Fatherhood: What’s Dad Got to Do With It?

Real Father, Symbolic Father, and Becoming a Father

Michael J. Diamond, Ph.D., FIPA

This conference takes a unique look at fatherhood by adding a perspective that is often neglected in the discourse about fatherhood — namely, the good-enough real father and fatherhood as a transformational phase in the father’s personal development.

In providing a deeper understanding of fatherhood and new ways of looking at masculinity, Dr. Diamond will discuss what it means to be a good-enough real, as well as symbolic father and how fathering helps to transform a father himself.

Until recently, psychoanalysis has largely neglected the actual, flesh-in-blood father while privileging the symbolic, Oedipal father. This contrasts with how psychoanalysis has treated the study of mothering with its focus on the actual, intersubjective child-mother interaction. Dr. Diamond will review the history of psychoanalytic theorizing about the father and will touch upon the importance of the father as third in analytic practice. He will emphasize the crucial importance of the child’s need both for the father’s recognition (i.e., being seen and responded to) and his capacity to hold the symbolic paternal function (i.e. Law) in the context of rivalrous feelings, neglect, and desire.

Dr. Diamond will illustrate the complexity of the powerful emotional impact of fathers on their children by presenting a clinical example in addition to considering the foremost father-child narratives in Western mythology — namely, the tale of Oedipus in Oedipus the King, the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, and the easily overlooked father-daughter narrative of Antigone in Oedipus at Colonus.

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Following his main presentation Dr. Diamond will discuss the following papers:

**The Dead Father Becomes Alive**  
by Lynn Higgins, LCSW

This paper is a personal narration of an experience of loss of an absent father — a father whose emotional illness was apparent when the author was 4 years old, and died when she was 11 years old. The author shares the transformation of the internal representation of her father through her eyes as a child who internalized his pain, and now from the perspective of a mature psychoanalyst. The pain of loss of the real father activated the creation of an imagined idealized one, who was constantly recreated to be whatever she needed. From his piano playing, to her own, a truer understanding of his internal state has released the need to recreate him. With only a few actual memories she kept her father alive through anger and sadness. Fear, rage, undefined agony, and later, understanding, were all part of her personal journey.

**Mourning My Father — Processing Ambivalent Grief**  
by Alma Krupka Klein, M.D.

The author narrates her personal experience of the complex loss and mourning of her father who was first lost to dementia. Ultimately, when he died her bereavement was tainted with ambivalence as she attempted to reconcile her childhood father with the angry and ultimately passive man that replaced him. The author addresses dementia and mourning from a relational perspective, namely the multiplicity of selves, suggesting that in dementia parts of the self are gradually destroyed, ultimately rendering the sufferer unrecognizable, unknowable and unreachable. As parts of her father’s self were deteriorating parts of her own self were activated.

**Continuing Education Credits (pending)**

**Social Work** Continuing Education credits are pending, however New York State approval is not guaranteed in time for this Conference.

In addition, a **Certificate of Attendance** will be available to other professionals upon request.

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