

An Examination of Paternal Influence on High-Achieving Gifted Males

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The challenges facing contemporary boys are complex, highlighting the importance of positive paternal influence for young men to achieve success. This study examines the father-son relationships of 10 prominent gifted men of achievement to identify factors influencing talent development. Through biographical analysis, 6 significant themes were identified: unconditional belief in son, strong work ethic, encouragement and guidance, maintaining high expectations and fostering determination, pride in son's accomplishments, and mutual admiration and respect. Implications for parents and educators of high-achieving gifted males are discussed.

“My father didn’t tell me how to live; he lived and let me watch him do it.” —Clarence Kelland (Lyons & Lyons, 2002, p. 44)

It is a challenging time to be a boy in this country. Such is the message heralded in today’s popular press (Sommers, 2000a; Tyre, 2006), and bookstore shelves are resplendent with recently published books calling attention to the plight of the young American male (e.g., Neu & Weinfeld, 2007). Psychologists and gender experts debate whether or not the problems faced by boys are more difficult than those facing girls (Gurian, 1996; Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Sommers, 2000b), and educators claim that the destructive effects of society’s failure

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to recognize boys' emotional needs are becoming evident in school (Pollack, 1998). A review of statistics from any state in the nation or any individual school district provides evidence of the problems that young males experience in our schools. An examination of any grade level, socioeconomic group, or race clearly indicates that boys are not performing as well as girls (Neu & Weinfeld, 2007).

While concerns about boys are becoming part of the national conversation, a parallel phenomenon is evolving. Psychologists, educational theorists, and sociologists are noting that fatherhood in America is changing (Balcom, 2002). Economic, political, and social influences are reshaping the role fathers play in the development of their children, while religious, political, and cultural leaders call for increased paternal involvement in boys' lives.

Although the dialogue regarding the problems facing boys and the role their fathers should play in their lives continues, little attention is being drawn to issues specifically facing gifted young men. While numerous researchers in gifted education have examined issues facing gifted females, research addressing the developmental issues of gifted males is limited. The body of research on gifted males indicates a number of psychosocial issues central to their development, including identity, belief in self, psychological androgyny, emotional sensitivity, empathy (Hébert, 2000a, 2000b; Wilcove, 1998), and limitations of traditional masculinity (Kerr & Cohn, 2001). Several of these same issues have also been examined in culturally diverse gifted males (Hébert, 1996, 2002; Kao & Hébert, 2006).

As researchers and educators examine the needs of males in this country, it is critical that we also invest our energy in addressing the specific needs of gifted males. As indicated by the limited research available on this population, more studies are needed to gain a better understanding of the intellectual and psychosocial issues facing gifted males. Moreover, studies focusing on parenting gifted males are also necessary in order to develop appropriate interventions. The following study examining paternal influence on high-achieving gifted males is an attempt to address this critical gap in the literature.

Review of Related Literature

Research on parent-child relationships has typically focused on the role of the mother, and there is little doubt that this relationship can be one of the most significant factors in healthy child development. Less attention has been focused, however, on the role of the father and the influence of his parental style, attitudes, and behavior. As the boy progresses through childhood and adolescence, research has indicated that continued paternal involvement can be a powerful predictor of positive outcomes. Veneziano (2003) contended that paternal warmth is a strong predictor of successful functioning for children, possibly even more than maternal warmth. Fathers also play an important role in the development of reading abilities for their children (Herb & Willoughby-Herb, 1998), and both parents' involvement and commitment to achievement is positively associated with the child's success in adolescence (Paulson, 1994). A strong bond with both mother and father through childhood may be associated with more affectionate and positive relationships with partners later in life (Moeller, 2001). Fathers who actively participate in parenting are also able to help their sons develop empathy, regardless of their own level of empathy (Bernadett-Shapiro, Ehrensaft, & Shapiro, 1996). In their comprehensive review of research on fatherhood, Marsiglio, Amato, Day, and Lamb (2000) reported that most studies of fathers in two-parent households indicated that paternal involvement was related to positive child outcomes such as school success, lower instances of behavioral or emotional problems, and positive social behaviors.

Additional insights into the father-son relationship resulted from the scholarship of DeKlyen, Speltz, and Greenberg (1998). These researchers noted that fathers could influence their sons greatly by aiding in gender identity development, modeling correct behaviors, and applying beneficial disciplinary models rather than fear-producing methods. In their examination of fathering styles, the researchers conducted observations of male youths' reactions to their families as they entered and exited rooms. After classifying each response, cross-referencing was done with the boy's clinical data to determine whether he had been referred for behavioral difficulties. Boys who were insecurely attached to either parent were five times more likely to be clinic-referred. DeKlyen, Speltz, and Greenberg concluded that

increased paternal involvement not only helps to prevent conduct disorders, but also supports recovery from them.

Researchers have also highlighted that the presence and involvement of fathers is of utmost importance for culturally diverse adolescent males (Canada, 1998; Rodney & Mupier, 1999). A research team of Hrabowski, Maton, and Grief (1998) examined fatherhood in the African American community. These researchers interviewed fathers of successful African American males and identified common characteristics that framed their parenting styles. Among those identified were: a stress on discipline, religion, and education; monitoring the use of television, video games, and media; careful attention paid to son's friends and peers; an emphasis on academic grades and talent development; strict disciplinary measures for breaking family rules, but without physical punishment; and open discussion on the topics of sex and drugs.

More recently, Morman and Floyd (2006) conducted research in which they facilitated independent surveys, the first with a population of fathers and the second with a population of father-son duos. In each of the surveys, participants responded to the question "What does it mean to be a good father?" Results indicated that fathers and sons had relatively similar concepts of good fathers, naming the same traits but in slightly different orders. The leading traits across all three groups were characteristics such as love, availability, role modeling, involvement, and support.

Although significant paternal involvement is associated with a number of positive outcomes for children, studies have also indicated that a lack of involvement is related to a number of negative outcomes. Young men who do not receive adequate affection from fathers may be more likely to experience feelings of rejection and unhappiness (Mussen, Young, Gaddini, & Morante, 1963), while sons of fathers who are altogether absent tend to have lower self-esteem than their peers (Balcom, 2002). In addition, paternal absence has been shown to be a strong predictor of violence and violent crime in males, even more so than poverty (Mackey & Mackey, 2003).

