment, animate and inanimate, and the practicing of locomotor skills are highly invested with libidinal energy (Mahler et al., 1975). It may be useful to think of this subphase in two parts: (1) the early practicing phase; and (2) the practicing period proper. The early practicing phase is characterized by the toddler's earliest ability to move away from the mother, yet still holding on when the infant tries to right him or herself. The latter part of this phase is characterized by the ability of the toddler to be on its own while walking and the awareness of separateness and individuation is beginning to emerge.

Three developments contribute to the child's emerging awareness of separateness and individuation. These are body differentiation from the mother; the establishment of a specific bond with her; and the growth of new, more interesting objects, such as the father (Mahler et al., 1975).

In the early practicing period the mother is still a source of interest for the toddler but inanimate objects are becoming other sources of pleasure. The maturation of locomotor functions enhances this differentiation. Mahler et al., (1975) observed in her studies that with the maturation of the locomotor skills, children who had an intense but uncomfortable symbiotic relationship with their mothers in the infant stage had the greatest difficulty in separation and individuation. It would seem possible that this was connected at least in part with a simultaneous satisfactory disengagement process in the mothers. Those mothers who had been most anxious because they could not relieve their infant's distress during the symbiotic and differentiation phases were now greatly relieved when their children became less fragile and vulnerable and somewhat more independent. As a result these children became more relaxed and better able to use their mothers to find comfort and safety (Mahler et al., 1975).

By contrast, another mother-child interaction pattern during the early practicing period was observed by Mahler et al., (1975) where the children actively sought physical

closeness to the mother, but the mothers had difficulty relating to them during the process of active distancing. Mahler et al., (1975) learned that these mothers enjoyed the closeness of the symbiotic phase but once this phase was over, they would have liked their children to have “grown up” already. Interestingly, these children found it relatively difficult to grow up; they were unable to enjoy the beginning ability to distance and very actively demanded closeness (Mahler et al., 1975).

During the early practicing subphase, following the initial pull and push away from the mother to the outside world, Mahler et al., (1975) observed most of the children seemed to go through a brief period of increased separation anxiety. However, as the children became accustomed to distancing themselves, and yet remained connected to the mother through the modalities of hearing and seeing, they achieved a greater sense of independence that characterizes this part of the subphase.

The latter part of this subphase is the practicing subphase proper. Mahler et al., (1975) believes that the toddler is beginning its greatest development towards individuation because of the ability to walk freely and advancing cognitive maturation. Along with this growth in autonomous functions, the chief characteristic in this period is the child’s narcissistic investment in its own functions, including its body, as well as objects in the environment. It appears that separation and individuation is progressing as the child concentrates on practicing and mastering their own skills and autonomous (independent of other or mother) capacities (Mahler et al., 1975).

Rapprochement

The next subphase, rapprochement, from fourteen or fifteen to twenty-four months, is considered “the most vulnerable period within the separation-individuation process” (Mahler, 1968, p. 24). According to Mahler (1968) it is characterized by a rediscovery of mother, now a separate individual, and a returning to her after the initial venturing out in the practicing period. The toddler loves to share his/her experiences and possessions with mother, who is now more clearly perceived as separate and outside. The narcissistic inflation of the practicing subphase is slowly replaced by a growing realization of separateness and, with it, vulnerability (Mahler, 1968; Mahler et al., 1975). Adverse reactions to brief separation are common, and mother can no longer be easily substituted for, even by familiar adults. It often culminates in a more or less transient rapprochement crisis which is of great developmental significance. The rapprochement crisis occurs in all children, but with great intensity in some, during which the realization of separateness is acute. The toddler’s belief in his/her omnipotence is severely threatened and the environment is coerced as he/she tries to restore the status quo, which is impossible.

Ambivalence is often intense for the toddler as he/she wants to be united with, and at the same time separate from, the mother. Temper tantrums, whining, sad moods, and intense separation reactions are at their height (Mahler et al., 1975).

Consolidation of Individuality

It is during the final subphase, the consolidation of individuality and object constancy, (from twenty-four to thirty-six months), that the child first learns to be separate in the presence of the mother. During this period, a degree of object constancy is achieved, and the separation of self and object representations is sufficiently established. Mother is clearly perceived as a separate person in the outside world, and at the same time has an existence in the internal representational world of the child (Mahler et al., 1975).

In summary, Mahler (1968) and her co-workers (Mahler et al., 1975) discovered in their studies that the mother's libidinal interest in the child is essential for the optimal unfolding and synthesis of ego structure; it provides support for the gradual attainment of autonomy. This psychoanalytical theory of development has provided a perspective on mother-child relations, and the theories that follow will shed more light on the topic.

Second Individuation Process

In the last two sections Bowlby and Mahler say that the toddler by three years of age has begun a process of individuation or differentiation. As we will see that this early process does not end but continues on into adolescence. The individuation process refers to:

a complex process by which a person becomes increasingly differentiated from a past or present relational context. This process encompasses a multitude of intrapsychic and interpersonal changes that share a common direction.

Individuation involves the subtle but crucial phenomenological shifts by which a person comes to see him/herself as separate and distinct within the relational context in which s/he is embedded (Mazor and Enright, 1988, p. 29).

The individuation process proceeds through progressive changes of psychological separation from one's parents. Two main components are involved in this process: (1) an increasing differentiation of an individual's behavior, feelings, judgment and thoughts from those of their parents; and (2) changes in the parent-child relationship towards a

growing co-operation, equality and mutuality, as the child becomes an autonomous person within the family context (Mazor and Enright, 1988).

Moreover, children under fair conditions would have begun the process of realizing that they are different from others such as parents and objects. If the parents encourage this process, then successful differentiation will occur. However, when parents truncate this process and do not allow their youngsters to seek out their autonomy, they have in all probability created their first boundary violations.

Middle childhood (6 to 12 years) was once considered by some to be an uneventful phase of development. Freud went so far as to label this stage of development as a latency period. Others have challenged this notion and have declared that middle childhood "is not an uneventful time" (Sroufe, Cooper and DeHart, 1992, p. 438). Yet, the literature is still unclear in indicating if individuation is occurring or not in this phase of development. However, research has shown that this is a period of both social and emotional expansion (Erikson, 1963).

One researcher, however, described adolescence as the 'second individuation process' (Blos, 1967, 1979). As toddlers in the "first individuation process" innately seek separation from their parent(s), so adolescents begin again the process of individuation (Blos, 1979). Adolescence is a time of rapid change when physical, cognitive, and social development are closely related to each other. The budding adult begins to challenge the family values and ideals and begins a process of distancing themselves from their parent(s). This can be a conflictual time between adolescents and parents as peers play a more important role than parents on many levels (Sroufe, 1992). However, Blos (1967) views this as a normal process of individuation. Dobson (1987) has suggested that to get through this phase where adolescents will likely challenge the parents' authority is "to begin releasing your children during the preschool age, granting independence that is consistent with their age and maturity ... so that the final release in early adulthood is merely the final relaxation of authority" (p. 220). Blos (1967) believes that parents need to be strong in themselves to face their child's opposition and accept their child's striving for individuation.

Feminist View of Separation-Individuation

Much of the thought on the separation-individuation issue has been birthed and nurtured by psychodynamic theorizing and practice. Today there has been a paradigmatic shift in developmental theory that has brought about some transformations in historical thought. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explain the socio-historical

trends that have influenced the paradigm shift. In particular, ideas brought by feminist writers have shed new light on development processes.

Philipson (1993) offers an explanation that historical developmental theory needs to be changed because, “new empirical infancy research has brought forth new scientific discoveries that demand alterations...” (p. 113).

[She] believes that some of the infancy research challenges the notion that: infants begin life not as part of an undifferentiated symbiosis with the mother—a long-held mainstay of psychodynamic thinking—but primed to distinguish themselves from the world of others. Due to this discovery, separation and autonomy [individuation] do not become the only developmental tasks, as in traditional developmental schemas, but rather connection and interrelatedness—the ability to [relate] to rather than separate from—also become signs of growth and maturity (p. 113).

Moreover, the appeal of this relational model can be best examined through the comparison with the Freudian paradigm. Historically, in Freudian thought, the oedipal conflict with father and son took center stage. Feminists have challenged this view of human development and believe that females need “their own developmental narrative”. Feminists acknowledge the oedipal conflict of girls but reject the theoretical constructs that were inhospitable to women—penis envy, women’s less capacity for sublimation and hence work outside the home, female masochism, and so forth and replace:

Freud’s negative and derivative description of female psychology with a positive and direct account of their own: Girls emerge with a stronger basis for experiencing another’s needs or feelings as one’s own (or of thinking that one is so experiencing another’s needs and feelings). Furthermore, girls do not define themselves in terms of the denial of preoedipal relational modes to the same extent as boys. Therefore, regression to these modes tends not to feel as much a basic threat to their ego.... Consequently, relationships, and particularly issues of dependency, are experienced differently by women and men. For boys and men, separation and individuation are critically tied to gender identity since separation from the mother is essential for the development of masculinity. For girls and women, issues of femininity or feminine identity do not depend on the achievement of separation from the mother or on the progress of individuation....males tend to have difficulty with relationships, while females tend to have problems with individuation. (Gilligan, 1982, p. 8).

The role of mother in the relational model is now understood to take center stage in psychological development. What feminist theorists “tend to focus on is not conflict—between the individual and society, or instinctual wishes and superego constraints—but rather deficit and deprivation that result from infantile needs to which a mother inadequately responds (Philipson, 1993, p. 121). The focus is now on mothers who encourage their children’s separation and connectedness, and thereby help the child develop fully.

Feminist writers downplay the importance of the father’s role in childhood socialization (Nicolosi, 1991). However, not all theorists within psychodynamic developmental theory would agree that fathers can be removed from a triadic focus to a dyadic one. Even though evidence has shown that female-headed households are escalating (Marshall, 1992), and the absent father picture seems to be more commonplace, one cannot conclude that fathers can be excluded from the picture. Winnicott (1965), who talks about both parents’ influence on the infant, says: “there is no such thing as an infant.” Rather there is “mother, father, and infant, all three living together” (p. 43). The argument is strengthened by Nicolosi’s (1991) assertion of the father’s influence on mother-infant symbiosis:

One of father’s most significant tasks during his period is to protect the child against mother’s impulses to prolong the mother-infant symbiosis (Stoller, 1979). This intimacy between mother and son is so primal, complete, and exclusive that the father’s presence may have to be almost traumatic to disrupt it (Freud, 1910). Through this example, the father, demonstrates to the boy that it is possible to maintain an intimate but autonomous relationship with the mother. This triangular relationship of parents and son helps the boy clarify his separateness and his differentness from his mother (p. 28).

Therefore, one can conclude that the debate among the psychoanalytic theorists is far from being concluded. It would seem that ideally researchers need to look at the role of both parents within the family before any one parent is given exclusive domain in their influence on a child.

Styles of Mothering That May Contribute to Psychological Boundary Violations

During the course of one’s formative years it was noted that the quality of parent-child attachment will influence the child’s capacity for affectional bonds. The experiences a person has had with their attachment figures during the formative years

will be greatly influenced by the styles of mothering that a child has had. The styles of mothering will determine to what extent that separation-individuation has unsuccessfully or successfully occurred. As well, parenting and mothering styles that lead to past psychological boundary violations are examined. Such concepts as enmeshment, disengagement, controlling parenting, toxic mothering, male sexual abuse, and mother-son incest are presented.

Enmeshment

Enmeshment is a type of interaction in family environments where members may have too much closeness or “diffuse boundaries and overly rigid boundaries” (Minuchin, 1974, p. 54). For example, a mother may wish to always hold and cuddle their toddler at the expense of the toddler’s desire to explore the environment.

Minuchin (1974) states that in a “highly enmeshed subsystem of mother and children, for example, [which] can exclude [the] father....resulting in an undermining of the children’s independence” (p. 55). Some factors that may develop as a result of poor subsystem differentiation are lack of autonomous exploration and mastery of problems. This may result from the mother allowing her child to cling to her for “symbiotic comfort”. More specifically, Minuchin (1974) says that, “cognitive-affective skills are thereby inhibited” when the child is not allowed to safely explore its world without parental interference (p. 55).

Klein (1984) believes that mothers who are single or divorced or who are not being fulfilled in their lives may unconsciously want to keep their sons dependent on them. Klein (1984) observes in her research that this burden can be heavy for mothers but they “feel responsible for everything that has to do with their sons” (p. 12). Allen (1993) calls this highly enmeshed mother the “smothering mother.” This is the mother who relentlessly applies herself to the fulfillment of every need of her son. Because her son’s mental health is so vital to her personal self-esteem, a mother is often tempted to overstate her mission by tending to all his clothing needs, doing too much of his homework, eavesdropping on his phone conversations, inquiring into his personal mail, pampering his health, and commandeering his social life. In doing so, she has “overstepped the parent-child boundary, preventing him from having a sphere of his own” (Allen, 1993, p. 81).

Disengagement

At the other end of the continuum members of the disengaged family may function separately and autonomously and with little sense of family loyalty (Minuchin, 1974).

Communication in such families is strained and guarded and the family's supportive systems are limited. Minuchin (1974) says, "only a high level of stress can reverberate strongly enough to activate the family's supportive systems" (p. 55). Thus, the disengaged family may not respond when a response is necessary (Minuchin, 1974).

If parents are unavailable or rejecting of their children, shame is induced in children by the lacking of a relationship (Bradshaw, 1990). Kaufman (1980) suggests that a breaking of the interpersonal bridge is the basis of a shame-based identity. Allen (1993) describes the "abandoning mother" as one who disengages herself from her children because of other interests. If children's needs are ignored or attended to inconsistently, (i.e., Mom is too busy on the phone to notice) eventually the children can feel that they are bad because they needed something from the parent. They interpret not getting their needs met as that they are not worthy. Their identity is then formed around the myth of them being bad (Kaufman, 1980). "Mom would love me if I was lovable." Thus, it seems in disengaged families when dependency needs are neglected, the children lose a sense of family loyalty and develop a shame-based identity.

Controlling Mother

Children who are not encouraged to do, to try, to explore, to master, and to risk failure, often feel helpless and inadequate (Minuchin, 1974; Dobson, 1987; Coloroso, 1995). Overcontrolled by anxious, fearful parents, these children often become anxious and fearful themselves. This makes it difficult for them to mature. When they develop through adolescence and adulthood, many of them never outgrow the need for ongoing parental guidance and control. As a result, their parents continue to invade, manipulate, and frequently dominate their lives.

The fear of not being needed motivates many controlling parents to perpetuate a sense of powerlessness in their children. These parents have an unhealthy fear of the "empty nest syndrome," the inevitable sense of loss that all parents experience when their children finally leave home (Dobson, 1987). So much of the controlling parent's identity is tied up in the parental role that he or she feels betrayed and abandoned when the child becomes independent (Coloroso, 1995).

What makes a controlling mother so insidious is that the domination usually comes in the guise of concern. Phrases such as, "this is for your own good," "I'm only doing this for you," and, "only because I love you so much," all mean the same thing: "I'm doing this because I'm so afraid of losing you that I'm willing to make you miserable" (Forward, 1990, pp. 50-51).

Control usually involves intimidation and is frequently humiliating. Feelings and needs must be subordinated to those of the parents. One's opinion is worthless; needs and desires are irrelevant. The imbalance in power is tremendous and "shame is probable" (Bradshaw, 1990).

A type of controlling parent has been described by Allen (1993) as "the martyr mother." This type of mother leads her child to believe that she sacrificed everything for her child. She says "I've sacrificed everything I have so you can enjoy yourself and have nice things. But that's a mother's lot". Allen (1993) says:

[T]he son of Martyr Mother grows up feeling responsible for everyone around him but feeling incapable of meeting their needs. If something goes wrong at work or at home, he feels that he's to blame. He has difficulty accepting favors or gifts from loved ones because any show of affection makes him feel guilty. He's been trained to believe that all love comes with a price tag (p. 86).

Another type of controlling parent who can cause psychological boundary violations is "the critical mother" Allen (1993). This type of mother tends to criticize her son's character due to a lack of understanding of the inherent differences between boys and girls. Allen (1993) comments on these differences:

As a general rule, boys tend to be more physically active, more aggressive, and less cooperative than girls, and these behaviors can show up as early as age one. Later on boys are likely to spend less time playing with one friend and more time roaming the neighborhood in a pack. In adolescence they exhibit a higher level of sexual desire than girls. While we may never know to what degree these behaviors are influenced by gender conditioning, there appear to be some inborn differences between the sexes. A mother who is not aware of these differences may unwittingly expect her son to behave more like a girl (p. 90).

When these differences are not taken into consideration by a mother then she may treat her son in a way that could cause psychological boundary violations. For example, a boy's mother may criticize her once compliant son who now hangs out with his basketball buddies and treats them cordially, while she gets his negative attitude every time she yells at him to do something.

However, in some cases the critical mother does not just fail to understand the nature of little boys—she doesn't *like* the nature of little boys. For example, the critical mother may frequently ridicule him about his dirty room and tell him he is a slob, just like his father. Allen (1993) believes a son growing up with this type of parent, "feels

unsafe in his own home, partly because he was male” (p. 91). Klein’s (1984) research revealed that this type of mother experienced a patriarchal world and for any number of reasons is harboring a lot of resentment against men. Furthermore, she was also taught that girls don’t express anger but her repressed anger eventually finds itself being targeted, if not onto an adult male, then at least onto her son.

Toxic Mothering

We can anticipate that when the effects of the above three styles of parenting are very severe then a toxic mothering style may develop.

Forward (1990) “describes [mothers] who inflict ongoing trauma, abuse and denigration on their [sons], and in most cases continue to do so after the [sons] are grown, can aptly be described as toxic [mothers]” (p. 6). These unhealthy mothers are like a chemical toxin that has contaminated a child emotionally, physically, sexually or spiritually to such a degree that the effects become more apparent as the developmental life cycle unfolds. Bradshaw (1990) would suggest that toxic mothering will wound the inner child to such an extent, that if left unresolved, will result in a contaminated adult life.

Allen (1993) suggests “the hostile/abusive mother” is one of the most extreme of all the dysfunctional mother-types. He describes this mother as one who does more than “just shames her son; she torments him”(p. 92). She doesn’t just criticize her son and send him from the room; she lashes out at him with a belt. In some instances her violent behavior arises from physical or sexual abuse she suffered from a male figure in her life. The rage she feels against men is immense, and she takes it out on her helpless son (Allen, 1993).

Men Who Have Been Sexually Abused

Most of the empirical research that addresses male survivors of sexual abuse is clear that men proportionately abuse more often than women. However, some literature is unclear as to who is the abuser (Finkelhor et al., 1986; Sebold, 1987; Risen and Koss, 1987). In other literature, when it was stated that the abuser is a woman, there is again a lack of clarity as to who the women are in relation to the men (Mendel, 1993). Due to this lack of clarity, this section will be divided into two subsections. The first section addresses the prevalence and effects of sexual abuse on adult males when they were boys by adult males and by adult females (not their mothers). The less researched area of mother-son incest will follow.

Adult Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse By Adult Males and Adult Females

This section presents the prevalence of sexual abuse in the general population and then more specifically, the prevalence and effects of sexual abuse by adults (other than mothers) on male survivors.

One of the problems in evaluating the exact prevalence of male sexual abuse is the lack of consensus regarding the definition of sexual abuse. This complicates the comparability of the findings from one study to the next and makes it difficult to form conclusions concerning the prevalence rate of varying degrees of sexual abuse. As well, evaluating the impact of various types of male sexual abuse perpetrated by different people is unclear in the research findings.

The literature, which attempts to determine the number of people within the general population (prevalence) who have been sexually abused, reports varying rates between 3% and 31% for males and 6% and 62% for females (Finkelhor et al., 1986). Sebold (1987) suggests that 8% of the general population of boys have been sexually abused by adults, whereas; Risen and Koss (1987) report a similar figure of 7.3% of college-men in their self-report survey indicated that they have been sexually violated as boys. Swift (1987) reported in her survey of physician's reports of childhood sexual abuse cases that 33% of the boys in her clinical study were sexually abused. More recently, Mendel (1993) reports in his clinical sample of 124 male survivors of sexual abuse that there was a higher incidence of intrafamilial abuse on boys than reported in most studies. In Mendel's sample, "60 % of reported childhood sexual activity was with females, and 88% was with males. Seventy-seven percent reported sexual activity with a member of the immediate family and 67% with a non-blood relative" (p. 24).

There is considerable variance in the literature of the percentage of males who have been sexually abused. Moreover, there is a growing awakening that sexual abuse of boys is more prevalent than we have previously realized. Some of the following reasons may provide us with some insight as to why this sexual abuse is occurring.

Craig Allen (1990) has posed a question as to "Why has recognition of the sexual abuse of children by women developed so slowly?" (p. 108) A number of speculative proposals have been put forward in answering this question. Allen (1990) reports that:

Part of the answer is that it has seldomly been reported. But perhaps an even more important part of the answer is reflected in the unacceptability of such behavior, for few actions deviate as far from cultural norms and deep-seated beliefs as do those committed by female child sexual abusers (p. 109).

These same observations and beliefs may intertwine to produce barriers that prevent the recognition of mother-son incest that is covered in a later section.

Substantial evidence gathered from self-report studies in the last ten years indicates that abuse rates are differentially reported on who are the abusers of men (Condy, Templer, Brown, and Veaco, 1987; Faller, 1987; Allen, 1990). Most of the empirical research that is available uses self-report measures. Since men may be reluctant to acknowledge or report their sexual abuse, self-report measures may underestimate the prevalence of sexual abuse. On the other hand, self-report measures suffer from a response bias which might inflate the percentage of reported sexual abuse if the only respondents were victim's.

There are many reasons for the consistent underreporting of sexual abuse of boys. It seems that most abusers are men (Finkelhor et al., 1986), and some researchers claim that boys are less likely to report an incident because of what it may imply about their sexual identity. Boys may believe they may have been chosen on purpose by the abuser because of a particular personal trait and thus may blame themselves. Consequently, their "shame" leads them to keep the abuse secret (Mathews, Mathews, and Speltz, 1989; McCarty, 1986; Vander May, 1988). Older boys have reported perceiving themselves as having sexual problems and/or as being homosexual, and did not report a sexual abuse incident for that reason (Lew, 1990; Nasjleti, 1980).

As well, professional care givers fail to report male sexual abuse. One study found that even when the reporting of child abuse was legally required, and the care givers were aware of the law, they failed to report a significant amount of sexual abuse because the boys were abused by a parent (Kalichman, Craig and Follingstad, 1989).

We have learned a good deal about the effects of child sexual abuse from the many female victims who have courageously spoken out about their own victimization. Their anger toward the offender and the assault itself, when left untreated, is often carried into adulthood and adult relationships (Blanchard, 1987). Male victims experience somewhat similar reactions to their offenders (Thomas, 1989). However, professionals and the public in general react with disbelief or passive acceptance to the sexual abuse of boys by adult females (Nasjleti, 1980; Mendel, 1993). There exists a myth that seduction of the male child is a positive sexual experience for the boy. The sexual relationship between the adolescent boy and the wife of his basketball coach depicted in the movie "The Last Picture Show" speaks to American sexual fantasy. However, clinical observations of the effects of seduction of a male child by his mother, mother surrogate, or other significant adult female indicate different findings (Nasjleti, 1980).

Nasjleti (1980) reports five findings in her research that (1) Rapists are often found to have had sexual or sexualized relationships with their mothers; (2) Boys who have had sexual relationships with their mothers and develop mental disorders often become

schizophrenic; (3) Incestuous fathers are often found to have had sexually stimulating relationships with their mothers; (4) Some homosexuals are said to have chosen homosexuality as a defense against their sexual feelings for a seductive mother; (5) Sexuality for child molesters is not usually the primary fact involved in their molesting behavior. It is instead the arena in which psychosocial issues such as their own childhood seduction are played out (Thomas, 1989).

In short, seduction is detrimental to a boy's psychological development. The negative effects of such sexual experience are numerous, and most endanger the well-being of women and children, who become victims of men who, as boys, were sexually abused by men and/or women.

A recent clinical study (Mendel, 1993), surveyed 124 men who were currently in psychotherapy revealed fairly severe sexual abuse.

Seventy-seven percent of the sample were subjected to anal and oral intercourse and were forced to have sex with a women in childhood, while an additional 20% experienced genital contact and fondling that did not result in intercourse. Most of the respondents were abused by multiple perpetrators, with an average of 2.34 abusers reported. The average age of the respondents' earliest abuse experience was 5.5 years, with a mean duration of abuse of approximately six years. There was a higher incidence of female perpetration within this sample....Sixty percent of the sample reported childhood sexual activity with females, and 88% reported sexual interactions with males. Seventy-seven percent of the sample reported sexual interactions with a member of the immediate family (mother, father, and/or sibling) and 67% reported sexual activity with a non-relative. (p. 24)

Finkelhor and Browne (1985) concluded in their study of sexually abused women that four common responses emerged—stigmatization, betrayal, traumatic sexualization and powerlessness. In Mendel's (1993) all male clinical sample, his findings highly correlated with those proposed by Finkelhor and Browne (1985). The same four responses were also common to male survivors of sexual abuse in Mendel's (1993) sample. A brief summary of Mendel's and other researcher's findings about men is in order.

Stigmatization

Numerous respondents described feeling stigmatized as a result of their abuse. They felt that they were bad, worthless, different from those around them, unable to be

“one of the guys,” and so forth. Several men cited the lack of societal recognition of the sexual abuse of boys as an additional source of their stigmatization (Mendel, 1993).

Betrayal

Betrayal was a recurrent theme in the interviews. Like their female counterparts, male survivors struggle with issues of trust and closeness. Many ask variations of the question: How could someone who was supposed to love me and take care of me abuse me instead? This resulted in a sense that the affection had been contaminated by the abuse. Another issue frequently mentioned by participants in Mendel's (1993) study and commonly cited in the literature in female survivors (Finkelhor and Browne, 1985) is difficulty establishing and maintaining appropriate interpersonal boundaries. For example, several men discussed their tendencies to become immersed in or “engulfed by” relationships, once they allow themselves to become emotionally involved because they are unsure of interpersonal boundaries.

Traumatic Sexualization

Traumatic sexualization was prevalent in the lives of these sexually abused men. Traumatic sexualization meant for these men, anal and/or oral sex by a male abuser or vaginal intercourse and/or cunnilingus by a female abuser. One pattern of response to the abuse appears to be an atrophying of sexual drive. Two men had stated that their abuse had “ruined” sex for them. Conversely, others indicated that sex is the only way they know how to achieve human contact and to express warmth or affection (Mendel, 1993).

Powerlessness

Powerlessness was also a pervasive issue for the participants in Mendel's (1993) study. It appears that powerlessness had different meanings for men than women, due to the socialization of males as powerful and active beings. Virtually all of the men in Mendel's study reported difficulty integrating their sense of themselves as men with their childhood experiences of victimization. Their schemas of what it is to be male do not incorporate feelings of helplessness and passivity. One man put this most succinctly: “The abuse by my mom and by my brothers tells me that I'm not a man.” Another man described himself as being “less of a man” because he couldn't tell his mom that he “didn't want it anymore.”

Along with doubts about masculinity, childhood sexual abuse by an adult male abuser also appears to evoke confusion and insecurity regarding sexual orientation. Several of the respondents in Mendel's (1993) study indicated concerns about whether

the abuse signified that they were gay. This study, like several others (Bieber et al., 1962; Masters and Johnson, 1979; Finkelhor and Browne, 1985, Finkelhor, 1986; Olson, 1990; Nicolosi, 1991) before it, found a high incidence of homosexuality among a sample of sexually abused males by other males. It is important to recognize that the relationship between homosexual behavior and sexual abuse is not necessarily a causal one. Men who engage in same-sex behaviors are not necessarily gay, and gay males may be more vulnerable to a variety of victimization experiences including sexual abuse (Dimcock, 1988). For example, same-sex behaviors can occur in prison populations and these men would not consider themselves gay but are only acting out sexually for the lack of a female partner (Hoffman and Grenz, 1990).

In other areas of sexual adjustment, Dimcock (1988) reported a number of difficulties for men who have been sexually abused by adult males or adult females: sexual dysfunction, sexual preference conflict, sexual compulsiveness, and sexual fantasies or sexual attraction toward children. He reports other symptoms including difficulty dealing with anger, poor self-concept, isolation, depression, problems with substance abuse, conflict about sexual orientation, and difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships.

Other psychological or emotional difficulties have been associated with male sexual abuse. Some of these problems include: anxiety (Kilgore, 1988), emotional withdrawal (Pierce, 1987; Kilgore, 1988), dissociation from self (Kilgore, 1988), unhappiness, dissatisfaction, feelings of negative self-worth (Janus et al., 1987), increased suicide ideation (Dixon, Arnold, and Calestro, 1978), paranoia and phobias (Sebold, 1987), and increased use of drugs (Dixon et al., 1978).

It was not always clear in the literature when males are survivors of sexual abuse as to who was the abuser. However, as mentioned above, males reportedly abuse more males. When women are abusers, the relationship to the boy is not always stated clearly in the literature. The literature makes it clear that serious attention needs to be given to the effects of sexual abuse on the male victim. It seems that the work in disclosing the effects of sexual abuse on females has many similarities that are applicable to men and shows that when their boundaries have been violated, numerous effects occur thereafter. While the sexual abuse of males is now well documented and is more common than previously thought the literature lacks sufficient data on long-term effects for adult males sexually victimized during childhood. Nasjleti (1980) speculates as to why long-term effects for adult male victims is not well documented is that society does not permit males to express feelings of helplessness and vulnerability. The following section will examine incest by the mother on the adult male.

Adult Male Survivors of Mother-Son Incest

The literature is replete with an emphasis on father-daughter incest. The less researched area of mother-son incest needs to be examined. Despite the paucity of available research, however, some studies are available.

Studies of mother offenders are rare because of the assumption that the majority of child sexual abuse perpetrators are male (McCarty, 1986; Chasnoff, 1986). As Banning (1989) suggests, “until recently mother-child incest was considered to be virtually nonexistent” (p. 563). Documented cases of mother-son sexual abuse have been primarily relied on unsolicited accounts by adult male patients/clients who revealed their experiences during the course of group or individual therapy (Bear, 1988; Thomas, 1989; Cabe, 1990; Grubman-Black, 1990; Hunter, 1990).

Miller (1993) believes that boys who were once sexually abused themselves who have not been properly treated may in turn reenact their abuse onto women. Miller (1993) states that:

One feminist sociologist sent me the results of her study of youths serving prison terms for attacking and raping women on the street. As it transpired, the rape and debasement of anonymous women had nothing to do with sexuality, although these men are referred to as “sex offenders.” Rather, they were motivated by revenge for the helplessness and defenselessness that they themselves had once suffered—a reality they had subsequently repressed, and continued to repress, to the detriment of others. What became clear was that all these men had been sexually abused by their mothers in early childhood, by way of either direct sexual practices, the misuse of enemas, or both. Various perverse practices were used to keep the child in check without it having the slightest chance of defending itself (pp. 7-8).

The conclusion that mother-son incest is rare may be erroneous partly because of a failure to ask about it. No studies to date have surveyed nonclinical male populations on the incidence of mother-son sexual abuse and only one study (Krug, 1989), specifically asked a clinical population about possible sexual experiences with the mother. Since it has been determined that mother-son incest does occur then the effects need to be addressed to help the male incest victim who may be suffering in silence. It may be speculated that this type of intrafamilial abuse is more damaging than extrafamilial abuse because of the intimacy of the mother-son relationship (Mendel, 1993). Lew (1990) believes that incestual abuse by mothers can shatter a child’s self-esteem and leave him with unrealistic self-perceptions.

Some of the barriers to the recognition of the sexual abuse of sons by mothers may lead to distorted perceptions about the occurrence of such behavior and contribute to underreporting as noted above in regards to males being sexually abused in general (Finkelhor et al., 1986). Some researchers believe this is underreported because boys may not perceive their experiences as abuse but rather are socialized to believe this as a form of “sexual initiation” by their mothers is pleasurable to them (Fritz, Stoll, and Wagner, 1981; Johnson and Shrier, 1985; Nasijeti, 1980). Such a stereotype of boys enjoying the act of “sexual initiation” opposes the image of the vulnerable child victim and presents conflict for many men who were sexually abused by their mothers. Furthermore, in a society that appears to approve of early sexual contact for boys, the implications for mother-son sexual contact may be ignored (Johnson and Shrier, 1987; Kropp and Lackey, 1989). Thus mothers are less frequently suspected of sexual abuse and a psychological boundary violation may go unchallenged.

Serious attempts to gather data about mother child sexual abusers are just beginning. In the meantime, while controversies about mother child abuse are sorted out and facts obtained to replace fictions, more caution needs to be exercised with speculations about why, and under what conditions, are mothers sexually abusing their sons.

Conclusion

Psychological boundary violations around the serious issues of male sexual abuse and mother-son incest appear to have a tremendous impact on the victim’s well-being. Numerous negative effects to the sexually abused male have been reported. Although it was not reported in the literature as to the effects on men who were abused by their mothers, it is possible that they also are wounded as much, if not more, than by being abused by other adults. In the parent-child relationship, the mother has a unique role with her son, however, when she crosses a psychological boundary then the consequences can be speculated to be devastating due to the intimacy of the relationship.