With the importance of paternal involvement understood, researchers have considered the factors influencing a father's level of involvement with his children. Flouri and Buchanan (2003) found a variety of factors that tend to improve paternal involvement including

higher education levels, spending less time at work, and complementary maternal involvement. Regarding factors that contributed to lessened paternal involvement, the researchers noted emotional and behavioral problems of the sons as well as domestic tension.

The late 1990s saw the publication of several books on parenting boys. This resulted from a number of psychologists becoming interested in examining boys' culture to determine its influence on later problems. Drawing from his clinical experience, psychologist Michael Gurian (1996) proposed a four-step model of "healthy fatherhood." The first step was involvement with the infant son from the earliest possible opportunity. The second practice involved the father establishing a stable, positive identity in the community. The next step was for a man to communicate a sense of heritage and tradition to his son, while allowing him to forge a separate identity overall. Finally, the father needed to learn the process of "letting go" and understand that the transition from boyhood to manhood required increasing independence and respect. Gurian explained, "By the time the son leaves home, or soon after, the father-son relationship must shift to a relationship between two adult men—two emotional peers, of equal emotional power" (p. 126).

Psychologist William Pollack (1998) also contributed to the conversation regarding father-son relationships in this country. Indicating that "Fathers are not male mothers" (Pollack, 1998, p. 113), he suggested that society should embrace the unique role fatherhood provides in a boy's development and help men to expand their parenting role in comfortably masculine ways. As some men may feel uncomfortable discussing their feelings, Pollack proposed a model of "love through action," because men may be excellent at subtly sharing their feelings through joint father-son activities. Moreover, Pollack highlighted that men must strive to remain close to their sons throughout their lives, noting that "Boys are never hurt by too much love!" (p. 137).

Research Methods and Procedures

Inspired by Goertzel and Goertzel's (1962) biographical examination of eminence, Simonton's (1999) psychological study of eminent

individuals, and McGreevy's (1990, 1992) biographical case studies of eminent individuals, we chose to pursue our question through a biographical examination of the father-son relationship in the lives of prominent high-achieving gifted males. With these models as guides to designing our study, the following research question guided our inquiry: What factors in father-son relationships influence the talent development of high-achieving gifted males?

Selection of Subjects

We began the study with a critical decision to limit our examination to high-achieving gifted males from the baby boom generation, born between 1946 and 1964. This was done because we realized that fatherhood in this country prior to World War II was significantly different from the period following the war. In a sociological examination of fatherhood in America, Griswold (1993) paid close attention to baby boom fathers. He noted that during this historical period, although women remained the primary caregiver to children, men took on a new role of using personal interaction and affection with children to inculcate positive values. New fathers were encouraged to remain the primary breadwinner and traditional family leader, but also take an unprecedented active role in affective child rearing.

The second significant decision in planning the study was our determination to examine biographies of males who experienced positive relationships with their fathers. Realizing that other prominent men of achievement have experienced negative father-son relationships, and in many cases may have been raised by a single mother, we chose to save that population for a separate follow-up study. A third important decision in designing the study was our choice of a definition of giftedness. We chose Renzulli's (1978) behavioral notion of giftedness represented by an interaction among above-average ability, task commitment, and creativity brought to bear on some domain of human endeavor. With Renzulli's landmark creative-productive definition of giftedness, we were able to select subjects from a variety of professional domains whose creative productivity was evident in their significant contributions to society.

With these decisions made, criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) was implemented, whereby the subjects had to meet some predetermined

criterion of importance. The criteria for selection of the 10 subjects were as follows: (1) baby boomers, (2) male, (3) positive father-son relationship, (4) evidence of gifted behavior in their contributions to their professional domain, (5) national prominence in their professional domain, and (6) availability of biographies or autobiographies. The 10 prominent high-achieving gifted males selected for the study are presented in Table 1.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred through three phases. Phase 1 consisted of searching for all available biographies and autobiographies through the Internet. We scoured libraries and bookstores to obtain materials. In addition, we utilized the state's interlibrary loan system and were successful in obtaining all of the biographies identified in our Internet search. The second phase of our data collection involved an additional Internet search. We realized that many of our subjects had been interviewed and featured in the popular media; therefore, we used the Internet to locate articles from national magazines and journals. The articles we located served as secondary sources of biographical material and confirmed the life stories presented in the published biographies and autobiographies.

When our search for all available materials was complete, we spent extensive time reading. We photocopied all of the pages from the biographies that featured any discussion of the father-son relationship, and used colored highlighting markers to draw attention to specific passages. This extensive collection served as our qualitative data set. The highlighted passages were equivalent to transcripts from traditional qualitative interview studies.

Data Coding and Analysis

Inductive analysis procedures were used to analyze and interpret the data. This process involved managing data through coding, categorizing into themes, and determining relationships among the themes (Huberman & Miles, 1994). The photocopied biographical materials were coded and analyzed according to the coding process described by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). In the first stage of analysis, we examined

Table 1

Gifted Male Subject Descriptives

Subject	Professional Field	Major Achievement	Father
Bart Conner	Olympic Gold Medalist	International Gymnastics Hall of Fame Inductee	Harold Conner
John Edwards	Former U.S. Senator, North Carolina	Presidential Candidate	Wallace Edwards
Franklin Graham	Evangelical Minister	President of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Samaritan's Purse	Rev. Billy Graham
Ron Howard	Academy Award-Winning Director	Academy of Achievement Inductee	Rance Howard
Carl Lewis	Olympic Track and Field Athlete, Nine-Time Gold Medalist	USA Track and Field Hall of Fame Inductee	Bill Lewis
Paul O'Neill	Outfielder, Cincinnati Reds and N.Y. Yankees	Five-Time World Series Champion	Charles "Chick" O'Neill
Tim Russert	Journalist, Political Commentator	Recipient of 29 Honorary Doctorate Degrees	Tim "Big Russ" Russert
Carlos Santana	Pioneering Musician	Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Inductee	José Santana
Jerry Seinfeld	Actor, Comedian	Cocreator of the Most Widely Syndicated TV Sitcom in History	Kal Seinfeld
J. C. Watts, Jr.	Former U.S. Congressman, Oklahoma	First African American to Serve in U.S. House Republican Leadership	J. C. "Buddy" Watts, Sr.

all biographical materials by combing through the documents for categories of phenomena and for relationships among those categories. Codes were organized with phrases that identified similar patterns, themes, recurring ideas or relationships, and consistencies or differences between and among segments of data. This process of coding

the data into equivalent categories enabled us to manage and reconstruct meaningful components (LeCompte, 2000). The second stage of analysis involved our examination of single instances in the data to derive their meaning. This strategy assisted us in breaking up the data in an analytically meaningful way and required that we raise further questions about our data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

In the third stage of the analysis, we determined meaningful patterns and consistency between two or more themes within the data. Through this process, we established generalizations that explained consistencies in the data. To conclude the analysis, our generalizations about the experiences of the high-achieving gifted males were contrasted with published literature on gifted individuals.

Our analysis process can be understood through the following example. In the first stage of coding, we recognized similar patterns, commonalities, or recurring ideas in the data that were labeled using such terms as *coaching, discipline, advising, emotional support, teaching, listening, and guiding*. In our second stage of analysis, we searched for single instances in the data and noted that the biographies of two subjects, Franklin Graham and Carlos Santana, described periods in the lives of these men in which they broke away from their families during early adulthood as they experimented with an independent lifestyle different from that of their families. As we raised questions of this data and further examined the life stories of both of these men, we realized that the father-son relationship remained strong during those periods. We realized that what was described was indeed consistent with the other subjects in the study in that Graham and Santana experienced a strong bond with their fathers in spite of their rebellious experimentation. We concluded our analysis process by establishing consistencies between several patterns in our earlier coding. In the final stage of analysis, it became apparent that relationships existed between and among these concepts, and they were eventually merged into a category labeled *encouragement and guidance*.

Findings

The lives of the 10 subjects included in the study featured father-son relationships incorporating the fathers' unconditional belief in their

sons. The fathers of the men provided encouragement and guidance while maintaining high expectations and fostering determination. They were inspirational as they modeled a strong work ethic for their sons. In addition, the father-son relationships incorporated mutual admiration and respect, and the fathers consistently expressed pride in their sons' accomplishments.

Unconditional Belief in Son

The biographical materials on comedian Jerry Seinfeld highlighted that his father realized early in Jerry's adolescence that his son was serious about becoming a comic. Biographers noted that Kalman Seinfeld had an absolute faith that Jerry would be successful in his chosen field. According to many of his old friends, Kalman used to share with virtually everyone he met, "Hey, you should meet my son. He's a pretty funny guy" (Tracy, 1998, p. 21). Jerry's father had developed his own effective comic routine that enabled him to be successful in sales work. Jerry explained how this influenced his father's belief in his son:

My dad was extremely encouraging about it. He was a salesman and that's a similar type of life. You're not really doing any legitimate kind of work, you're just making a living talking people into things. That isn't much different from what a comic does. (Tracy, 1998, p. 21)

Kalman Seinfeld saw the similarity between himself and his son and understood how to be supportive. Jerry described that there were many times he would drive into Manhattan at midnight hoping to be invited to perform in one of the comedy clubs. He would hang out until 3 in the morning waiting to go onstage only to face the disappointment of not performing. During these difficult periods, his father remained confident in his son. Jerry explained, "I'd get home at four-thirty depressed, and dad would wake up and come into the kitchen, sit there and talk to me about it" (Tracy, 1998, p. 21).

The evangelist Franklin Graham experienced a similar unconditional support from his father, the renowned Billy Graham. Throughout his early adulthood, Franklin struggled with living in the shadow of a "larger than life" father as well as deciding whether he

would follow a Christian lifestyle. He underwent a long period of adolescent rebellion and searching and eventually chose to follow Christ. In his autobiography, Franklin Graham explained the unconditional quality of his father's confidence as he described his father's poignant message to him during a low point in his identity search:

You're going to have to make a choice either to accept Christ or to reject him. You can't continue to play the middle ground . . . I want you to know that we're proud of you, Franklin. We love you no matter what you do in life and no matter where you go . . . The door of our home is always open, and you're always welcome. But you're going to have to make a choice. (Graham, 1995, p. 120)

In a world far removed from evangelical ministry, the gifted musician Carlos Santana underwent a period of searching parallel to Franklin Graham's. Santana's father José was also a musician and he and Carlos shared a special relationship. Santana's biographer described, "José felt in his heart of hearts that Carlos was destined for bigger things than the dusty roads and simple lives lived by the people in Autlán de Navarro" (Shapiro, 2000, p. 15) and explained that there was a "near-psychic bond" that formed between father and son.

Throughout his schooling years, Carlos Santana underachieved academically as he focused on his teenage dream of becoming a legendary rock musician. José Santana, an established mariachi band musician, was often able to offer his son performance opportunities playing violin or guitar in a band. Carlos, however, was more focused on the musical world of the burgeoning hippie district in San Francisco. Although Carlos' mother was increasingly unhappy with his friends and lifestyle, José Santana remained convinced that his son would ultimately find his way.

When Carlos moved out of the house following a particularly ugly fight with his mother, José created a job for his son as a guitarist in his weekend gigs. Eventually Carlos ceased contact with his family for a 2-year period. During this time, his parents received secondhand reports of Carlos playing guitar throughout the Haight-Ashbury district. Not knowing the truth, José always tried to keep a positive spin on those reports, as he remained convinced that his son would soon settle down. Eventually Carlos reunited with his family

as he was set to play in a major musical show in San Francisco. His biographer explained, "For Carlos, the isolation from his family had been about pride. He had no accomplishments to hold up to them and did not want to appear a failure in their eyes" (Shapiro, 2000, p. 63). As the Santana Blues Band's reputation grew exponentially, he felt comfortable enough to return to his family and they praised his accomplishments.