The next section will depict stories from classical literature that are examples of mother-son psychological boundary violations.

Stories of Mother-Son Psychological Boundary Violations

Pittman (1990) claims “for decades, mother bashing was *de rigueur* in mental health circles” (p. 85). This thesis too will not dramatize the psychoanalytic myths about monster matriarchs who devour their children. Yet, case stories from the literature will be offered to illuminate psychological boundary violations experienced by sons. As adults, the men will disclose the path they took to bringing resolution to their mother's psychological boundary intrusion.

Iron John

Bly (1990) adapts a fairy tale based on the story "Iron John". In this tale a Wild Man is captured in a remote area of a forest and is held captive in the castle. The Wild Man according to Bly (1990) is a "deep male". When a man looks "deep" into himself and accepts what's dark inside of him then he suggests that this man will be closer to the Wild Man. In the story a boy has a choice as to whether he will free the Wild Man or not. This is a pivotal point in the story because the boy continues the conversation and says, "Even if I want to let you out, I couldn't, because I don't know where the key is" (Bly, 1990, p. 10). The Wild Man tells him that the key is under his mother's pillow. The pillow is interpreted to carry great significance. It represents the repository of the mother's expectations for her son. "She dreams: "my son the doctor." "my son the Jungian analyst." "my son the Wall Street genius." But very few mothers dream, "my son the Wild Man.'" (Bly, 1990, p. 11). It is implied that the mother "holds the key" to the boy's freedom. This may be interpreted that, she could be controlling, manipulative, or seductive. In any event a psychological boundary violations could occur if the "key" isn't handed over to the boy by the mother.

This tale illustrates the struggle for every boy who faces the decision to take the key to free the Wild Man within. However, this can only be accomplished if the son has experienced clear interpersonal boundaries in his formative years. The clearer the boundaries the greater the autonomy he would likely have. The result will likely be freedom from his mother to become who he was wants to be.

Sons and Lovers

In this classic autobiographical novel of mother-son love, D.H. Lawrence describes an intense and at times provocative story of a family whose members are trying to free themselves from each other and yet are "sickly" loyal to each other.

The stage is set in the opening chapter where Lawrence describes the Morel's marriage as one that knew the intensity of passionate love but soon faded into remorseful tolerance. The turning point came when the first child, William, was born. At this point Mrs. Morel was becoming disillusioned and hardened towards her husband and then she transferred her love to William, "His mother loved him passionately. He came just when her own bitterness of disillusion was hardest to bear; when her faith in life was shaken, and her soul felt dreary and lonely. She made much of the child, and the father was jealous" (p. 20).

The birth of the Morel's second son, Paul, was of mixed emotions to the couple. Mr. Morel didn't even arrive home to comfort his wife and instead, as was concluded by

Mrs. Morel, “had called for a drink, since it was raining. What did he care about the child or her” (p. 39). On the other hand, Mrs. Morel found consolation at the birth announcement, ‘A boy.’ Lawrence describes her thoughts “of being the mother of men was warming to her heart. She looked at her child.... Her love came up hot, in spite of everything. She had it in bed with her” (p. 40).

Lawrence now provides a younger Paul’s relationship to his mother. “Paul loved to sleep with his mother” (p. 80). “Mrs. Morel’s intimacy with her second son was more subtle and fine, perhaps not so passionate as with her eldest (p. 82). “So she talked to her son, almost as if she were thinking aloud to him, and he took it in as best he could, by sharing her trouble to lighten it. And in the end she shared almost everything with him without knowing” (p. 103). Mrs. Morel clung to Paul. He was quiet and not brilliant. But still he stuck to his painting, and still he stuck to his mother. Everything he did was for her. She waited for his coming home in the evening, and then she unburdened herself of all she had pondered, or of all that had occurred to during the day. He sat and listened with his earnestness. The two shared lives.

Yet when she died, Paul became the one who suffered the loss as if it was his beloved that had died and he “wanted everything to stand still, so that he could be with her again” (p. 463). Lawrence describes him oscillating between life and death. Paul chose life. His choice was to live dependently on his old girlfriend, Miriam: “He would leave himself to her. She was better and bigger than he. He would depend on her” (p. 466). However, the innocent, old-fashioned Miriam had something in her that Paul could not connect with—it was the residual longing in “his soul [that] could not leave her [mother], wherever she was. Now she was gone abroad in the nights, and he was with her still. They were together.... ‘Mother!’ he whimpered—‘mother!’ She was the only thing that held him up, himself, amid all this. And she was gone.... He wanted her to touch him, have him alongside with her” (p. 473).

From the few excerpts taken, we get examples of psychological boundary violations between mother and son. The mother, Mrs. Morel, has become emotionally distant to her husband. Her unmet needs were now obtained through her focus onto her two eldest sons. However, in the meeting of her needs for psychological, emotional, and physical closeness, she further alienated, first her husband, and eventually her oldest son, William. William obtained his freedom through scholastic success which eventually afforded him the opportunity to move away. In William’s disengagement from his mother, Mrs. Morel became somewhat hostile towards her son and the double messages bothered him.

The second son, Paul, did not meet with the same success in freeing himself of his enmeshed relationship with his mother. At the sacrifice of his girlfriends—which his

mother sabotaged unbeknown to Paul—Paul wanted to be with her, even after her death. It may be said that since Paul spent time in his mother's bed in his formative years, then he was longing to be comforted by her again after she was gone. The psychological boundary violations were much more pronounced with this second son. This was most evident in his longing to be with his mother after her death and I speculate that the early enmeshment in his formative years has brought him to the state he was in.

Chapter Three PHILOSOPHY OF METHOD

A researcher is faced with a variety of choices as to which method will be used in examining a topic of interest. In this chapter, two predominant approaches to research will be presented: the natural science method and the human science method. The researcher argues for the human science method as being most appropriate for answering the research question, “What are the experiential themes of mother-son psychological boundary violations as recalled by adult sons?” The phenomenological method—with its emphasis on getting as close to the prereflective experience as possible—seemed to be the most appropriate choice for exploring mother-son psychological boundary violations.

Natural Science Approach to Research

Natural science has been the mainstay of traditional psychological research. Prediction, control and explanation are the hallmarks of the scientific method. Three basic assumptions underlie this type of research: the phenomenon must be observable, measurable, and the results must have inter-observer consensus “to agree on its existence and characteristics” (Valle and King, 1978, p.4). The natural science researcher hopes to control the variables of the study by manipulating, modifying, or holding constant external influences while a limited set of outcome variables are measured (Patton, 1990). Furthermore, the experimenter attempts to fit the subject into a predetermined structure in a cooperative but unknowing way (Giorgi, 1975). According to Borg and Gall (1989), “the researcher’s values, interpretations, feelings, and musings have no place in the positivist’s view of natural scientific inquiry” (p. 17). Therefore, one can conclude that natural science highly values quantification, demands precision and control of the behavior of people, and does not attend to the experience of subjects. Moreover, the natural science approach strives for objectivity by insisting upon distance between themselves and the object to be researched. To attain this in practice when people are the ‘objects to be researched’ ignores the intrinsically social nature and human purposes of research (Patton, 1990).

Philosophy of Human Science

The psychology that studies the inward, subjective aspects of people’s experience is the human science approach. The human science method focuses on the individual’s experiential or phenomenal world. Human science psychology is intentional in its

selection of participants so that significant dialogues between the researcher and the participant can be obtained and analyzed.

Phenomenological Methodology

Phenomenological researchers are most interested in attending to people's consciousness and awareness in relation to a particular experience. Phenomenological research has its philosophical beginnings assigned to Edmund Husserl (Colaizzi, 1978). Husserl reasoned that, "if consciousness is our primordial window on the world, then an understanding of human knowledge would be best based upon an understanding of consciousness" (Osborne, 1990, p. 80). Husserl also described the idea of life-world, "the world as given in direct and immediate experience ... the world as lived by the person" (Valle and King, 1978, p. 9-10).

Phenomenological methodology attempts to investigate conscious experience directly through introspection rather than inferentially through overt observation, as does natural science (Osborne, unpublished). Exploration of the inner world of experience by phenomenology enables the researcher to capture that part of the human being that has been so long neglected due to the prevailing view that the study of psychology must follow natural science methodology. Phenomenology provides a method for investigating the lived-experience—the actuality of experience—as legitimate subject matter for a human psychology. Describing a person's experiences can help us understand their world.

In order to understand their world, the basic principles of phenomenology such as co-constitutionality and the idea of life-world guide the phenomenological researcher. Both are addressed below.

Co-Constitutionality

Luijpen (1969) said that, the world exists as a "brute reality". Therefore, as humans we cannot deny that our experiences are closed off inside the person, but occur in the world. To do so is absurd. This states nothing other than the phenomenological notion of "intentionality" by which is meant that human existence and the world constitute a unity so vital that either one is "absurd and inconceivable without the other" (Colaizzi, 1986). Therefore, since our existence is inextricably involved with the world, then the two co-exist by reciprocal implication, each co-constituting, rather than creating or causing the other (Valle and King, 1978). Phenomenology claims that, because there is no separation between person and world, to explore human consciousness is to explore the actual world-for-the-individual rather than the idea of "world" as a separate reality (Osborne,

unpublished). There is no world without a subject and no subject without a world (Luijpan and Koren, 1969). Person and world constitute an interdependent unity. An investigation into the personal experiences of people's psychological boundary violations is best studied using a methodology that can accommodate and keep intact the co-constitutionality of the participant and his world of meaning.

Life-world

The direct and prereflective lived experience of a person is referred to as the life-world of the person. Husserl (1970) would assert that this prereflective world of everyday experience was the domain of phenomena—"pure phenomena". To rediscover the life-world or basic phenomenal level of a person one needs to extract the layers of language and individual interpretation that may be obscuring the person's experience in its simplest form, thus remaining faithful to the person's co-constitutionality.

The Researcher as Instrument

The researcher in phenomenological research intends to get as close to the prereflective experience of the participants as possible. In doing so, the researcher can be seen as the instrument in drawing out recollections of the experience from the participant. Patton (1990, p.14) comments on the researcher as instrument in phenomenological research as follows: "Since as often as not the phenomenological inquirer is himself the instrument, changes resulting from fatigue, shifts in knowledge, and co-optation, as well as variations resulting from differences in training, skill, and experience among different "instruments," easily occur. But this loss in vigor is more than offset by the flexibility, insight, and ability to build on tacit knowledge that is peculiar province of the human instrument."

As the primary researcher, I will acknowledge my biases, knowledge of the phenomenon, immersion in the transcript, extrapolation of themes, and process of eliciting clients' experiences so that they may be more understandable and their influences more visible. In doing so the phenomenological approach will be adopted to express the issues of reliability, audibility, validity, empathic generalizability, and bracketing.

Reliability

As an approach to research that is still in the process of being clarified, the phenomenological method has no direct tests for reliability and validity (Patton, 1990).

However, when the practicing researcher is faced with providing sufficient reliability and validity, he or she must achieve rigor and trustworthiness throughout the study.

In natural science, reliability assumes that similar results will be obtained for the same participants at different times, irregardless if the same or other researchers replicate the original study. Reliability for phenomenological research is a matter of sameness of meaning across factual variability (Wertz, 1986). Osborne (1990) asserts that in phenomenological research, "different interviewers of different co-researchers [participants] produce situations which are never repeatable but which provide multiple perspectives which can lead to a unified description of a shared phenomenon" (p. 81 [emphasis mine]). Wertz (1986) has described the reliability of phenomenological research as a multiperspectival view of the phenomenon from which emerges sameness of meaning even though there may not be sameness of fact or context. Phenomenological researchers conducting a similar study, aspire to social consensus of similar meanings rather than a replication of facts (Wertz, 1984).

It is the researcher's goal to accurately gather, document, and code the participant's information in a consistent (reliable) manner to ensure reliability is achieved in qualitative research. In qualitative research, the one-time, unrepeatable interview is the method of inquiry and is therefore, not able to be duplicated from the quantitative perspective. The individual accounts from each participant will provide multiple perspectives of the phenomena under study and thus a more multidimensional view of the experiences and thoughts of the participants.

Auditability

When another researcher follows the original researcher's data analysis process and concurs with the results, reliability in the form of the criterion called "auditability" is said to have been established (Guba, 1978). As mentioned above, it appears that the qualitative method is not reliable according to the quantitative dictate of repeatability. The likelihood that such a study will be exactly replicated is small.

Other investigators who are auditing the study cannot be expected to reproduce the study unless the original researcher explains how the decisions were made at every step of the process. They could, however, review each decision and the consequent actions based upon the original researcher's knowledge at the point of that decision, verifying that substantive and methodologically sound choices were made. Such a review or audit would give substantial assurance that the phenomenon under study has been illuminated.

Validity

Validity in phenomenological research refers to the extent to which the life-world of the participant is described as truthfully and precisely as possible, and therefore the appropriateness with which inferences can be made on the basis of the participants' descriptions.

The clearly interpretive aspects of phenomenological research ultimately depend upon the arguments advanced by the researcher to establish validity. Therefore, validity of phenomenological analysis depends upon the adequacy of the researcher's rendering of the phenomena. Validity depends on the power of its presentation to convince the reader that its findings are an accurate description of the phenomena under investigation.

According to Polkinghorne (1981), the validity of phenomenological research concerns the question, "Does the general structural description provide an accurate portrait of the common features and structural connections that are manifest in the examples collected?" The issues to be addressed include:

1. Did the interviewer influence the contents of the subjects' descriptions in such a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the subjects' actual experience?
2. Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?
3. In the analysis of the transcriptions, were there conclusions other than those offered by the researcher that could have been derived? Has the researcher identified these alternatives and demonstrated why they are less probable than the one decided on?
4. Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experiences?
5. Is the structural description situation-specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations?

There are several types of validity in phenomenological research that can be determined in various ways, such as internal validity, validity checks, external validity, juridical validity, and empathic generalizability.

Internal Validity

The degree of isomorphism that exists between the study data and the phenomena to which they relate is an important factor in establishing the internal validity of a phenomenological inquiry. Speizman (n.d.) (in Guba, 1978, p. 62) suggests the following invalidating factors may be present in a phenomenological inquiry:

1. Distortions resulting from the researcher's presence during the interview. Such distortions include the induction of reactive responses in subjects and failure to provide sufficient opportunity for the researcher's preconceptions to be thoroughly challenged by the data he collects.
2. Distortions resulting from the researcher's involvement with his subjects. Failure to establish a minimum level of rapport, on the one hand, or "over-rapport," on the other, can militate against a successful inquiry.
3. Distortions resulting from bias on the part of the researchers or his subjects. Such distortions may arise from wrong first impressions, slavish adherence to hypotheses formed earlier, or role/status differentials. Subjects may introduce distortions for similar reasons, or simply out of a desire to be as helpful" as possible.
4. Distortions resulting from the manner in which data-gathering techniques are employed. Speizman suggests that careful recoding of data, continual scrutiny of data for internal and external consistency, cross-checking of inferences with selected interview material, and continual assessment of these distortions.

Issue of False Memory Syndrome

Whenever phenomenological research is conducted, one must take into account the unreliability of memory. Currently, there are two opposing camps amongst professionals: "those who insist that most memories are irretrievable; especially those that agree from early childhood or those who are older that may have had a serious traumatic event many years previously, versus those professionals who believe that their clients are indeed telling the truth" (Kent, 1996). The controversy is widely debated and is referred to as the False Memory Syndrome. One of the liveliest debates around False Memory Syndrome is the recollection or reconstructive process of child abuse accounts (Loftus, 1993; 1993; Sykes-Wylie, 1993). Critics argue that since memory is a reconstructive process, "there are many opportunities to bring in current influences which reinterpret/retell the history of an actual event. This reinterpretation may not be a conscious process. These critics argue that child abuse is a fad and therefore the current cultural trend to discover abuse in your past creates the opportunity for acceptance for many clients" (Kent, 1996).

Whether one believes distortion is possible or not, any form of qualitative research is a limitation when the data sought is based on a person's recollection of memory.

Validity Checks

Credibility in a qualitative study occurs when faithful descriptions of the subject's experience is preserved and that the people having that experience would identify it as their own. Guba and Lincoln (in Sandelowski, 1986) propose that credibility, rather than internal validity in the quantitative sense, be the criterion in which qualitative research be evaluated.

External Validity

External validity, in the qualitative sense is to illuminate the results for the purpose of transferability or "fittingness" (Sandelowski, 1986). Other researchers may judge whether or not the results can be transferred to fit other situations by analyzing the descriptions of the results made by the researcher. External validity cannot exist unless there is a reasonable level of internal validity (Guba, 1978). But there is also a sense in which internal validity can truncate or inhibit external validity. An overemphasis on a priori (e.g., foreunderstanding of the phenomenon) control of factors or conditions influencing the inquiry, which have been instituted precisely in the interest of achieving high internal validity, may seriously affect the external validity because the findings can then, at best, be said to be generalizable only to other, similarly controlled situations (Guba, 1978).

Juridical Validity

Juridical validity is the position the researcher argues for in interpreting the data. In the illumination of a specific phenomena, the researcher's interpretation must be verified by the participants in the study. When the researcher faces the scrutiny of the study participants then he must be prepared to defend the manner in which the results of the study were derived. This type of validity is called juridical validity (Salner, 1986).

Empathic Generalizability

Denzin (1971) indicates that "to the best of his ability the investigator must [accurately] offer evidence on the degree to which his samples of [the life-worlds of people] are representative of the... [phenomenon] he wishes to generalize to" (p. 175). When the phenomenon is so carefully described that someone who has shared that experience can read the research and identify with the general themes portrayed then empathic generalizability has occurred. If the term "generalization" is to have any meaning at all, it must be for particular audiences. It is up to each audience to determine what, if anything, the information means, and to determine for itself its applicability. In

other words, if the participants share a common description of their experience and are of diverse cultural backgrounds, then the more empathic generalizability that description has.

Bracketing

From the phenomenological perspective, the researcher attempts to suspend or to put into abeyance any preconceptions and presuppositions in order to understand a given phenomenon (Valle and King, 1978; Polkinghorne, 1989). It is this ongoing suspension of judgment that is crucial in phenomenological analysis and necessitates the setting aside the researcher's personal viewpoint in order to see the experience itself more clearly.

Following the suspension of judgment, the second step is phenomenological reduction. Reduction is a two step process: paraphrasing and labeling. First, the researcher must locate within the personal experience, or self-story, key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question and then interpret the meaning of these phrases, as an informed reader. This step is called paraphrasing. Secondly, the researcher must inspect these meanings for what they reveal about the essential, recurring features of the phenomenon being studied and then offer a label that captures the recurring features.

Chapter Four

METHODOLOGY

This chapter covers the following procedures: ethical considerations, participant selection, and the interview process. Additionally, the method for analysis of the data is outlined.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was established through the Ethics Committee of the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta.

Participant Selection

The sampling was deliberate in order to enlist participants who can illuminate their experience. Four criteria for participant selection in this study were used: First, the men had to be over eighteen years of age. Second, the men had to be living on their own and not living in the same city or town as their mothers for at least five years. Third, the men had to have received or currently be involved in psychotherapy. Finally, all the men were volunteers for the study and were referred by their therapists. No one therapist could refer more than one person.

Demographics of Participants

In total, six male participants were selected. The mean age was thirty-one years, range twenty-nine to thirty-six years. All participants were given pseudonyms (i.e., false names) to protect their identity and ensure confidentiality.

Interview Process

Data collection in this study was through in-depth interviews. Good rapport between the researcher and the participant occurred. This occurred by facilitating a climate that was minimally intrusive and allowed the individual's experience to present itself as spontaneously as possible. Each of the men participated in three one-on-one interviews.

Initial Interview

The first interview allowed the participants to become familiar with the researcher, the purpose of the research, and to ask any questions about the study. Confidentiality, informed consent, and the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time

without penalty were also explained. A consent form was then signed by each participant (see Appendix G). Each participant also received a letter that outlined the purpose of the study and provided guidelines to assist in preparing for the data gathering interview (see Appendix H).

Data Gathering Interview

The second interview involved gathering data about each person's lived-experience of the phenomenon. The interviews were conducted in a counselling room at the University of Alberta Education Clinic. The interviews were open-ended and minimally structured so as to avoid any questioning that may support my biases and direct the person's thoughts. I followed the conversational lead of the participant and asked for elaboration whenever necessary. The questions to be asked were guided by a prepared list of questions (Interview Guide), which dealt with aspects of the phenomenon that had not been addressed by the participants (see Appendix I). The interviews ranged from 1-2 hours and were audio-tape recorded with the permission of the participants and later transcribed by the researcher.

Validation Interview

The third interview involved a validity check by the participants to confirm the themes of the data. The participants were asked to review the personal and collective themes for fittingness and validity. Where discrepancies were noted, changes were made to better fit the participant's experience.

Data Analysis

The procedure of hierarchical thematic analysis was followed by analyzing the participant's verbal description of their memory of their experience of psychological boundary violations. The steps of the analytical process are as follows.

Schematic View of the Hierarchical Thematic Analysis

- **First Level of Individual Analysis:**

Interview Transcript → search for meaning units → paraphrase of meaning units → label assigned → first validity check with participants to ensure transcript was accurately transcribed.

- **Second Level of Individual Analysis:**

Clustering of labels from each participant→emergence of themes for each participant.

- Between Participant Analysis:

All participant's themes compared→emergence of common and important themes.

Procedural Steps

The following is a list of the procedural steps that were adhered to:

1. Each interview was audio taped and then transcribed. Each transcribed interview (“conventionally termed *protocols*”) was read several times to obtain a sense of the participant's experience of the phenomenon.
2. From each protocol, meaning units were extracted that related to the participant's experience of the psychological boundary violation.
3. The third step involved formulating a paraphrase that captured the central message of the meaning units.
4. The fourth step involved generating labels for each of the meaning units.
5. At this step a validity check meeting with the participants occurred. This ensured that cluster themes were correctly labeled and corresponded faithfully to the men's experiences. Relevant new data or modifications to these analyses were discussed with the participant and appropriate changes were made to validate the original protocols.
6. The labels were then grouped into themes for each participant.
7. The final level of thematic analysis involved the comparison of themes that were shared between the participants. It is during this final phase that a second validity check was conducted for any discrepancies among and /or between the various clusters for common and important themes.

The data analysis of the themes is presented in Chapter Five.

Researcher's Presuppositions

The following list of my presuppositions helped me to honor the participants' own experiences of the phenomenon under investigation. The compilation of this list was derived from my work as a psychotherapist and in consultation with colleagues who had experience working with men. The first list is my current presuppositions about the phenomenon of psychological boundary violations.

Current Presuppositions

1. I suspect that men who have had their psychological boundaries violated as children will have a diminished sense of play, joy, or excitement about life.

2. I suspect that men who have had their psychological boundaries violated as children will feel helpless and have a sense of emptiness.
3. I suspect that men who have had their psychological boundaries violated as children will have experienced confusion in their relation to their mothers.
4. I suspect that men who have had their psychological boundaries violated as children may feel they are under or over eroticized.

Presuppositions About Long-Term Effects of Psychological Boundary Violations

The following seven presuppositions are not really being pursued but I suspect these could be long-term effects of psychological boundary violations. My awareness of these presuppositions as well as others that emerge will hopefully allow for a more accurate illumination of the phenomena of mother-son psychological boundary violations.

1. I suspect that men who have had their psychological boundaries violated as children will be angry at their mothers.
2. I suspect that men who have had their psychological boundaries violated will be unsure of their feelings.
3. I suspect that men who have had their psychological boundaries violated will have difficulty with intimate relationships.
4. I suspect that men who have had their psychological boundaries violated will lack a distinct feeling of self-identity apart from their mothers.
5. I suspect that men who have had their psychological boundaries violated will not have healthy peer relationships.
6. I suspect that the eldest child in a family or only male child would be the most likely target for the mother to involve herself in a relationship that violates the child's psychological boundaries.
7. I suspect that a son involved in such a relationship will view the mother's relationship with the father as troubled.

Chapter Five RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the hierarchical analysis of the data and the common and important themes that emerged and a higher order theme.

Before examining the results it is important to provide my perception of how the interview evolved. Each participant had a difficult time articulating their emotions. Men in this study seemed to find it difficult to share their feelings about their mothers. As well, during the interview the participants wanted to focus on current life problems. In order to maintain rapport, time was given to share experiences that related to both parents. However, only material related to the mother-son boundary violations was utilized in the study.

In the tables that follow, only the last three levels of thematic analysis are presented:

- 1) The first level of analysis is the meaning unit.
- 2) The second level of analysis is a paraphrase.
- 3) The third level of individual analysis uses the labels.
- 4) The fourth level consists of a within person analysis.
- 5) The fifth level consists of an across person analysis.

Below is an example of a thematic analysis that includes the meaning units (column 1), paraphrases (column 2), and labels (column 3) is illustrated:

<u>Meaning Unit</u>	<u>Paraphrase</u>	<u>Label</u>
<p>Mom wouldn't listen to my sexual abuse stuff, she could only talk about the gross things done to her as a teenager. It was too much to hear.</p>	<p>Guy felt unheard about his abuse and was made to listen to his mother's troubles.</p>	<p>Left alone in pain</p>

A more comprehensive example of each participant is presented in the Appendices. The participants will be presented in the following order: Guy, Kyle, Sid, Dale, David, Stan.

Table 1.

Second Level of Individual Analysis for Guy

<u>Labels</u>	<u>Themes</u>
Realization of unmet needs, angry and alone, Feeling anger and unprotected, left alone in pain, feeling unprotected	1. Feeling Unsafe
Feeling trapped, feeling used	2. Feeling Stuck
Feeling overwhelmed, overcoming fear	3. Feeling Burdened
Feeling ambivalence towards body	4. Body Tension
Feeling invalidated	5. Feeling Invalidated
Vengetuiness	6. Feeling Vengeful

Table 2.

Second Level of Individual Analysis for Kyle

<u>Labels</u>	<u>Themes</u>
Feeling confused, feeling ambivalent (X 2)	1. Ambivalence
Feeling anger, wanting retribution	2. Feeling Vengeful
Feeling burdened, feeling used (X 2)	3. Feeling Used
Feeling guilty (X2), shame and guilt (X3)	4. Feeling Guilt and Shame
Hopelessness, feeling incapable	5. Sense of Inadequacy
Feeling diminished, feeling neglected/alone	6. Alone and Diminished

Table 3.

Second Level of Individual Analysis for Sid

<u>Labels</u>	<u>Themes</u>
Gaining understanding	1. Gaining Understanding
Conflicting feelings, feeling insecure, emotional conflict, fear of inadequacy	2. Ambivalence
Feeling alone in his loss	3. Feeling Alone
Loss of closeness	4. Not feeling close
Feeling frustrated, feeling controlled, feeling uncomfortable, feeling used	5. Feeling Manipulated

Table 4.

Second Level of Individual Analysis for Dale

<u>Labels</u>	<u>Themes</u>
Anger and repulsion, hurt and anger, resentment, anger	1. Feelings of Anger
Feeling manipulation, feeling confused, sense of confusion	2. Sense of Confusion
Sense of loss	3. Sense of Loss
Feeling anxious	4. Feeling Anxious

Table 5.

Second Level of Individual Analysis for David

<u>Labels</u>	<u>Themes</u>
Feeling vengeful, feeling resentment	1. Feeling Vengeful
Feeling restricted, feeling used, feeling guilt	2. Feeling Manipulated
Wanting connection, search for acceptance	3. Desiring Closeness
Feeling rejected, feeling neglected	4. Feeling Hurt
Feeling confusion, emotional confusion	5. Confusion
Shame	6. Shame
Feeling ambivalent	7. Ambivalence

Table 6.

Second Level of Individual Analysis for Stan

<u>Labels</u>	<u>Themes</u>
Anger, feelings of anger	1. Anger
Sense of intrusion, feeling suppressed, feeling intruded upon	2. Sense of Intrusion
Threatened autonomy, feeling seduced, feeling used (X2)	3. Feeling Manipulated
Feeling burdened (X2), overwhelmed	4. Feeling Burdened
Feeling grief	5. Sadness

The common and important themes are now presented.

Table 7.

Common Themes
Between Participant Analysis

<u>Common Themes</u>	<u>Participant</u>	<u>Cluster of Themes</u>
1. Feeling Used	Guy	Feeling overwhelmed (4), Feeling trapped (10), Feeling used (12)
	Kyle	Feeling burdened (7), Feeling used (8, 9)
	Sid	Feeling frustrated (4), Feeling controlled (5), Feeling uncomfortable (10), Feeling used (11)
	Dale	Feeling manipulation (1), Feeling used (10)
	David	Feeling restricted (3), Feeling used (4), Feeling guilt (9)
	Stan	Feeling seduced (5), Feeling burdened (7), Feeling used (9, 11)
	2. Ambivalence	Guy
Kyle		Feeling confused (2), Feeling ambivalent (3, 4)
Sid		Conflicting feelings (6), Feeling insecure (7), Emotional conflict (8), Fear of inadequacy (9)
Dale		Feeling confusion (1), Feeling confused (5), Feeling anxious (6), Sense of confusion (9)
David		Feeling ambivalent (8), Feeling confusion (10)
Stan		Feeling burdened & overwhelmed (8), Sadness (12)
3. Feeling Vengeful/Angry	Guy	Vengefulness (9)
	Kyle	Feeling anger (5), Wanting retribution (16)
	Sid	Strong displeasure (12)
	Dale	Anger and repulsion (2), Hurt and Anger (4), Resentment (7), Anger (8)
	David	Feeling vengeful (5), Feeling resentment (7)
	Stan	Anger (1), Feelings of anger (6)

4. Loss of Autonomy

Guy	Feeling invalidated (5)
Dale	Sense of loss (3)
Sid	Feeling alone in his loss (1)
David	Wanting connection (6), Search for acceptance (11)
Kyle	Hopelessness (6)
Stan	Threatened autonomy (4)

Table 3.

Important Themes
Between Participant Analysis

<u>Important Themes</u>	<u>Participant</u>	<u>Cluster of Themes</u>
1. Feeling Alone	Guy	Realization of unmet needs (1), Anger and alone (3), Feeling anger and unprotected (6), Left alone in pain (7), Feeling unprotected (11)
	Kyle	Feeling diminished (1), Feeling neglected and alone (10)
	Sid	Feeling alone in his loss (1)
2. Feeling Guilt and Shame	Kyle	Feeling guilty (11,12), Shame and guilt (13), Feeling shame (14), Feeling ridiculed and shame (15)
	David	Shame (2)

Results of the Analysis

A biographical description of each of the participants which includes personal information and an overall synthesis of his experience is given. The individual descriptions are presented in the order in which the interviews were conducted.

The thematic analysis was undertaken in various stages. Each participant's interview was transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The transcription was then analyzed with four levels of further analysis for each participant. The steps included were: meaning units, paraphrase, labels, common and important themes.

Biographical Description of Participants

Guy

Guy is a thirty year old man who is married and has two daughters. Guy is the youngest in his family-of-origin which consists of two brothers and three sisters. In Guy's teen years his father died. Guy has seen a male psychologist for approximately three years on an intermittent basis and has been in four different support groups. Guy sought counselling initially to deal with depression, an eating disorder, and his struggle with sexual orientation. The latter part of his therapy consisted of dealing with his anger towards his parents—primarily with his mother. Guy is a voracious reader and has a supportive wife and believes the combination of these factors, along with therapy have been paramount to his healing journey. He is not on any medications. Guy is successfully employed as a school teacher.

Kyle

Kyle is a thirty year old man who has never been married. He has a sister, thirteen years his senior. His father died when he was ten years old. He is currently seeing a female therapist to deal with his strong feelings of anger towards his mom in regards to her control and sexual seduction. Also, concerns of sexual addiction and sexual orientation are issues being addressed. He is not on any medication. He is currently unemployed.

Sid

Sid is a twenty-nine year old man who is married with two children. He has a younger sister. The parents were divorced when he was eight and the children stayed with the mother. Sid was in marital counselling with his wife for approximately one year when the issue regarding his mother was raised. Sid's therapist began observing that he

was having mixed feelings towards his wife. It was eventually determined that Sid was projecting his anger about his mother onto his wife which started when they began raising their own children. Sid is not on any medication. He is employed as an insurance adjuster.

Dale

Dale is a thirty-six year old man who is married with two children. Dale has one younger biological sister and one step-sister. His mom was divorced and remarried in his mid-teens. Dale is very angry at his mom for her way of implementing the divorce to her first husband and for her effect on Dale's career choice. Dale currently works as a machinist. Dale is not on any medication and was in counseling for a few months.

David

David is a thirty-four year old man who is married and has two sons. David's parents are still married. David was the second oldest of seven children (six sisters). David saw a male psychologist for eighteen months. He has previously been in two support groups. His therapeutic goals were to deal with issues of self-esteem, ambivalent feelings toward parents and his sexual orientation. David is not on any medication. He is employed as a biology teacher.

Stan

Stan is a twenty-nine year old man who is married and has no children. His parents were divorced in his mid-teens. Stan has been seeing a female therapist for approximately two years to deal with issues of rejection by his father, anger towards his mom for manipulation and sexual seduction, and his struggle with sexual fantasy. Stan has used anti-depressant medication. He is employed as a nurse.