Professional baseball player Paul O'Neill was grateful for the strong faith his father maintained in him as well. His father's unconditional belief in his son was evident early on in his life and remained with him throughout his athletic career. As a high school senior, O'Neill was faced with the difficult decision of whether he should pursue a college degree or enter the world of professional baseball following his high school graduation. Turning to his father for advice, his dad assured him that it was his personal decision to make. Several years later Paul O'Neill struggled to overcome a rather long slump in his career. He questioned whether he should leave baseball. During this difficult time, he received a handwritten letter from his father, further evidence of his unconditional belief in his son. Paul described the importance of that letter:

Reading his words off the page, it was almost as if he was physically there, putting his arm around me, energizing me with the will to carry on, continuing with his pep talk about how I was *his* son and I was *not* going to quit and how I was *never* going to quit . . . When I put the letter away, a subtle shift had taken place inside, giving me a sense of certainty that this was not the end of my baseball ride. I resolved to give it one more go, for the sake of myself and for my family. (O'Neill & Rocks, 2003, p. 70)

The Olympic athlete Carl Lewis found the same emotional support from his father. As an internationally recognized track star, Carl's career was spotted with periods in which his performance and personal style were often criticized in the media. For Carl, such criticism was challenging, as Lewis noted in his autobiography that his father had taught him and his siblings to always do what they believed was right. His father encouraged him to maintain his personal convictions and conduct himself accordingly. Following the 1984 Olympics,

when several sports journalists were broadcasting negative reports about Lewis, his father counseled him: “You’re not doing anything wrong, Carl. You haven’t done anything to hurt anybody. You’re not bad-mouthing anybody. You’re not mistreating anyone. Not doing any of that stuff. You’re doing just fine” (Lewis & Marx, 1990, p. 99). His father’s unconditional support and belief in his son was reinforced further as he encouraged Carl to “Be yourself, and don’t worry about what’s going on around you. Everything is going to turn around” (Lewis & Marx, 1990, p. 99).

Strong Work Ethic

The fathers of the men in the study were industrious men with strong work ethics. Although several of them were not well educated, they all worked very hard to provide for their families and they tried to instill this philosophical view of hard work within their children. Tim Russert’s father, who had not graduated from high school, was a sanitation worker during the day and maintained a second job delivering bundles of newspapers for the *Buffalo Evening News*. Russert described his father’s approach to his situation:

All through my childhood, and well beyond it, Big Russ held down two demanding jobs. But as hard as he labored and as long as he toiled, we never heard a single complaint about his heavy workload or the sacrifice he was making. He didn’t talk about it; he just got it done. And if he had to take a third job to support his wife and four kids, he would have done that too . . . Like so many members of the strong silent generation of men who grew up during the Great Depression and went off to war, he had learned long ago that life was hard and nothing was handed to you. In fact, Dad considered it a sign of success, and even a blessing that he was able to hold down two jobs. He could remember a time when a man considered himself fortunate to have even one. (Russert, 2004, p. 60)

Russert’s respect for his father’s work ethic was evidenced when he wrote, “He was never embarrassed about being a garbage man, and even when his title was Foreman of the Streets Division, everybody

knew what that meant. Because he was proud of his work, I was proud of him for doing it” (Russert, 2004, p. 69).

Paul O’Neill’s father also held down more than one job to provide for his family, as a construction worker who plowed snow every winter in order to make financial ends meet. O’Neill’s admiration for his tireless father is reflected in the following passage:

After long demanding hours of work—often with stressful deadlines, juggling different job sites, getting dusty and dirty, dealing with tasks that were physically taxing and emotionally challenging—instead of stumbling home and collapsing into an easy chair, he saw his return to his family as the beginning of his real day. Dad came home ready to play, not ready to rest. (O’Neill & Rocks, 2003, p. 21)

John Edwards found inspiration in his father’s experience in the textile industry in North Carolina. His admiration for his father’s strong work ethic and determination for self-improvement influenced John early on. Edwards’ high regard for his father’s difficult labor and his humble approach to dealing with adverse situations is evidenced in the following passage from his autobiography:

Wallace Edwards took what came without complaint. When he began at Milliken’s Excelsior Finishing Plant in Pendleton, South Carolina, he hoisted hundred-pound rolls of cloth, but he slowly advanced up the company ladder until he reached a management position at Milliken Robbins Mill in North Carolina. Along the way he spent much of his time training younger men who would get better-paying jobs than the one he had or would ever have. They had college degrees, and he did not. And although he tried to take the advancement courses his company offered, an erratic shift schedule made regular attendance almost impossible—as it did for so many who worked beside him. So he silently let his dream go, but even then I remember waking up early in the morning to find him in the living room, with his own mysterious pads and pencils in front of him as he watched what were to me bleak public television shows that taught the basics of probability and statistics. (Edwards & Auchard, 2004, p. 118)

J. C. Watts also described how he and his siblings were taught the value of hard work early on. He explained, “If you lived under Buddy Watts’ roof, chores were a fact of life. Nobody in the family ever spent a Saturday morning in bed” (Watts & Winston, 2002, p. 36). J. C. and his brothers would be working with their father by daybreak and his sisters spent the weekend helping their mother with house cleaning. He elaborated,

And if you were working outside the family and not in school, you helped pay your own way by chipping in a little bit for groceries and mortgage . . . Those rules went for every one of Buddy and Helen Watts’ kids. Life in the Watts family was no Sunday afternoon picnic, but hard work never hurt any child. (p. 36)

By the time J. C. was 8 years old, he had begun helping his father fix properties and convert them into rental houses. Working with his father, he grew to appreciate his father’s strong work ethic and his frugal approach to business. He explained:

My job was to pull bent, rusty nails out of reusable old boards in those houses and stack the boards by size. Daddy paid me a penny a piece for every nailed pulled. Whenever I got the urge to quit, I would mentally picture a trickle of pennies, one after another, dropping into a mason jar, and I went back to work again. The way I’d pile those brown nails up so carefully, you’d have thought I was stacking gold bars at Fort Knox. But, I learned that every penny counts. (Watts & Winston, 2002, p. 46)

The admiration that J.C. Watts had for his father as a provider helped to shape his worldview. He respected his father who accomplished so much in an era when Black males in the segregated South were not afforded educational opportunities. “He was no Pollyanna. No one who lived through the Depression, World War II, and Jim Crow could be,” he wrote. “He would have had plenty of reasons to throw up his hands and blame his troubles on others, but he never did, because Buddy Watts believed—and taught me—that opportunity is just hard work in disguise” (p. 13).

Encouragement and Guidance

The fathers of the high-achieving gifted males provided their sons with strong encouragement and helpful guidance throughout their lives. Such encouragement and guidance was evident in a variety of ways. Several of the fathers were good listeners while others were more apt to offer verbal advice. Some of the men actually taught their sons skills necessary to achieve within their chosen professional domain while others served their sons as coaches or supporters from the sidelines.

José Santana realized early that his young son Carlos was captivated by the sound of music in a much more personal and spiritual way than most children. As a result he decided to follow his own father's model and taught his son how to play the violin at age 5. Santana's biographer indicated that "José was patient in teaching Carlos. He felt that his young son needed the nuts and bolts of music. But he was not overly strict and allowed the love of the instrument and the music to set his young son free (Shapiro, 2000, pp. 18–19). Eventually father and son had differing views of the choice of violin as an instrument, and José acquiesced and purchased him a used electric guitar. Years later, the accomplished musician was appreciative as he explained, "Because of all the training that my dad gave me on the violin, learning the guitar seemed pretty easy" (Shapiro, 2000, p. 30).

Carlos Santana also learned some important life lessons from his father's experience as a mariachi band musician. Observing his father in street performances, restaurants, and nightclubs, Carlos learned painful lessons regarding class distinctions in American society. He saw the degradation his father experienced when an intoxicated patron would pull out a thick wad of money, hand it to his father, and insist that he play his favorite song 15 times in a row. Carlos felt the degradation turn into humiliation when his father accepted the money and began to play. Troubled by his father's circumstances, he made an important decision. "I said, 'When I grow up, I'm going to play what I want to play and they're still going to pay me or I'll be doing something else'" (Shapiro, 2000, p. 27). When he confronted his father with his feelings, his father then passed on an important life lesson: "He told me when you're onstage, you have to put away your anger and pain and make people happy. Once you go home, you

could kick and curse, but he was adamant about presenting yourself with kindness and softness” (Shapiro, 2000, p. 27).

Like Carlos Santana, actor and director Ron Howard also received important training from his father at an early age. As a child actor, Ron Howard grew up in his parents’ world. He found himself among theatrical folk and discovered that being on a Hollywood set was like a playground for him. Although the theatrical environment may have seemed like a place to have fun, Rance Howard insisted that his young son conduct himself in a professional manner. For instance, when a journalist asked him to sit for his first interview, he fidgeted but his father would not let him be anything less than professional. When the reporter turned to Rance for responses to questions, he would demur, saying, “No, I want Ronny to answer them” (Gray, 2003, p. 13). Although he expected professionalism from his young son, he understood that young Ronny was merely a child who occasionally needed to be scolded. After being disciplined on the set of *The Andy Griffith Show*, Rance explained to him that no matter who was watching “I have only one job and that’s to be your father and that’s to teach you right from wrong. And nothing about that embarrasses me” (Gray, 2003, pp. 18–19).

As a 5-year-old child actor Ronny had not learned to read yet, so his father taught him his lines. Howard maintained that his father also passed on lessons in basic acting techniques that remained with him throughout his career. He remembered his father telling him, before his appearance on the famous *Red Skelton Show*, “Really look at him in the eye and really listen to what he’s saying. Don’t just wait for your line; really listen. And then your line will just come naturally” (Gray, 2003, p. 12). He taught the difference between acting and mere performing, making it clear that “In order to say a line, you had to have the thought first” (Gray, 2003, p. 18).

Hollywood actress Shirley Jones reported that she found Rance Howard’s approach to parenting a child actor refreshing. She explained, “So many parents take the kid aside and say, ‘Don’t do that. Don’t do it that way. Listen to how I tell you to do it.’” Rance, by contrast, never interjected his own ideas. “He was very, very cognizant of what the movie was, what the story was, and the director was boss” (Gray, 2003, p. 28). Howard’s biographer noted the significant lesson that young Ron gained from his father’s parenting on the set: “Rance’s

quiet subordination of his parental ego to the welfare of the project taught his son a valuable lesson. Ronny learned from an early age that being part of a collaborative effort was always an actor's top priority" (Gray, 2003, p. 28).

While Ron Howard was receiving important training from his father on a Hollywood set, Olympic gymnast Bart Conner was being raised in a home environment that was also supportive of his talents. Conner reflected on his parents' approach to encouraging three physically active, athletic boys. "Doing flips in the living room and standing on the washer seemed like perfectly normal activities for us because we knew that objects in our house were meant to be used and enjoyed" he recalled, "It was always as much 'the kids' house' as it was 'the adults' house'" (Conner, 1985, p. 7). Bart also received important problem-solving training from his father. His father was a professor of engineering and his approach to life was always logical. Bart Conner explained how he benefited from his father's style of problem solving:

He is incredibly skillful at analysis, methodical plotting, and step-by-step execution. No problem is ever so big that my dad can't compute all the variables, set a goal, and get to work. Every task is simply set out in a series of small tasks. Yet there are times when he almost makes it seem too easy. In many situations it is true that if you can make a logical plan and then work it through, there is the result. And my dad taught me how to execute and achieve in this manner. (Conner, 1985, p. 28)

Bart described how his father taught him the mechanics of how to make something work. In high school, he hated his calculus course. He would arrive home from school with a problem that he saw as impossible to solve and spend hours raving and ranting about such a "stupid class." He admitted his problems with the calculus assignment took on the "proportions of a national crisis." Bart explained that the problem would be addressed when his father arrived home and his dad would calmly sit down with him and say, "Okay, what is your goal here? What are you trying to accomplish in this assignment? Just find one thing you enjoy about this class and we'll go from there" (Conner, 1985, p. 25).

The fathers in the study provided their sons with advice when the time was appropriate. John Edwards described a summer job in the weaving room of a textile mill in which his responsibility was to clean hundreds of the looms. They were covered with grease and lint, and because many of the loom fixers chewed tobacco to pass the time, they were also covered with globs of thick, brown saliva. Edwards wrote, “‘Now you see,’ my dad said, bending close to me so that I could hear him over the din of the looms, ‘why you need to go to college’” (Edwards & Auchard, 2004, p. 122).

Carl Lewis described multiple examples of his father providing encouragement and guidance. During times of controversy when the media was criticizing Carl, his father helped him to remain focused on his goals and ignore his critics. He would often say to Carl, “Express your feelings in a low-key way, yes, but don’t lash out. That will only make things worse. That will only lower you to their level” (Lewis & Marx, 1990, p. 90). Lewis found that his father’s advice and encouragement paid off when the reporters began to treat him better. “My father had been right when he encouraged me to be patient. I had waited out the problems, and now I would have a chance to turn my image around” (Lewis & Marx, 1990, p. 110).