N.B.

This biographical description is biased towards describing the mothers as opposed to fathers. However, it will be noted that of the six parental dyads at the time of this study : four fathers left the marital dyad, one father died (Guy), and one marital dyad remained intact, yet the adult son (David) reported that his father was emotionally distant throughout his formative years.

Explanation of the Themes

Common Themes

1. Feeling Used
2. Ambivalence
3. Feeling Vengeful/Anger
4. Loss of Autonomy

The common themes are discussed in relation to the experiences offered by each participant. An overall synthesis of these experiences are merged to reveal a commonality for the six participants. The common themes are presented using the comments made by the participants. Two important themes are also presented. Although these different themes were not common to all participants, nonetheless they are important in that they may offer some added insight to the overall understanding of the phenomena of mother-son psychological boundary violations as recalled by adult sons. Furthermore, a brief description of the higher order theme will be given.

Common Themes

1. Feeling Used

All six of the participants described feeling used as the most frustrating aspect in their relationship to their mothers. Guy described his experience as feeling trapped (10). When he wanted to go outside and ride a bike, or play sports like any other of the children in the neighborhood, his mother denied him this opportunity. Instead she would teach him female mannerisms, and dress him up in either his sisters' clothing or her own. He went along with this because it was the only time he was receiving positive attention from either of his parents. Also, Guy felt overwhelmed (4) by the type of conversation he had with his mother. "She (mom) told me a lot of things when I was in my teens... [that] I didn't feel it was right for some reason, it left me overwhelmed." He eventually would not tolerate this inappropriate relationship. Furthermore, "I was tired of mom using me as a pinch-hitter for a husband or confidant" (12). Kyle's experience of feeling used (8) was when he was put in the position to be compared (as a male) to his father by his mother. In Kyle's own words, "I was used as a ploy against dad. Mom tried to get one over him (dad) to meet her needs. I was the fuel for her defense, to vent her anger. That was an awful feeling of being used." In Sid's case, his parents had marital problems and eventually they divorced. Sid found himself receiving preferential treatment over his sister by his mom as a result. Sid said, "I liked my sister but I didn't like her getting this type of treatment or me feeling like some sort of "boyfriend". As a result of this position

Sid said, "I felt like I was put under pressure to keep mom happy. She tried pouting, whining, making me feel guilty to get what she wanted" (11). Dale's parents also divorced but Dale witnessed his mother purposely trying to end it by having an affair. He experienced manipulation (1) and to this day this still bothers him immensely. Another example of feeling used (10) for Dale was his experience of his mother telling him what to do without consideration for his own dreams and aspirations. "She tried to shape me into her mold and didn't support my dreams...." David's situation in this common theme was a feeling of restriction (3) and being used (4). In his youth and as David was thinking of a career he sensed that his mom didn't support his sense of adventure or aspirations. Instead, David's mother "would use her tears" to get David to feel guilty (9) for going contrary to her wishes. After Stan's parents were divorced, he felt the experience of being used (9) when his mother subtly reminded him that if he wanted to play organized sports he would "have to travel away from home and her." He eventually concluded years later that she was intending to keep him near her for her needs not his. The closeness became most apparent when "[they] started sleeping in the same bed [and as] I shared everything I had, she seemingly felt better." (5) Stan also concluded that his mother in these times "made me feel special but eventually this became my obstacle. I felt used" (11).

In this common theme of feeling used the most salient feature was that the participants felt their mothers used them to meet their needs instead of their needs.

2. Ambivalence in Relationship

All six participants had undergone feelings of ambivalence toward their mother. In Guy's experience, he said, "Mom was nice to me and I felt close to her as long as I played her dress-up game and listened to her complain about dad. As soon as I said I didn't want to hear her lambasting dad anymore, she yelled, pouted, and shut me off for awhile. I didn't know what to think about her." (13) These ambivalent feelings also caused him to fear maternal loss (8) because of the type of relationship that developed. Kyle had a similar experience and he too was affected by his mom's berating of his dad. "Mom spoke negatively about dad, even more so when they separated when I was nine. Her comments were not always fair. I think she didn't realize that her comments about my dad would affect me." (3) In another matter Kyle had ambivalent feelings (4) that he described as inconsistent. He said, "When mom got drunk she was trying to be very nice to me—smothered me with affection—but she withdrew from me when she wasn't drunk." Sid had conflicting feelings (6) as he described his experience as to when "mom confided in me in regards to most anything. I felt privileged most of time except when

she talked negatively about dad.” Dale experienced anxious feelings (6) toward his mother’s ridiculing of his superior grade point average, “Yet she bragged about [him] to her friends as to how smart [he] was.” David experienced ambivalence in his relationship to his mother and he felt pressured to meet her expectations for him (8). Furthermore, David experienced feelings of confusion (10) in his attitude towards girls due to his mother’s teachings. He said, “Mom expressed contempt for sex to us kids. “Sex was dirty”, she’d say. In my adolescence I was confused by this. I thought I wanted to date girls but was too scared and to protect my desires I built up a resentment towards girls.” Stan felt inadequate in trying to meet his mother’s needs and “wasn’t always sure if [he] could comfort her in her time of need” (8) Stan is also feeling sadness (12) as he experiences ambivalent feelings towards his mother. He doesn’t want to believe that she has manipulated him throughout his life. “I will find it hard to accept the fact that mom is a manipulator” but has come to that realization that this is a part of her personality type.

In this common theme of ambivalence the participants desired closeness to their mothers but some negative action by the mothers would create mixed feelings that would threaten the closeness.

3. Feeling Vengeful/Anger

Guy’s vengefulness (9) came as a result of teasing by his classmates for his effeminate behavior. Ultimately, “[Guy] knew that [his] anger towards them was really misdirected anger towards his mom for teaching [him] this behavior.” In his late teens Kyle wanted retribution (16) against his mom for all the years that she never provided an explanation for her disciplining him. Sid had a strong displeasure (12) towards his mom because of the way she judged his “right to visit dad years after they divorced”. Dale was very angry (2) at his mother’s creating “a fantasy world to cover up her guilt over her affair and then the divorce.” David was feeling vengeful (5) towards his mom for “driving [him] around to organized ball [and] making excuses for dad not being there [to do it himself].” Stan’s anger (1, 6) was a result of his mother’s forceful way of getting the children to see things her way at the expense of their best interests.

Each of the participants in this common theme had feelings of anger that built up over time due to a sense of frustration they had with their mothers.

4. Loss of Autonomy

All six participants had experienced loss of autonomy in some fashion. Guy felt invalidated when his feelings were suppressed in favor of his mother’s. (5) Dale had difficulty recalling his early childhood and was wondering “who [he] was then” and as a

result experienced a sense of loss. (3) Sid also had difficulty recalling parts of his early childhood and said he “feel[s] alone in [his] loss [because] no one can explain it” (1) David felt that he never connected with his parents so he attempted to join a special club that he thought they might approve. (6) However, this attempt was not met with much success so David sought the friendship with peers but was met with further rejection. His search for acceptance (11) brought him into a relationship with an older man who “rescued [him] from the taunting [and loneliness].” Kyle’s experience of childhood was gloomy as he also “didn’t know who [he] was or where [he] was going or how [he] was to fit in.” (6) Stan never managed to feel secure with so many moves in his formative years and as a result “clung to [his] mom through each new adjustment.” (4)

The participants in this common theme experienced a sense of loss in their formative years. They apparently never achieved a sense of autonomy.

The following important themes also emerged from the analysis. These themes were not shared by all six participants but did provide further information about the phenomenon of psychological boundary violations between mothers and sons.

Important Themes

1. Feeling Alone

Guy remembers that his mom “wouldn’t listen to [his] sexual abuse stuff” and this left him alone in his pain (7). Kyle experienced a similar sense of alienation from his family as he “desired a relationship with [his] mommy” but on a typical occasion when he “wanted to ask her something, she told me to get lost.” Sid has a difficult time recalling a four year period in his life (between four and eight years of age) and “feels alone (1) in [his] loss, [because] no one can explain it.”

The participants in this theme had a painful sense of feeling alone in their pain.

2. Feeling Guilt and Shame

Kyle was made to feel responsible by mom for the two miscarriages between his sister and himself. As a child he felt guilty (11) that it was something he had done. In his mid-teens Kyle was coerced into bed with his mother and this disturbed him. A sense of shame (14) is still lingering. As a boy, David was of small stature and because of this his mother tried to protect him “from doing farm work.” However, David shares how this caused him shame (2), “This added to my humiliation because I was the second oldest of seven children (six sisters). She (mom) had more influence on dad than I think he would of liked to have given her.”

In this important theme the participants felt guilt and shame due to the actions that their mothers did toward them.

Higher Order Theme

Turbulent Emotional Conflict

Upon reflection on the participants' stories and the compilation of the common and important themes there appears to be a higher order theme which I have called Turbulent Emotional Conflict. Each of the above six themes are contributing to Turbulent Emotional Conflict. The contributing factors to Turbulent Emotional Conflict were the participants' experiences of being unheard or subject to coercion by their mother's view. Also this conflict was evident around sexual issues. In the final chapter this overall theme will be expanded upon.

Chapter Six DISCUSSION

The following discussion of the past research is integrated with the common and important themes that emerged from the analysis of men's experience of psychological boundary violations. A higher order theme is presented. Some important issues are examined, the study's limitations are discussed, and implications for future research are presented.

The Common Themes

1. Feeling Used

It was mentioned in chapter two of this study that the family is a "hot-house of intimacy and emotionality" because of the close interaction and intensity of relationships. The family has the potential to do either great good or harm for its members. It appears that the latter part has occurred not only in this theme, but is present in many of the other themes as well. Furthermore, it seems that these participants generally came from unhealthy families.

The experience of feeling used was shared by all six participants. This experience reflected a sense of psychological boundary violation. In Guy's case, he felt overwhelmed (4) by the type of conversation he had with his mother. His experience of being "used" was interpreted by him as a boundary violation when his mother made him listen to her speaking negatively about dad and being forced to wear female clothes (10). Guy's mother did not protect her son from her own unmet needs and thus a psychological boundary violation occurred between them. Bradshaw (1992) asserts that "without strong boundaries one cannot know where they end and where others begin. Such a person has trouble saying no and knowing what they want" (p. 18). For example, Guy had trouble saying no due to the lack of a strong boundary between him and his mother. Due to this psychological boundary violation Guy recently severed his attachment with his mother. Bowlby (1980) proposed that attachment is "present and active throughout the life cycle" but this has been interrupted between Guy and his mother (p. 39). However, Guy will likely deal with this issue for some time unless he gets some resolution.

Dale and David similarly experienced feeling used by their mothers. They felt their mothers wanted to keep them away from their own dreams. Their mothers had them do alternative activities that would thwart their dreams. These men felt that their mothers used their position of authority in an abusive manner. Minuchin (1974) calls the parents' position in the family the "executive subsystem" and when the person (mother) in this

position of authority abuses their power a psychological boundary violation is experienced.

Klein (1984) stated that some mothers use their sons unconsciously to keep them dependent on them. For example, a mother may be so involved in her son's life that he may not be able to believe in himself enough to undertake an activity on his own. Similarly, Kyle's mother tried to convince both him and his older brother to live in the same (small) house as her. In Kyle's words, "It took me almost thirty years to realize that my mom did everything for me and I felt paralyzed that one day she would die and couldn't be there for me. Eventually, I realized that this was not for my benefit but for hers; she couldn't live without a man in her life. When I left [the State] she had my brother and his wife move in with her. It was nuts. My sister-in-law couldn't believe the control she has on him". Similarly, the controlling mother type that was described by Allen (1993) has likely been experienced by these participants in this theme of feeling used. Dale also experienced his mother using him at home for her needs without consideration for his own needs. "She tried to shape me into her mold and didn't support my dreams...." In summary, these men felt used by their mothers and as a result, they did not have their own needs met.

A salient finding in this theme that surprised this researcher was that of sexual abuse. Four out of six in this sample had been sexually abused. Three men were abused by their mothers and one of the men by an adult male. Some research indicates that males sexually abuse other males in at least 90% of the cases (De Jong, Emmet, and Hervada, 1982; Faber et al., 1984; Gale, Thompson, Sack, 1988; Hibbard, & Orr, 1985; Reinhart, 1987), although two studies have found the opposite. One study of almost 600 college men found that the abuser was female over 75% of the time (Fromuth and Burkhart, 1987). Another study of male sexual abuse reports the abuser as being female in about half of the cases (Risen and Koss, 1987). Neither one of these later researchers attempted to explain their findings and what relation these females were to the males, except to say that their samples were in some way qualitatively different than those used in other studies.

Men generally are reluctant to report sexual abuse (Lew, 1990). However, they are more likely to report victimization by women; yet much less if it was their mothers, and be even more reluctant to disclose homosexual abuse due to the social stigma of being gay (Lew, 1990). Lew has found that while men are socially encouraged to discuss their "sexual conquests" with older women they are discouraged from discussing their sexual experiences with their mothers and with other men. Lew feels that because homophobia has been institutionalized in our culture, men who have been abused by other men are

shameful and often see themselves as being demeaned, demasculinized and weakened. Burdened with these feelings it would not be surprising to find that male victims of sexual abuse have difficulty in discussing their experiences. In fact, one of the men reported in the present research that he felt like such horrible person that he did not deserve to be helped.

The present research concerning the survivors' feelings about sexual abuse fail to support other research which indicates male victims are apt to describe their abuse in positive terms. Fromuth and Burkhart (1987) found that males were more likely to describe their sexual abuse by females as interesting and pleasurable, than fearful and shocking. Men may have been socialized to view their sexual experiences differently than women. They may also be socialized to have difficulty viewing themselves as victims and therefore, in some instances, describe their early sexual experiences in positive terms. However, results from this research, and that of many others (Bagley and King, 1990; Bruckner and Johnson, 1987; Dimcock, 1988; Janus, et al., 1987; Kilgore, 1988; Krug, 1989; V. Mey, 1988) indicates that most male victims of sexual abuse report more negative than positive components resulting from the sexual abuse.

It would appear that the experience of feeling used has a powerful affect on the men who participated in this study. The most devastating finding of a psychological boundary violation is that of sexual abuse. The findings in this study and the results found in the literature conclude that sexual abuse is a poignant example of feeling used.

2. Ambivalence in Relationship

Minuchin (1974) says the "boundaries are the rules defining who participates in a subsystem, and how... [and] further argues that subsystem organization within a family provides valuable training in developing a sense of self" (p. 53). Minuchin would seem to suggest that a healthy family has a "sense of self" and does not expect members from one generation to fulfill duties that belong to another generation. However, in Guy, Kyle, and Sid's experiences there appears to be an expectation by their mothers to have their sons hear their complaints about their husbands. Although the sons "wanted to be good listeners" for their mom's needs in the early years their cognitive and social development was not able to handle the type of information that was shared. The boundaries in these subsystems are not clear because of "intergenerational contamination" (Jacobvitz, Morgan, Kretchmar, and Morgan, 1991). The sons are not able to "fulfill the duties" as confidant nor meet their mothers' unmet needs. Klein (1984) suggests:

In homes where mother and son live together without a father, the pleasures of a maturing relationship may also become distorted. Instead of gradually becoming a more equal partner in the relationship, a son may be asked to be more mature than is psychologically possible at a given age. The situation I observed most often was that of a son being asked to supply masculine support to his mother at an age when he still needed her maternal support (p. 134).

The sons are left in confusion or are ambivalent in their feelings toward their mothers because the responsibility was too much and in some of the participant's experiences they wanted to withdraw but felt this would be like abandoning their mothers and in turn "[they] would be abandoned". Evans (1988) suggests that "the fear of abandonment operates when childhood fears conspire to maintain relationships no matter how abusive or neglectful they are" and leaves the child feeling confused because of the child's needs are dependent on the mother (p. 165).

When boundaries are unclear, as was experienced by the participant's in this study, when the men were made to listen to their mother's burdens, then ambivalent feelings are experienced by the sons toward their mothers.