Several of the men in the study described in their autobiographies how the encouragement and guidance they received from their fathers—the important lessons learned from their dads—remained with them long after their fathers had passed away. A representative example of this was Paul O’Neill’s description of a conversation held with his own children early one morning when he arrived home after a baseball game. He had helped to win the game and was quietly celebrating the victory in the silence of his home. He explained:

I was surprised when my kids came running in to see me, finding me alone having some private thoughts. They wanted to know if I had been talking to Papa Chuck just then. “Guys,” I said, smiling and hugging them, “I *was* talking to Papa Chuck.” . . . Nothing would ever replace Dad’s being here to celebrate with me in person, but a year after his death, his wedding ring now on my left ring finger with my own wedding band, I felt his presence constantly and had

conversations with him whenever I felt the need. (O'Neill & Rocks, 2003, p. 212)

Maintaining High Expectations and Fostering Determination

The fathers of the men in the study maintained high expectations for their sons. None of the fathers placed high pressure to follow a particular path in life. They did not insist that their sons follow in their footsteps or impose any particular professional goals or aspirations; they simply asked that their sons strive to always do their best in whatever domain they chose. Maintaining high expectations was a lesson delivered by the fathers to their sons in childhood and adolescence, and was reinforced throughout their early career years. For instance, Bart Conner described how his father held high expectations for all three of his sons, encouraging them to consider various avenues for developing their talents. He explained, "I've always been interested in automobiles. And I remember when my father said, 'Why don't you plan on being the president of Ford Motor Company someday.' I mean, that's how my dad is—nothing seems too farfetched" (Conner, 1985, pp. 24–25).

Maintaining high expectations included doing well in school. The fathers of the high-achieving males all insisted that their sons focus on academics before anything else and conduct themselves as young gentlemen in school. Tim Russert's description of his father's philosophical approach to education and discipline is evident in the following passage regarding Tim's early parochial school experience:

When a teacher issued a decree, there was no court of appeals, no second opinion, no parental mercy. My parents backed Father Sturm as they backed every teacher and administrator, and every other adult in our lives. Dad didn't know the expression *in loco parentis*, but he understood the point of it: you behaved at school the way you were expected to behave at home. And if you didn't, you would be punished in both places. (Russert, 2004, p. 189)

Several of the fathers in this study were not afforded the opportunity to attend college and were determined to see their sons improve their lives through education. John Edwards wrote that as a young man he certainly wanted to please his parents and he understood that they wanted what was best for him in life. Eventually he grew to understand why they maintained high expectations for him. He explained,

At first, I didn't understand why they had such strong ambition for me to find a life beyond a mill town. But at one of my early summer jobs in the weaving room of the Robbins mill, I began to understand how genuinely hard the life of my parents really was. And why they wanted something different for me. (Edwards & Auchard, 2004, p. 122)

J. C. Watts wrote about his father's hard work and struggle to provide for his family. "After years of scrambling for jobs, no one understood competition better than Buddy Watts" (Watts & Winston, 2002, p. 104). His father served as inspiration for J. C. as he provided his son a model of determination. He wrote, "Most important, he knew that there are times in every man's life when reaching for your dream forces you to find bedrock, to look deeply into yourself and summon up the courage to do your best" (Watts & Winston, 2002, p. 104). He concluded, "That's all Buddy Watts ever expected of me growing up" (Watts & Winston, 2002, p. 104).

Pride in Son's Accomplishments

The biographical materials examined in the study provided evidence that the fathers of the high-achieving gifted males expressed pride in their sons' accomplishments, which naturally propelled their sons to continue their pattern of achievement. The fathers' pride was expressed in subtle or not so subtle ways, and the sons appreciated knowing that their fathers were proud of them. Tim Russert's father expressed his pride in rather subtle ways. When Russert was accepted to John Carroll University his parents were proud of their first-generation college son. He wrote:

Right away, Mom asked me to get Dad a John Carroll University sticker for the back of the car window, which was quite a statement because Big Russ has an aversion to bumper stickers or decals. But for his college boy, he made an exception. (Russert, 2004, p. 221)

Several semesters later when Russert returned home for the summer months, he joined his father and his colleagues as a garbage collector on the city sanitation crew of Buffalo, NY. At the end of that summer, a member of the sanitation team who had watched Tim work all that summer complimented Mr. Russert for Tim's performance as a member of the crew, not realizing that Tim was within earshot. Mr. Russert graciously accepted the praise for his son. Russert explained why having his father receive a compliment for his performance as a crew member was so significant:

Dad never mentioned this exchange, but he didn't have to—I had witnessed it, and I felt like I had won a medal. There's nothing worse than disappointing your parents, and nothing better than making them proud. Here and there, I had pleased him in other ways, mostly at school, in church, or on the playground, but this was different. This was his world, and I had done my job—his job, actually—with some degree of competence. (Russert, 2004, p. 70)

John Edwards also recognized the pride his parents felt in him. After becoming successful as a trial attorney, Edwards was able to treat his parents to dinner at the City Club, a fine restaurant situated at the top of the First American Bank Building overlooking Nashville, TN. He explained, "To splurge like that for my folks, both of whom had worked long hard hours to put me through college, was tremendously gratifying," he recalled, "As we sat there and they remarked about how they'd never been up so high and seen so far, I knew that they were pleased with my life" (Edwards & Auchard, 2004, pp. 14–15). He was especially pleased for his father as he noted, "I had no trouble imagining my dad at church the next weekend telling anyone who'd listen about the fancy place Johnny had taken them to in Nashville" (Edwards & Auchard, 2004, p. 15).

Paul O'Neill also benefited from his father's open expression of pride in his son. He had memories of his father's pride in him as a Little League player. When he helped his team win the city tournament, he knew how his father felt about him that evening. "I'll never forget that strikeout as long as I live. How could I? The smile on Dad's face was emblazoned forever in my heart (O'Neill & Rocks, 2003, p. 46). When he reached the minor leagues, his father would travel long distances to watch his son perform in spring training. He reflected, "His presence certainly gave me tremendous confidence as I'd glance over and see him in the stands that held only around five thousand people, beaming at me with his constant big smile" (O'Neill & Rocks, 2003, p. 83). O'Neill noted his father's pride as he described the experience of receiving the phone call in which he was officially being called to play professional baseball in the major leagues:

What truly mattered as I put down the phone, only to pick it up two seconds later to call Dad, was that this signified the crowning moment of all the sweat, hard work, and faith that he has invested in me throughout my life . . . I hollered the news over the line as Dad hollered right back. We were ecstatic . . . Getting "The Call" was one of the biggest rushes of my life, and the thrill it gave my father made it much sweeter, letting me know that I was giving back to him what he had given to me for so many years. (O'Neill & Rocks, 2003, p. 5)

What Paul O'Neill described above is similar to the feelings Franklin Graham experienced when Billy Graham attended his son's evangelical crusade meeting for the first time. Franklin realized that his internationally renowned father was considered larger than life by many of his followers. He described the poignant event:

When my father stood to greet the crowd, he was given a standing ovation. I tried to convince him to preach that night. "Daddy, believe me, they would rather hear you tonight than me any day." But he smiled and said, "No son, I came to hear you . . . I'm proud of you son." I guess every son wants to hear those words from his father, no matter how old he is. (Graham, 1995, pp. 310–311)

Mutual Admiration and Respect

While the fathers took great pride in their sons' achievements, both fathers and sons held each other in high admiration and respected each other as men. The admiration of the sons for their fathers often centered on how the fathers approached life in general, how they overcame difficulties, how they remained dedicated to their families, and how they supported the talent development of their children. The fathers respected their sons for becoming the industrious, high-achieving individuals they were. The subjects in the study had looked to their fathers as models of successful men, followed their example, and listened to their fathers' encouragement, guidance, and advice, and in return were appreciated and respected by their fathers.

Carlos Santana had tremendous admiration for his father. This was established early in his childhood. As a youngster, he watched his father and his fellow costumed troubadours who brought so much pleasure to the lives of audiences throughout the city. He saw his father as a powerful man who could affect people deeply with his music and he was awed. "As a kid I remember watching how people's eyes would light up when his father played the violin. At that point, I knew that he had the power to validate people's existence" (Shapiro, 2000, p. 17).

Santana's awe for his father was similar to the admiration Jerry Seinfeld held for his father who applied his comic qualities to his work as a salesman. Seinfeld explained, "My dad was very funny; quick and very sociable—the kind of guy you'd want at a party . . . He was always making people laugh. I watched the effect he would have on people and I thought, 'That's for me'" (Tracy, 1998, p. 8). Seinfeld elaborated: "There has never been a professional comedian with better stage presence, attitude, timing, or delivery . . . a comic genius" (Oppenheimer, 2002, p. 40). Seinfeld also wrote, "He also turned me on to the secret that it's *fun* to be funny. That's really why I do it" (Tracy, p. 8). Jerry enjoyed watching his dad's salesmanship and described how his father influenced his work:

The thing I remember most . . . is how often my father would say to me, "Sometimes I don't even care if I get the order, I just have to break that face." He hates to see those serious businessman faces. I guess that's why he, like me, never

seemed to be able to hold down any kind of real job. Often when I'm on stage I'll catch myself imitating a little physical move or a certain kind of timing that he would do "To break that face." (Oppenheimer, 2002, p. 40)

While Jerry Seinfeld's father brought laughter into his customers' lives, Franklin Graham's father touched lives in a different way. Franklin Graham's admiration and respect for his father as an evangelical leader grew over time as he realized the powerful influence his father's life had had on so many people around the world. He explained:

I observed what one man could accomplish if he trusted God and remained faithful to His Son Jesus Christ. An entire nation could be impacted. I began to appreciate in a different way my own father and the impact that his life had made not in just one nation but the entire world. Wherever I went, I met people who had given their lives to God under my father's ministry, many of them men and women who were now in high places in many walks of life—serving Christ. It made me proud. (Graham, 1995, p. 135)

Several of the men in the study admired and respected their fathers for the way in which they dealt with adversity in their lives, maintained their dignity, and kept the needs of their families as their highest priority. John Edwards observed the challenges his father faced and admired his strong character. He noted,

I knew what kind of man he was. I knew how good a man he was and how much he cared for the people around him. And to see the way he was treated because he didn't have a high school degree—it didn't cause anger. But it felt unfair" (Broder, 2003, p. A01)

J. C. Watts reflected on how his father's sister was diagnosed with tuberculosis and was placed in a hospital approximately 80 miles away from her family. Watts shared that his father grabbed a freight train and rode the rails in order to visit his sister. Because he could not afford a motel room, he spent his nights sleeping under a bridge. This

experience deeply influenced how he saw his father and his dedication to his family:

That story of my daddy's train ride to his sister's bedside taught me the importance of love and family from the time I first heard it as a young boy. No matter how much we change or how far from home we find ourselves, the family is the rock on which we build our lives. My family is a proud one—proud of its ancestry, its triumphs over adversity, its faith, and its love. (Watts & Winston, 2002, pp. 11–12)

The admiration and respect of the sons for their fathers was often openly expressed in tender ways. Paul O'Neill discussed how his father's presence in the stadiums was significant to him. He said, "My father's being in the stands mattered to me more than words could express. Fenway Park could have been filled to capacity with standing-room-only crowds, but I knew where my father was sitting" (O'Neill & Rocks, 2003, p. 165). He added, "I could feel his presence, like a bright beam of sunlight shining on me when I took to right field" (O'Neill & Rocks, 2003, p. 165).