3. Feeling Vengeful/Anger

The men's experiences in this theme were very intense. In Guy and Kyle's experiences they wanted retribution against their mothers for the way their mothers communicated their needs at the expense of their sons' needs. For example, Kyle was severely disciplined by his mother without apparent cause during his pre-teen years. However, he started to realize in his mid-teens that she was actually taking out her frustration with her husband onto her son. So by controlling her son's behavior, Kyle "believed that she still had some control for herself by disciplining me and I wouldn't turn out like dad." Forward (1990) suggested that such a form of control is usually done in the guise of concern. For example, "this is for your own good," "only because I love you so much" are phrases that make a controlling mother so insidious. In Guy's case he experienced shame because he was forced by his mother to adopt female mannerisms and Guy's "shame" eventually turned to anger. As a result his feelings and needs were subordinated for his mother's needs. Bradshaw would concur that when the power between the subsystem is imbalanced, then a strong reaction (anger) is needed to regain some control for the person who feels shamed (1990). An explanation was offered years later to Guy as to why his mother dressed him up—and not his brothers—in women's clothing and taught him female mannerisms. In Guy's words, "Mom was angry at dad's

workaholicism and he was giving more attention to my brothers than her, so she tried what she could to keep me the only other male around...and she also permitted the homosexual abuse—knowing I was too afraid to tell—and so she could prevent me from seeing any girls so that she could preserve what I think was a type of love affair due to the physical and emotional stuff we did.” Klein (1984) has observed in her research that “if a woman’s resentment of her husband’s attempts at control is great, she may strike back with a comparable weapon, using her relationship with her son to diminish further the father in his eyes. Some sons’ comments indicate what a threat this can be to their own masculine esteem” (p. 133). Guy still suffers with low self-esteem and believed he was gay as a result of his mother’s actions and his brother’s sexual assault on him. Guy’s anger was not as apparent towards his brothers but more so to his mother who knew about it. Forward (1990) calls this type of mother the “classic silent partner”. This is the mother who chooses to ignore what is going on even if she is “told of the molestation by her [child] but does nothing about it. When this happens, the victim is doubly betrayed” (pp. 157-158).

The type of families that Keith and Stan came from were “filled with problems” as Keith described it. The result was anger by these men towards their mothers due to the sexual involvement with their mothers. At first these boys were feeling guilty about what was going on and were never really sure of their mother’s intentions. Klein (1984) says:

It is quite common for a boy, who still needs the security of his mother’s approval and affection, to blame himself for his mother’s arousal, thereby adding another layer of guilt to his already burdened psyche. It is as if the son tells himself that his mother won’t hate him for his secret suspicions if he holds himself responsible for creating them. Also, because he still needs her so desperately, he cannot perceive her as the one to blame, because he might have to reject her. (pp. 111-112)

In evaluating Klein’s analysis above, I believe the men in this study have also burdened feelings and have suffered a psychological boundary violation that some are still carrying.

Unfortunately, incest is not always portrayed as a psychological boundary violation in the film industry. For example, in the French film, *Murmur of the Heart*, directed by Louis Malle, a young mother and her sensitive fifteen-year-old son go away together to a resort. One night, the mother has too much to drink, and the boy, bursting with the fires and torments of adolescence, makes love to her. Afterward, in a genuinely moving scene, the mother tenderly tells her son that their lovemaking will remain a beautiful secret for

them to share but never to repeat. Without apparent trauma to the boy, their lives as mother and son resume.

However, off screen, incest between a mother and her son, even when it does not involve actual intercourse, is not experienced this gently or lightly. Both Keith and Stan still suffer enormous guilt, and it might be presumed that their mothers may have some guilt too.

4. Loss of Autonomy

As result of feeling used the men also experienced loss of autonomy. As noted above boundaries differentiate subsystems within a family. Minuchin (1974) states that:

such divisions must be sufficiently well defined to allow subsystem members to carry out their tasks without undue interference, while at the same time open enough to permit contact between members of the subsystem and others.

Boundaries thus help safeguard each subsystem's autonomy while maintaining the interdependence of all of the family's subsystems" (p. 55).

From an analysis of the results in this study it has become apparent that the boundary between mother-son has not been safeguarded and the sons have experienced a loss of autonomy. When Guy's mother suppressed his needs for her own, Guy recognized his independence and freedom was not possible; the loss of autonomy elicited some very intense emotions. The interference by Guy's mother jeopardized the affectional bond between them and Guy has no intentions in seeing her again and yet it pained him to be away from her. Bowlby (1973, 1979) has found in his research that when a child lacks a secure and empathic foundation they may become "anxiously attached" due to the parent's emotional needs which suppress the physical or emotional needs of the child. Dale and Sid experienced loss of autonomy due to a difficulty in recalling parts of their early childhood. While in counselling they did not discover if any provocative or seductive experiences have contributed to their loss of memory. However, in Klein's (1984) research she states that "less than 3 percent of the men in my study recalled unquestionably provocative experiences with their mothers" (p. 111). Urquiza and Capra (1990) found 12% of boys in their research have been sexually abused by their mothers. Furthermore, where cunnilingus or intercourse was initiated by an adult perpetrator the effects were more disturbing than masturbation or exhibitionism (Hunter, 1990). When Kyle and Stan were involved in the first two acts with their mothers, cunnilingus and intercourse respectively, they still recall the repulsion it made them feel. Finkelhor et al. (1986) suggests the difficulty for young children trying to recall their

early childhood is because they do not have the “emotional, cognitive, or social orientation with which to make meaning of adult sexual experiences” (p. 112). This may be the reason why Dale and Sid have a sense of confusion and disorientation in recollecting their early childhood. Conversely, they may be also trying to suppress the childhood memories.

What emerged from this theme was two ideas. First, a loss of autonomy was experienced by some of the participants when the sons’ needs were subordinated for their mother’s needs. Second, a loss of autonomy was experienced by other participants when they experienced disorientation and frustration in trying to recall an earlier part of their childhood. Some research supports the idea that sexual abuse or maternal incest may cause a child to suppress their memory during that part of their childhood (Urquiza and Capra, 1990).

The next section briefly describes the important themes and these are shared with only some of the participants.

The Important Themes

1. Feeling Alone

Some participants experienced feeling alone in their relationship with their mothers. The commonality of Guy, Kyle, and Sid’s experience is that their mothers were sexually abused as children. For example, Kyle experienced loneliness as a child due to the lack of nurturing and communication with his mother. Empirical support states that when the abuser has not received help with their abuse then the likelihood of “intergenerational boundary violations” will continue (Klein, 1984; Blanchard, 1986; Hemfelt and Warren, 1990; Forward, 1990; Jacobvitz et al., 1991; Mendel, 1993). When the mothers did not receive help for their abuse they repeated their history with their sons.

2. Feeling Guilt and Shame

Kyle and David felt guilt and shame for acts of psychological boundary violations that occurred between them and their mothers. When one’s boundary is crossed over and a “sense of self” is unclear then the victim is more likely to take responsibility for the guilt and shame that results (Evans, 1988; Thomas, 1989). Feeling guilt and shame is likely to result when boundaries have been unclear and the offending party has not taken responsibility for their part in the boundary transgression.

The Essence of Psychological Boundary Violation

Four common themes and two important themes emerged from this study of mother-son psychological boundary violations. Upon further evaluation of the themes that emerged from this study, there appears to be a higher order theme or essence related to all the themes. The higher order theme seems to be that all men have experienced turbulent emotional conflict, regarding psychological boundary violations by their mothers.

Turbulent Emotional Conflict

The participants seem to have all shared a turbulent emotional conflict with their mothers. In many instances the men were either unheard by or subjected to coercion by their mother's view. Arguably, either one of these psychological boundary violations caused conflict for the men and when they were older they started challenging their mothers. For Guy, he confronted his mother when he was twenty-nine-years-old, about how his feelings were subordinated to her own and has not initiated any conversation with her since. Bradshaw (1990) believes that in order for the inner child to be healed from the years of "shame and denigration [and boundary violations]", the person must take steps on their own to begin constructing a boundary that is comfortable for themselves. Kyle started to take steps to challenge his mother's verbal and sexual abuse of himself but unfortunately he used his fists towards his mother when he was seventeen. Subsequently, he ran away with a music band for four years and realized that "sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll" was "dragging him down". Eventually he found a church support group and went into counselling and this has enabled him to start dealing with his rage towards his mom. Similarly, Stan is dealing with the coercive influence his mom had over him when he was living with her. He sought help from a therapist because he began displacing his anger onto his wife. What is common here is conflict between mother and son that was a result of years of psychological boundary violations.

Also the idea of turbulent emotional conflict was evident in regards to sexually-related issues. Guy, Kyle, and David appear to have initially gone into counselling to deal with turbulent emotional conflict around their sexual orientation/masculine identity confusion, sexual abuse and sexuality more generally. Guy relates his issue of sexual orientation and preoccupation with masturbation has been affected by his mom teaching him female mannerisms, fondling him while dressing him in female clothes, and his two brothers sexually abusing him. Guy felt these were causal factors that lead him to doubt his masculinity. Kyle believes his struggle with sexual orientation was as a result of the sexual involvement with his mother and the taunting by his "mother's new lesbian

friends". David admitted that his struggle with sexual orientation was his rebellion to a controlling mother and an emotionally distant father. Stan also struggles with sexually inappropriate behaviors due to his incestual experience with his mother and knew it was becoming a serious problem when he was tempted to molest a patient at the hospital where he works.

Finkelhor (1986) refers to traumatic sexualization as a process whereby sexual contact experienced during childhood begins to shape the child in sexually inappropriate and interpersonally inappropriate developmental ways. Some of these sexually inappropriate symptoms may include: precocious knowledge of sexual matters, sexual acting out with other children or adults (Kelly, 1986), use of sexual language, preoccupation with sexual thoughts, sexual behaviors such as public masturbation or excessive preoccupation with masturbation (Sebold, 1987) and difficulty with sexual feelings (Janus et al., 1987) including sexual orientation (Johnson and Shrier, 1985; Bruckner and Johnson, 1987). Blanchard (1986) reports that:

Statistics vary as to just what percentage of sex offenders were themselves victims of child sexual abuse. ...45% to 75% of rapists were sexually assaulted as children....80% of pedophiles were abused as youngsters....17% of the male victims were assaulted by females....The message behind the statistics is that part of the responsibility for our current high rates of child sexual molestation is due to the chronic neglect of male victims who, when untreated, further perpetrate the very problems they once endured as children. (p. 23)

Turbulent emotional conflict was very evident when the men were either unheard by or subjected to coercion of their mother's view and when there was inappropriate sexually-related issues between the mother and her son. These early experiences are still troubling the men today.

Overview of the Study

Commentary on the Researcher's Presuppositions

Psychological boundary violations between a mother and her son have occurred as previously stated at the inception of this study. For example, I expected that the participants to have a diminished sense of play, joy, or excitement about life. The experience of feeling used that was shared by all the participants was likely a contributing factor to a diminished excitement about life.

I also expected that men who have their psychological boundaries violated as children will feel helpless and have a sense of emptiness. This was most evident when the mother would put her needs before her son leaving him feeling helpless and empty as experienced in the theme loss of autonomy. The sexual abuse that some of the men experienced by their mothers was a poignant example of feeling helpless and empty.

I also expected that men who have their psychological boundaries violated as children will have experienced confusion or ambivalence in their relation to their mothers.

I also expected that men who have their psychological boundaries violated as children may feel they are under or over eroticized. It was not clear as to what degree the men may have been eroticized as no tests were given in this phenomenological investigation. However, it does appear that many of the men have questions about their masculinity and do struggle with sexual issues.

Even though this study did not investigate the presuppositions about long-term effects of psychological boundary violations, it does appear that some of these presuppositions have occurred and are ongoing. I say ongoing because they have occurred since the men recognized these boundary violations in their formative years. For example, I expected that men who have their psychological boundaries violated as children will be angry at their mothers. All the men in the common theme of feeling vengeful/anger certainly felt this emotion due to the psychological boundary violation between mother and son.

I also expected that men who have their psychological boundaries violated as children would have difficulty in intimate relationships. This was evident in that five of the men went into marital therapy because of a relationship problem. It was the therapists who recognized that a psychological boundary violation has occurred between the mother and son that was likely a contributing factor to problems in the marital relationship. It was also suspected that the eldest child or only male child in a family would be the most likely target for the mother to involve herself in a relationship that violates the child's psychological boundaries.

Another ongoing expectation that I had was that a son involved in such a relationship will view the mother's relationship with the father as troubled.

I observed throughout the research process that I had to make an effort to be aware of my biases and attempted to counter their effects so that I could remain as truthful to the participant's phenomenal experience as possible. Between interviewing the participants, the most difficult task was to guard myself from looking for similar experiences within the participants rather than letting the individual experiences of the

participants emerge. When the biases emerged I recorded them in a notebook so that I was able to be aware of their possible influences.

It appeared that the participants found the interviews difficult as attested by men's comments. Overall there was some reluctance to explore the mother-son relationship. Despite this apparent reluctance, I do believe the participants appeared to gain some benefit from being involved in this study as was indicated to me by some of the men.

Other Observations

The researcher believes it is important to include the following observations that emerged but are not directly related to the themes. They seem to implicate that the psychological boundary violations that the men have experienced are causing difficulty for the men in other relationships—namely with their wives. The observations that will be addressed are: men's difficulty in relationships, men's difficulty in articulating feelings, accepting self-blame for the abuse, and reluctance to seek professional help.

1. Men's Difficulty in Other Relationships

For a person to develop a self-concept or identity that is separate and unique from others, the person must not become too close (enmeshment) or too distant (disengagement) from the relationships they are involved in. It has been observed in this study that experiences like feeling restricted, feeling burdened, feeling alone, and many more, have contributed to the difficulty these men have had in their relationships with their mothers in developing trust. Dimcock (1989) has also observed that when a parent or parental figure violates the relationship with the child similar factors were found. Trust with others, such as those with a spouse in this study, were again noted by other researchers (Dimcock, 1989; Krug, 1989). Too much or too little involvement in the relationship with their mothers has contributed to this difficulty. If the boundaries between mother and son had been clearer then such difficulties in other relationships may have been less likely to occur. The ideal time for boundary development to have been learned was when gender identity was being formed in the formative years. As Gilligan (1982) states "separation and individuation are critically tied to gender identity...[especially for males who] tend to have difficulty with relationships" (p. 8). It is reasonable to conclude that early boundary violations by the mothers to their sons may have been contributed to the difficulty in relationships these men are now having.

2. Men's Difficulty in Articulating Feelings

The idea that men may experience affective dissociation is indirectly supported by the different ways in which men describe their feelings. It was observed in this study that the men described their feelings about the abuser, and none of the men used their own words to describe their experience of the abuse itself. This was typical of Kyle's experience. He said, "I hate her for seducing me. But what makes me really angry is the fact that years later she denies ever doing it with me."

The initial reactions of sexual abuse victims are sometimes thought of as being similar to victims of other traumatic events (for example, physical assault) who have had their boundaries violated (Bear, 1988). The affective components may become dissociated from the incident itself through denial or disbelief (Bagley and King, 1990). Dissociation is defined as the separation of psychological activities from the rest of the personality so that they function independently (Meir, Minirth, Wichern, Ratcliff, 1991). This was the case for Stan and Guy in this study where they may have been in pain, but did not necessarily connect the pain to the traumatic event. The symptoms become removed from the causal incident, leaving them with no understanding as to the source of their discomfort. In addition, the affective component of the experience may become blocked altogether (Kilgore, 1988), leaving them with no reason to discuss the incident. In either case the men are prevented from having a clear understanding of the impact of their traumatic experience.

3. Accepting Self-blame for the Abuse Itself

It appeared that the men were reluctant to describe the sexual abuse. Most of the men felt the sexual abuse was at least partially their own fault. Lew (1990) discusses the issue that sexually abused men often feel that they have done something wrong. He describes abused men as feeling that they were bad children who were unlovable, manipulative, evil or seductive because of the lies the abuser told them.

Caution must be used when interpreting the finding that the victims felt partial responsibility for the abuse. It would be wrong to infer that the men shared responsibility for the abuse with the mother because results from this research do not indicate that victims are, in any way, to blame for their sexual abuse. It does seem likely that some of the men were made to feel responsible for the abuse. For example, Kyle confronted his mother while he was attending counselling to ask her why she used him as a sexual partner. Her response as Kyle reported was a "complete denial of initiating any such activity however, she did accuse me of approaching her one night to have intercourse after she had too much to drink....What I have trouble with is that she doesn't admit that

this so called 'activity' went on for a number of months. She was quite sober." Similarly, Guy inquired of his mother as to "why did she have to fondle me while she was dressing me up in her clothes....She never answered me. She conveniently changed the topic." Stan's mother's response was more overt to her initiating cunnilingus with her son, "you seemed to be preoccupied with sex [at fifteen] so I thought you wanted me too...." It is problematic for the men in that they feel blamed because the mothers did not take responsibility for abusing their sons.

If men are able to disclose the sexual abuse to a professional they still may suffer further trauma if they are not believed. The research on sexual abuse indicates that sexual abuse victims seldom lie about their abuse (Coulborn-Faller, 1988), yet they may not be believed (Broussard and Wagner, 1988; Rogers and Terry, 1984). Three of the men in this sample who were sexually abused by their mothers and the one participant by an older man expressed concern that at the time they were contemplating disclosing the abuse they were worried about not being believed, and one man indicated that he was not believed when he did report the abuse.

4. Reluctance to Seek Help

A prerequisite to men receiving help would be that they perceived a need for counselling. None of the men in this study felt they needed to seek help. Help usually received was in conjunction with marital therapy or at the urging of their spouses to get help. One participant, an unmarried man, entered therapy because he was having vocational problems.

This finding should not be surprising when the reported age of the respondent and the age at the time of the abuse are taken into consideration. Almost all of the men who were abused were not aware of sources of help. This may have been due to the fact that their abuse and psychological boundary violations occurred approximately fifteen years ago. Public and professional discussion and treatment of male sexual abuse has only just begun to occur within the past decade. Even today, resources for sexually abused men are sparse and it may be that many abused males are unaware of appropriate professional services.

The present research also found that men were reluctant to seek treatment because they waited until they found a safe and supportive environment before they told anyone about their sexual abuse. Half the men (David, Kyle, Stan) indicated that they were reluctant to share their story about the abuse because they felt their abuser wanted them to keep quiet. For example, Stan shared that he attempted to tell a sibling but his mother found out and threatened to throw him out if he told "any more lies about her". In

addition, one man (David) continued to keep quiet because he was in need of parental companionship and acceptance and thought that by disclosing his abuse experiences he might jeopardize the relationship.

The traumatic experiences that these men experienced through psychological boundary violations and sexual abuse may have been compounded by the lack of safety and need for acceptance, thus making it difficult to disclose. Lew (1990) makes some interesting comments concerning the difficulty sexually abused men may have feeling safe enough to disclose in a therapeutic environment. Lew states that most counselling occurs in private, with only two people in the room. The door is closed and there is agreement that the session is to be kept confidential. This type of situation may be too similar to the home environment to be thought of as safe and secure and may inhibit men's ability to disclose in this type of therapeutic environment.

Limitations of the Study

Prior to discussing the limitations of the present study, it is important to outline briefly what the study was not intended to accomplish. First, the focus of the study was the investigation of mother-son boundary violations. Even though the father in the family can be very important (Nicolosi, 1991; Stanton, 1995), this study did not take into consideration the father's role. Second, the study dealt with only the adult son's experiences of psychological boundary violations when they lived with their mothers. I did not explore the mother's experiences in relationship to her son. Although such an investigation would have been valuable, it was beyond the scope of the present study. Finally, the study did not examine the long-term consequences of these participant's experiences of psychological boundary violations but attempted to stay as close to the experience of psychological boundary violations when they were with their mothers. In this respect the objectives of this research was met.

A number of limitations are evident in the present study. First, the most serious limitation is in using psychological language to describe the phenomenological experience. Jones (1985), for example, points out that although phenomenological reports may provide the researcher with valuable data, people may not be aware of some of the expectations and other framing cognitions that shape their perceptions. In other words, people are only capable of providing information about aspects of the phenomenon that are available through reflection and this takes away from the naiveté of the experience. They are incapable of addressing aspects of the phenomenon that are outside of awareness and therefore beyond reflection. Despite these limitations, however,

the phenomenological method is considered the most appropriate method when the aim of research is, as in the present study, to explore questions concerning lived-experience and meaning. Moreover, it is important to emphasize that limitations are inherent in the use of any method.

A second, related limitation involves the phenomenological method's reliance on language as a vehicle for understanding. That is, language is required for the expression and meaning of the participant's experience, and the interpretation of the phenomenon by the researcher. MacLeod (1984) views the phenomenological method as limited in this regard because words are capable of indicating, but never completely representing, phenomena. He adds that "our almost paradoxical task is, while of necessity using language in our analysis, to penetrate through language to real psychological structures, yet all the while recognizing that some linguistic artifacts are psychologically real" (p. 205). Thus, due to the limitations of language, phenomena cannot be apprehended fully.

A third limitation involves the generalizability of the study. Due to the small sample of participants it is difficult to form conclusions which could apply to anyone other than these six men. Information which might be obtained from six other men who experienced psychological boundary violations could be quite different. Therefore, the results are meant only to describe the men who participated in this study. However, an assumption will be made that these results may be useful in researching what other men experienced in relation to psychological boundary violations with their mothers. Furthermore, as stated by Polkinghorne (1979), "The purpose of phenomenological research is to increase the understanding of a functioning experiential concept, not to generalize statistical findings to a specific population" (p. 19).

Finally, data collection and data analysis are influenced by the researcher's presuppositions and biases. Although a degree of interpretation is inevitable in any type of research, I have attempted to minimize such influences through a continuous process of rigorous self-reflection (i.e., bracketing). That is, over the course of the study, I reflected on my presuppositions and biases about the phenomenon being investigated and attempted to "bracket" or suspend them. Also, I have articulated these presuppositions and biases so that readers can be aware of the perspective from which the research was conducted.

Implications for Further Research and Practice

The findings of the present study have a number of implications for further research on mother-son psychological boundary violations.

1. Future phenomenological studies could focus on men who represent other age groups, possess different levels of socio-economic status, different cultural groups, and different levels of education than the participants in the present study. These studies would be valuable in providing us with a more comprehensive understanding of psychological boundary violations.
2. Consistent with other research (Krug, 1989), findings from this study indicate that males have been abused by their mothers. Some of the following factors that brought attention to the men being referred for this study were marital quality, degree of sexual satisfaction in the parental marital relationship, degree of mother's social isolation, how affection was physically expressed between the mother and son, mother's involvement in bedtime, bathroom, and bathing rituals, and family sleeping arrangements. An implication for psychotherapists is to be aware of these factors in their counselling men.
3. We need to be sensitive to the situational differences found when males are sexually abused or incestually involved with their mothers and develop treatment programs accordingly. To do this, we need to focus research more closely on the males themselves, and on the male's psychological reactions to the abusive situation. We cannot assume that treatment approaches that are effective with female survivors will be appropriate for males until further research is done. Implications from this research for the treatment community also involve the creation of resources to meet the needs of men who require therapy.
4. Public attitudes which fail to view males as victims may have resulted in a bias which exists within the research and therapeutic communities. This bias may contribute to the failure to recognize males who have been sexually abused by females, and especially by their mothers.
5. As men are generally reluctant to discuss their abuse or seek treatment, the resulting implication for future research is to address ways in which men can be encouraged to seek help they need. Men need safe environments to permit them to share their traumatic emotional history. The idea that men can feel victimized, feel pain, the need for professional assistance may be necessary before they will be able to address their emotional selves.
6. Research is needed to understand the difficulty men have articulating their feelings, especially about sexual abuse. The likelihood that men will receive appropriate help is substantially reduced if they are unable to communicate what is wrong. The research (Hemfelt, and Warren, 1990) indicates that defense mechanisms may exist and prevent men from thoroughly understanding their experience of psychological boundary violations. Researching the role that denial and affective dissociation play in the lives of

sexually abused and maternally abused men may help to explain some of the difficulties these men have expressing their feelings.

7. Teaching healthy parenting expressions of maternal sexuality where appropriate emotional and sexual identity building messages are encouraged may reduce the risk of sexual abuse by mothers who are isolated. Further research is warranted to address this need as the number of mother-only-headed-homes seems to be increasing.

Conclusion

The present study grew out of my desire to explore and come to a greater understanding of the nature of the mother-son relationship in relation to psychological boundaries. Specifically, my intention was to explore mother-son psychological boundary violations as recalled by adult sons. Given this emphasis on experience and meaning, the phenomenological method seemed well suited for such an investigation.

Through the use of the phenomenological method, many aspects of the nature of the mother-son relationship in relation to boundaries were revealed. First, it appears that when there is not a clear delineation of boundaries, then one's needs are subordinated at the expense of the other. More specifically in this research, the men in this study had their needs subordinated to their mothers' needs while they were in their formative years.

Secondly, the effect of psychological boundary violations was very traumatic in men even though they may have difficulty in expressing their experiences and emotions.

This study has impacted my approach to attending to men's needs in individual or couples counselling as I believe it is very important for men to be able to share their experiences. It is my hope that through the findings of this research, others will be affected in a similar way.

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Appendix A

Thematic Abstractions of Guy's Experience

<u>Meaning Unit</u>	<u>Paraphrase</u>	<u>Label</u>
<p>1. And I guess what I have concluded is that both parents are extremely weak. They weren't there for me (the youngest) or for my sixth youngest sister (next to Guy).</p>	<p>Came to a conclusion that parents weren't able to meet his needs.</p>	<p>Realization of unmet needs</p>
<p>2. I feel like I'm behind the wheel of my dad's big truck, but I don't have a license. I feel like a boy in a man's body. My mom always made a big deal about anything to do with the body. Some days she was telling me it looked good. Other times she belittled it.</p>	<p>Guy was confused about his bodies appearance.</p>	<p>Feeling ambivalence towards body</p>
<p>3. He (dad) was always at work with my older brothers and I hated when my mom made me hang around her. She kept me from my one friend. I missed hanging out with him.</p>	<p>He resented the family arrangement that left him feeling alone.</p>	<p>Anger and alone</p>

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| <p>4. She (mom) told me alot of things when I was in my teens—more so than sis'. I didn't feel it was right for some reason, it left me overwhelmed.</p> | <p>Guy was overloaded by a certain type of conversation with his mother.</p> | <p>Feeling overwhelmed</p> |
| <p>5. Both my sister and me were told by my mom, but mostly me that when we were hurting to stop whining. She said if anybody has any (emotional) pain it is her.</p> | <p>Mom invalidated the children's feelings.</p> | <p>Feeling invalidated</p> |
| <p>6. She knew that my two older brothers beat me up and screwed me 'til I was hurting. I'm pretty peeved with her for not doing anything to protect me.</p> | <p>Dissatisfied with mom's ineffectual parenting.</p> | <p>Feeling anger & unprotected</p> |
| <p>7. Mom wouldn't listen to my sexual abuse stuff, she could only talk about the gross things done to her as a teenager. It was too much to hear.</p> | <p>Guy felt unheard about his abuse and was made to listen to his mother's troubles.</p> | <p>Left alone in pain</p> |
| <p>8. If mom would die, I couldn't survive was a thought I had for 30 years, until I discovered in counselling that this behavior is ridiculous.</p> | <p>Fears maternal loss and ability to survive.</p> | <p>Overcoming fear</p> |

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| <p>9. I just hated when my classmates would tease me about my effeminate behavior. I wanted to hurt them—they just laughed. However, I knew now that my anger towards them was really misdirected anger meant for my mom teaching me this behavior.</p> | <p>Strong feelings of contempt due to ridicule and shame.</p> | <p>Vengefulness</p> |
| <p>10. She (mom) wouldn't let me ride a bike, play any sports, ..., and would teach me female mannerisms, and dress me up in either my sisters' or her clothing. I only went along because this was the only time she was giving me attention.</p> | <p>Resentment at missing out on childhood activities and experienced female programming. Guy needed a sense of belonging, therefore went along with mom's wishes.</p> | <p>Feeling trapped</p> |
| <p>11. I looked to mom for protection but never felt close to her, therefore I started eating lots and fantasized about sexual things and this thereafter caused serious problems for me.</p> | <p>Felt unprotected by mother and escaped into food and sexual fantasizing that became problematic.</p> | <p>Feeling unprotected</p> |
| <p>12. I was tired of mom using me as a pinch-hitter for a husband or confident.</p> | <p>No longer will tolerate an inappropriate relationship.</p> | <p>Feeling used</p> |
| <p>13. Mom was nice to me and I felt close to her as</p> | <p>Was treated nice and close to mom as long as she got</p> | <p>Ambivalent attachment</p> |

long as I played her dress-up game and listened to her complain about dad. As soon as I said I didn't want to hear her lambasting dad anymore, she yelled, pouted, and shut me off for awhile. I didn't know what to think about her.

her way but was confused when he stood up to her.

Appendix B

Thematic Abstractions of Kyle's Experience

<u>Meaning Unit</u>	<u>Paraphrase</u>	<u>Label</u>
1. Both of my parents were alcoholics and fought alot. My father was verbally volatile. My mother was always yelling at my dad. I cringed during these times.	Kyle was exposed to parental fighting and this caused him to retract.	Feeling diminished
2. I was actually more fearful of mom. With dad I knew a sort of boundary, whereas mom was so inconsistent. I didn't know where I stood.	Both parents were inconsistent in their boundaries and his mother's relationship was ambivalent.	Feeling confused
3. Mom spoke negatively about dad, even more so when they separated " " was nine. Her cc were not alwa think she / her com would ai	Kyle was affected by his mom's berating of his dad.	Feeling ambivalent
4. When mom got drunk she was trying to be very nice to me—smothered me with affection—but she withdrew from me when she wasn't drunk.	Kyle's emotions were inconsistent.	Feeling ambivalent

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| 5. The TV was my baby-sitter while my parents worked. I hated them for this. | Felt neglected as a latch-key child and was angry as a result. | Feeling anger |
| 6. I had an image of a gray, overcast outlook in my formative years. I felt lost, floating-like. I didn't know who I was or where I was going or how I was to fit in. | Kyle's childhood was gloomy. | Hopelessness |
| 7. I felt unwanted by my parents. I was an OOPS thirteen years after my oldest sister. I felt that I was the cause of their financial problems. Dad was stingy with his money and mom let me know that I was selfish for even asking for lunch money. | Kyle felt unwanted and the source of parental difficulties. | Feeling burdened |
| 8. I was used as a ploy against dad. Mom tried to get one over him (dad) to meet her needs. I was the fuel for her defense, to vent her anger. That was an awful feeling of being used. | Kyle didn't appreciate being used by his mom. | Feeling used |
| 9. In my late teens my feelings were like a volcanic eruption with the lava flow destroying | Kyle's feels anger at being manipulated. | Feeling used |

everything in its path.

There are times when I still get those feelings when I challenge my mom's guilt-giving, manipulative tactics.

10. I felt a tremendous sense of anger and loneliness as a child. It seemed like I missed a lot of my childhood. I wanted a relationship with a mommy, not the one I had with mom. I felt mostly outside from the family. For example, I went to her bed after dad died (about 10 years of age) and wanted to ask her something. She told me to get lost and rolled back over to sleep.

Feeling of anger and loneliness due to lack of nurturing and communication.

Feeling neglected/alone

11. It was clear that dad didn't want anymore children but mom blamed me for the two miscarriages between my sister and me.

Kyle was made to feel responsible for the two miscarriages.

Feeling guilty

12. I broke a badminton racket (laughs), but my mother made me feel like shit for hurting its feelings. I was so confused. What did she think she was doing to my own?

Kyle was made to feel bad over an inanimate object at the expense of his own needs.

Feeling guilty

13. I was about nine years of age and mom gave me some money for a Mothers-Day gift for herself. I went out and bought something I thought she would like. She told me how greedy and selfish I was and threw the gift away. I hurt badly.

Kyle was shamed for his attempts to please his mother with a token g

Shame and guilt

14. In my mid-teens my mom had a party and got pretty drunk and so did I because the adults let me drink. After everyone left my mom asked me to help her get into bed so that she could sleep the booze off. What I hated is that she enticed me to perform oral sex on her. I couldn't look her in the eye for a long time

Kyle was coerced into sex with his mother and this disturbed him.

Feeling of shame

15. I wanted to be a band player but mom wanted to pick a career choice for me. When I got lippy with her she would constantly ridicule in front of her girlfriend dykes that music was a dead end. She and her friends would incessantly repeat the phrase—a stupid meaningless task.

Parental interference instead of support for a child's aspiration.

Feeling ridiculed and shame

16. Mom's style of disciplining (verbal and physical) without any explanation became my mode of retaliation to hurt her in my late teens.

Kyle felt justified in getting back at his mother. Wanting retribution

17. I was never allowed to handle money except for that Mothers-Day gift. I think this still haunts me today with my inability to manage financial matters very well.

Lack of training with financial purchases has lead Kyle to believe that he missed out on valuable training. Feeling incapable

Appendix C

Thematic Abstractions of Sid's Experience

<u>Meaning Unit</u>	<u>Paraphrase</u>	<u>Label</u>
1. Between 4-8 years of age I can't remember very well. This difficulty ended with my parent's divorce when I was eight. I feel alone in my loss; no one can explain it.	Sid has a difficult time recalling a four year period in his life and feels alone.	Feeling alone in his loss
2. Mom never explained the reason for the divorce and dad, five years ago at my request, finally did.	Sid was in need of understanding of his parent's divorce.	Gaining understanding
3. The earliest memory I had of my mom is when she let me crawl onto her lap in the back of a taxi. I knew she favored me over my sister from that point on until she found out that I talked to dad about their divorce.	Sid was in his mother's favor until she found out about his inquiry.	Loss of closeness
4. The early memories with dad was his encouragement in sports, whereas mom would never come out and say, "You never really wanted to play". Yet I wanted to play but was too	Remembers father support and mothers lack of support but was afraid to assert himself and subsequently lost opportunity to play sports.	Feeling frustrated

scared to speak up. The divorce finalized my team sports' involvement. She (mom) again never provided an explanation—nothing was said but it was to be understood....

5. Mom handled all the money matters for my younger sister and I. If we were given money, we were told how much to spend and on what purchases. This bothered me even if it was birthday money from others. It was if she couldn't trust me but I never complained because she was a single parent.

Mom didn't trust him and she controlled his spending. He was upset but never complained.

Feeling controlled

6. Because my sister got along well with my dad, even after he left us, my mom confided in me in regards to most anything. I felt privileged most of time except when she talked negatively about dad.

Sid was caught between privilege and privacy in regards to personal matters with his mother.

Conflicting feelings

7. I felt insecure as a child, I never had the affirmation I guess I needed. Mom was so worried as to how she was acting in front of her parents and family. And

Longing for acceptance and affirmation by parents.

Feeling insecure

dad withdrew for a number of years after the divorce.

8. I enjoyed my solitude, especially at my grandparents where we lived for quite some time; yet I hated it.... Does that make any sense?

Emotional conflict between being alone and being lonely. Emotional conflict

9. When it comes to school work, mom was very hard on me. She instilled fear into me. I'd get a 90% on a test and she never seemed pleased by that.

Felt fearful and unable to please mom in regards to academics. Fear of inadequacy

10. I felt awkward around my mom when my sister was around. It seemed that mom tried to ignore or get rid of my sister with excuses to have me all to herself. I liked my sister but I didn't like her getting this type of treatment or me feeling like some sort of "boyfriend".

Sid was uncomfortable with his mother's treatment of his sister and being treated as a boyfriend. Feeling uncomfortable

11. I felt like I was put under pressure to keep mom happy. She tried pouting, whining, making me feel guilty to get what she wanted.

As a child, Sid felt coerced for his mother's wishes. Feeling used

12. I'm ticked at her for judging me in my right to visit dad after their divorce.

Displeased at mom's judgment of him (Sid).

Strong displeasure

Appendix D

Thematic Abstractions of Dale's Experience

<u>Meaning Unit</u>	<u>Paraphrase</u>	<u>Label</u>
1. Mom tried to do everything she could to get dad to divorce her. Finally, she had an affair and he gave in (drop of voice and head).	Dale witnessed his mother's ploy in trying to get a divorce.	Feeling confusion
2. She (mom) created a fantasy world to cover up her guilt over her affair and then the divorce. For example, she conned a neighbor lady to have an affair to liberate herself. I'm peeved that she ruined two marriages. Then she and her new husband continued the charade with smoozy baby-talk—it was repulsive.	Dale was repulsed at his mother's game to deal with guilt.	Anger and repulsion
3. I seem to have difficulty recalling the first ten years of my life. Who was I then?	Hard to recall early childhood.	Sense of loss
4. I wanted to go to Europe with my mom, step-dad, and sister, but my parents were adamant about me not	Dale was hurt at not being able to travel to protect his sister and was visibly angry.	Hurt and Anger

going. That really stung. I knew inside that I had to go to protect my sister. When they got back several months later my sister acted different, I knew he (step-dad) did something to her. (visible anger—body shaking)

5. Mom was the boss and dad was the “hammer of discipline”. I called her Little Hitler and dad the SS troops. Mom could get just about anything she ordered.

Dale’s mom was domineering and his dad was subservient.

Feeling confused

6. Mom crushed my greatest childhood passion—to be an oceanographer. This created a lot of anxiety in me throughout my life. She told me I was too stupid to be an oceanographer. I had an A average. Only A+ was good enough for her she said. Yet she bragged about me to her friends as to how smart I was.

Dale’s career choice was ridiculed and he felt anxious.

Feeling anxious

7. Mom fantasized about having a strong man, having a nice place, and a prominent social standing. Her first husband was only a navy man—seemingly

Dale recognized his mom’s dissatisfaction and wishes for her unhappiness.

Resentment

less than her second husband, and air force officer. I think she deserves her unhappiness, since this second marriage isn't working.

8. Mom was guilty for her failures and tried to instill guilt onto others. I was incensed at her attitude to turn her guilt onto others. For example, when I was two years of age, my mother blamed me for giving a medication to my youngest brother and as a result he died from complications.

Dale was mad at his mother for projecting guilt onto him. Anger

9. I couldn't ever figure her out. It was like I was always kept off balance by her. Two examples. First, at an awards banquet she was gloating to everybody how I'd go places because I was smart, but at home, she'd tell me I'm stupid, a basket case, a bad boy, and I'm not officer material but a gun carrying trench man. A second example, was her pleasure with my strong body in my teens but then cut me down as a hairy ape

Dale received mixed messages from his mother. Sense of confusion

when I developed chest hair.

10. I got fed up with her (mom) telling me what to do. She tried to shape me into her mold and didn't support my dreams and therefore, she won't control me anymore.

Dale wasn't going to be told what to do by his unsupportive mother. Feeling used

Appendix E

Thematic Abstractions of David 's Experience

<u>Meaning Unit</u>	<u>Paraphrase</u>	<u>Label</u>
1. I was picked on in school due to my small size. I tried to play ball but my strength was inadequate in comparison to others. The teasing was humiliating.	David was small for his peer group and their teasing hurt his feelings.	Feeling rejected
2. My dad was so aloof from me. My mom tried to keep me from doing farm work because of my small size in the early years. This added to my humiliation because I was the second oldest of seven children (six sisters). She (mom) had more influence on dad than I think he would of liked to have given.	Mom tried to protect her son, however, this caused David shame.	Shame
3. I believe she had emotional problems and would use her tears to stop my sense of adventure. I loved to explore the woods by our farm. This helped my loneliness.	Mom's emotionality was a mode to influence her son and stop his adventurous spirit and thus alienated him.	Feeling restricted
4. When I was old enough	Mom changed her views on	Feeling used

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| to leave home mom tried to encourage me to take over the farm. She wouldn't listen to my dreams of becoming a teacher or biologist. | her son's involvement on the farm and wouldn't support his dreams. | |
| 5. When I did play some organized ball I should have been bitter at dad for not being there, instead I wanted to lash out at mom for driving me around because she was always making excuses for him. | David was projecting his anger onto his mom instead of his dad. | Feeling vengeful |
| 6. To win my parents' affection I joined 4-H. | David tried a farming related activity in the hopes of gaining his parents' favor. | Wanting connection |
| 7. While I was getting my university training my parents tried to make me feel guilty for not staying on the farm. I'd come home every weekend but they didn't seem to appreciate my efforts. | David felt controlled and unappreciated by his parents. | Feeling resentment |
| 8. I felt closer to mom but I'm not sure that we were bonded. I only felt closer in the sense that at least I could talk to her. What bugged me at times was that | David wasn't as close as he would of liked and he felt pressured to meet her expectations for him. | Feeling ambivalent |

she tried to push me into things that she wanted for me.

9. Whenever mom and I had a disagreement, I came out feeling guilty because she would go to tears on me. She would inevitably state, “see what you’ve done.”

David felt guilty for his mother’s tears.

Feeling guilt

10. Mom expressed contempt for sex to us kids. “Sex was dirty”, she’d say. In my adolescence I was confused by this. I thought I wanted to date girls but was too scared and to protect my desires I built up a resentment towards girls.

Mom taught the children that sex was dirty. This created confusion for David, therefore, he protected himself by having resentment towards girls.

Feeling confusion

11. I felt alone and didn’t feel good about myself. When I was old enough to go out I went to the local pool hall. I was teased by the other boys there about being a fag—I didn’t really know what a fag was. I thought it was to do with my not wanting to date girls. An older nice man rescued me from the taunting and eventually we were “friends”

David sought company in a local pool hall and got ridiculed from peers. An eventual friendship with an older man was established.

Search for acceptance

12. Even on my birthday I never felt it was special for me alone. I always celebrated it with a neighbor girl who was “my twin” and also my parents’ anniversary was two days after my birthday. I was told that I was being selfish to request a celebration for me alone.

David never felt that the birthday celebration was to honor him alone.

Feeling neglected

13. At sixteen years of age the older man started showing me affection like nobody had done before. I felt awkward at first and it felt unnatural but I compartmentalized those feelings in exchange for the affection.

David was finally receiving attention from someone but it posed a dilemma for him.

Emotional confusion

Appendix F

Thematic Abstractions of Stan 's Experience

<u>Meaning Unit</u>	<u>Paraphrase</u>	<u>Label</u>
1. My dad had drinking and explosive anger problems, and had several adulterous affairs. I was very angry in my teens. I think I was fifteen when we as a family voted to leave him after yet another affair, but my mom's religious views thwarted that. I was indignant at her for her mistake.	Stan was angry at his mother's change of mind to leave dad.	Anger
2. Mom was a huge influence on my thought life, choice of friends, and theology. I couldn't make a decision without her approval.	Mom has a profound influence on his thought life.	Sense of intrusion
3. Mom had a lot of control over me to keep me from hating dad. I had my right to.	Stan's anger towards dad was tempered by mom.	Feeling suppressed
4. We moved five times in ten years and I clung to mom through each new adjustment. For example, schools and neighborhoods.	Stan was fearful of each new move and found a sense of security with mom.	Threatened autonomy

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| <p>5. I would have died for my mom and would do anything to help her emotionally, and I was concerned with her heart problem. We started sleeping in the same bed around twelve years of age since dad was away so much or was drunk alot. I shared everything I had and she seemingly felt better. I eventually got sexually hooked.</p> | <p>Stan cared deeply about his mom's health and became sexually involved with her.</p> | <p>Feeling seduced</p> |
| <p>6. (In late teens) I got angry at mom because she forced me to see things her way.</p> | <p>Stan was angry at his mother's forceful way.</p> | <p>Feelings of anger</p> |
| <p>7. I grew up too fast and had to assume the mantle of male leadership, even though my mom and dad didn't divorce until I was seventeen.</p> | <p>Stan missed his childhood because he had to adopt an older role.</p> | <p>Feeling burdened</p> |
| <p>8. In relation to my mother I felt very vulnerable as a child. I had to always be emotionally there for her. I wasn't always sure I could comfort her in her time of need.</p> | <p>Stan felt inadequate in trying to meet his mother's emotional needs.</p> | <p>Feeling burdened and overwhelmed</p> |
| <p>9. When I played sports I</p> | <p>Stan sacrificed his</p> | <p>Feeling used</p> |

tried to stay in close proximity to make sure she was O.K. I didn't play organized sports because mom told me that I'd have to travel away from home and her.

gratification to meet his mother's needs.

10. In my mid-teens I felt both close and awkward around mom but when my parents divorced, I felt smothered by her. This feeling of being smothered amplified when I got married. My mom tried to break up our marriage. She's an interfering, controlling, (face turns red)

Stan's feelings are mixed in his mid-teens and amplified in his later years.

Feeling intruded upon

11. Mom made me feel special but eventually this became my obstacle. I felt used.

Stan realizes that he was being used.

Feeling used

12. I still find it hard to accept the fact that mom is a manipulator. When I left, my younger brother (28y), my sister (26y), and her husband all live with mom in a two bedroom house. Mom convinced them all that it is best to keep the family together.

Stan is struggling with certain feelings toward his mother.

Feeling grief

Appendix G

Phenomenology of Mother-Son Psychological Boundary Violations

Consent to Participate

I, _____, am aware that the purpose of this study is a phenomenological inquiry into the nature of a certain type of mother-child relationship. Both my relationship with my mother and my current relationship with her are of interest. A phenomenological inquiry requires examples of people's lived-experience. Through the use of an interview format, I will be asked to describe my experiences in as much detail as possible. I understand that the present study is being conducted as a masters thesis by Adam Howorko, under the supervision of Dr. Dustin Shannon-Brady of the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta.

I agree to participate in the study and I am willing to share experiences with the researcher. I am aware that one or two interviews of approximately one hour in length will be tape recorded in order that it can be transcribed for later analysis. I realize that my participation in the study is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If I choose to withdraw from the study, any information or any data that I provide will be destroyed. I am also aware that if discussion of my experiences raises any concerns for me then I will contact my present counselor or Adam Howorko will suggest individuals that I might contact.

I am aware that all information associated with this study is strictly confidential and that my identity, or that of any persons that I mention, will only be known to the researcher and will not be revealed at any time. When transcribing the interview recordings, the researcher will use pseudonyms (i.e., false names) for my name and for those of any persons that I mention. These pseudonyms will also be used in writing the final report. Any details in the interview recordings that might identify me or any persons that I mention will also be changed during the transcribing. Furthermore, the researcher will be the only person with access to the tape recordings and interview transcripts, and these will be stored in a secure place. Interview recordings will be erased when the transcript has been completed.

I am also aware that the information obtained from the interview(s) will be used by the researcher solely for purposes of this study and that the transcript of the interview(s)

conducted with me may be included in the appendices of the researcher's thesis. Any portion of the transcript that is not included in the appendices will be destroyed following the completion of the study.

Signature_____

Date_____

Witness_____

Appendix H

Information Sheet

Topic: Mother-Son Psychological Boundary Violations

Hi, my name is Adam Howorko and I am a masters student at the University of Alberta in the counselling program in the Department of Educational Psychology. I have selected this topic of mother-son psychological boundary violations because of personal interests and professional experience.

The intent of the present research study is to explore the mother-son subsystem of the family. The purpose is to discover common and important experiential themes of mother-son psychological boundary violation as recalled by adult sons.

Your personal counsellor has recommended you as a suitable candidate for this study based on his or her assessment and my selection criteria. Participation in the study will require only a small investment of your time: no more than 3-4 hours, spread out over about a 2 month period. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may stop at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you should call the researcher as soon as possible to inform him. The researcher and your counsellor may stop your participation in the study at any time if it is decided that it is in your best interest.

The study will focus on your answers to some questions that I will ask you. You will be asked to take part in 3 interviews. The first interview will last about a half hour and will provide you with the chance to ask any questions that you might have about the study. The researcher will also briefly ask some preliminary questions about your age, birthplace, education, and mental health history. In the second interview, the researcher will ask some questions of about your relationship with your mother. This second interview should take about an hour to a maximum of two hours long. In the final interview, which should last about thirty minutes, you will be asked to verify the information collected by the researcher. The interviews will be audiotaped and then would be destroyed at the end of the study. At the end of the study, you will receive a summary of the results.

This study has gone through the necessary ethical steps to ensure that your well-being will be protected although, there are possible risks and benefits involved in participating in this study. During the interviews, it is possible that you may begin to be aware of thoughts, emotions, or feelings that are unpleasant or disturbing. Your counsellor should be contacted to assist you in the event of this occurrence. It is also

possible that you may feel pleased or satisfied in being able to talk about your experiences of boundary violations. Another benefit from participating in this study is that it is likely your self-knowledge will increase as a result of being in a study of this kind.

If you agree to participate in this study, an appointment will be scheduled to meet at the Education Clinic at the University of Alberta. If you are interested in participating in the study or would like more information please call the following people:

Adam Howorko 492-3746
(Principal Investigator)

Dr. D. Shannon-Brady 492-1163
(Co-Investigator)

Appendix I

Interview Guide

Preamble

The interview guide permits some structure and direction for the interview and ensures that certain information is asked of each participant. In order to follow the uniqueness of each research participant's experience I may adapt my questions to pursue relevant material emerging during each individual interview.

Preliminary Portion of the Initial Interview

*Brief introduction. Ensure that the setting is comfortable.

*Brief summary about the study: purpose and requirements made of the participants. Hand out participant information sheet and consent form. Ensure that the participant knows that he can refuse to answer any questions.

Do you have any questions about the forms that you have signed?

Do you have any questions about the study? about myself?

Interview Questions

1. Background Information

*Name

*Age

*Birthplace: Where were you born? When did you leave home? Were both parents always in the home? Can you describe your upbringing?

*Marital Status: Are you married? Have you ever been married? In a current relationship?

*Do you have any siblings?

2. Mental Health History

*Have you ever been hospitalized?

*Can you tell me how long you have seen your counsellor?

*Have you ever been involved in any therapy groups? self-help groups?

3. Now I would like to focus on your relationship with your mother during your childhood.

- * Tell me about an experience of face-to-face contact with your mother that stands out in your mind. Please describe, in as much detail as possible, the situations, the images, your actions, and the thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations that you experienced during the course of your childhood. Start with the earliest accounts as best as you are able to recall.
4. Can you tell me how your relationship with your mother affected your relatedness to your childhood world?
 5. Would you describe how your relationship with your mother affected your sense of relatedness to yourself, or your opinion of yourself as a child?
 6. How did your relationship with your mother affect what you did as a child?