Tim Russert had been invited to address the annual convention of the New York state chapter of the American Legion. The Legion wanted to give Tim a journalism award in appreciation for his having featured the American Legion in a special broadcast on veterans he was responsible for at NBC. With his father and son seated in the front row of the auditorium, Russert concluded his acceptance speech with a poignant surprise:

"I am honored to receive this award," I said, "but I want to dedicate it to someone much more deserving. He never graduated from high school, but he taught his four kids by example, his hard work, and his basic decency. Today, he celebrates his fiftieth anniversary as an American Legionnaire. It is with enormous pride, the utmost respect, and the deepest love, that I present this award to the past commander of the South Buffalo Post 721—my hero, my dad, the *real* Tim Russert." (Russert, 2004, p. xv)

Shortly after Carl Lewis earned his first gold medal in the 1984 Olympics, his father was diagnosed with cancer. Lewis noted, "Just

like that, everything that had ever seemed important to me was not important anymore. The only thing I cared about was being a son, my father's son" (Lewis & Marx, 1990, p. 97). When his father died, Carl's final tribute to his dad reflected the ultimate love, admiration, and respect he held for his father. In his autobiography, Lewis described an important promise he made to his father:

The day of the funeral, when our family was viewing the body, I pulled out the medal to place in my father's hand . . . My mother asked if I was sure I wanted to bury the medal, and I was. It would be my father's forever. "But I'm going to get another one," I told my mother. Turning to my father, I said, "Don't worry. I'm going to get another one." That was a promise—to myself and to Dad. He was lying there so peacefully, his hands resting on his chest. When I placed the medal in his hand, it fit perfectly. (Lewis & Marx, 1990, p. 101)

Discussion and Implications

In reviewing the experiences of the 10 subjects in this study, six interwoven themes emerge from the data. The relationships among the themes are significant in understanding the father-son relationships and are helpful to parents and educators of gifted males. For instance, an important relationship exists between a father modeling a strong work ethic and expecting his son to maintain high standards. As evident in the study, a father works hard to provide for his family, and the son follows his father's example and strives to work hard in school and later in his chosen profession. As a result, mutual admiration and respect evolves between the father and his son. Another relationship between existing themes is evident in the father's unconditional belief in his son, influencing the son's identity as a man capable of high achievement. In other words, if a young man realizes that his father believes in him and thinks he is capable of significant accomplishment, he begins to see himself as an achiever. A third thematic relationship exists between the encouragement and guidance afforded the son and the father's display of pride. As a father encourages, guides, and teaches his son lessons that enable him to become successful and

as his nurturing results in his son's success, it is not surprising that he openly shares his pride in his son's accomplishments.

The fathers of the prominent successful baby boomers featured in this study have provided a model that may serve as the foundation for effective parenting of gifted males. The themes emerging from this study serve as important components of the model and may be thought of as critical ingredients for successful parenting. In thinking about these ingredients, one must consider how they become individualized for each young man. Each father in this study took an individualized approach for transferring his life lessons to his son. Several fathers saw their sons being too hard on themselves at times and delivered guidance accordingly. Some saw their sons needing to strike out for independence and provided them the opportunity. Others realized that their sons would benefit from direct instruction and they delivered. In each case, the father's approach matched the particular needs of his son.

The findings of this study are consistent with research on father-son relationships. The ingredients for successful parenting delivered by the fathers of the 10 subjects in the study support the work of Morman and Floyd (2006) who found that love, availability, role modeling, and support were seen as important characteristics of good fathers. The findings of this study are also consistent with the scholarship highlighted by Marsiglio et al. (2000), indicating that paternal involvement was directly related to positive outcomes such as academic success, emotional health, and appropriate social behavior in boys. Moreover, the findings of the study reinforce Gurian's (1996) philosophical view of healthy fatherhood in which the father is involved in the son's life early on, communicates a sense of heritage and tradition to his son, enabling him to shape his own identity, and assists his son in making the transition from boyhood to manhood with independence and respect.

The findings of this study also call attention to an important issue in research on fatherhood within culturally diverse populations. Researchers in men's studies have indicated that circumstances associated with race and ethnicity may affect how men of color view their roles as fathers (Marsiglio & Pleck, 2005). When considering fatherhood for African American and Latino men, we must take into account the historical background, institutional racism, and the

marginal status of men of color in order to appreciate the challenges they encounter. Historically African American and Latino men have experienced fewer opportunities to achieve socioeconomic success. As a result, culturally diverse men in this country must mentor their sons into a society tainted with prejudice. For these men, the added paternal role as teacher of racial or ethnic relations becomes significant. The findings of this study highlight this issue when we consider the experiences of the fathers of J. C. Watts, Carl Lewis, and Carlos Santana. In each case, the fathers of these men overcame adversity associated with the historical context in which they were living and taught their sons to look beyond the circumstances of their families and strive to succeed. Through their encouragement and guidance these fathers delivered important lessons to their sons regarding what it meant to be a man of color in America.

Researchers and psychologists maintain that fathers serve their sons as the most important source of information regarding what it means to be successful males (Cox, 2006; Pollack, 1998). Consistent with this view, this study offers significant implications for fathers of gifted males and their role in talent development. By closely examining the father-son relationships of the high-achieving gifted males, fathers may gain new insights on how to support their sons. In fact, parents may find it helpful as well as inspirational to read the biographical materials examined in this study. Moreover, educators and counselors need to examine the lessons learned from this study and support the fathers of gifted males who want to follow the recipe for success offered by the men in this study. Teachers and counselors can certainly reinforce how fortunate gifted boys are when their fathers believe in them unconditionally, serve as models of a strong work ethic, maintain high expectations for them, respect them, and take great pride in their accomplishments. In addition, educators may wish to emphasize these same practices in the classroom, in the hopes of reinforcing the important lessons delivered at home. For instance, teachers determined to instill a strong work ethic may not allow gifted learners to simply earn good grades yet remain intellectually unchallenged. Through promoting such a philosophy, educators teach students to appreciate hard work as an opportunity for valuable talent development.

This study examined a population of men from the baby boom generation and the findings of the study may reflect the values of their fathers' generation. A compelling question to consider is whether or not the values of men such as Buddy Watts, Wallace Edwards, and Rance Howard are timeless. Consider the following questions: Will the baby boomers represented in this study carry on the values passed on to them? Would the same findings emerge from a study of high-achieving gifted males from Generation X or the Millennial Generation? Researchers may want to replicate this study with subjects selected from succeeding generations. Another interesting consideration is the possibility of replicating this study and focusing on biographies of prominent gifted high-achieving males whose fathers were absent from their lives. Such a study would examine how single mothers may have maintained similar recipes for successful parenting.

The men included in this study were prominent within their domains; therefore, publishing companies are willing to invest in biographies and autobiographies of such men. It is important to realize that prominence in American society is media driven. It is interesting to note that the same challenges Goertzel and Goertzel (1962) encountered in locating biographies of eminent individuals more than 40 years ago remain today. The Goertzels reported their frustrations in being unable to locate adult biographies of significant Americans such as Nobel prize winning statesman Ralph Bunche, yet they discovered an abundance of biographies on popular culture icons such as "Buffalo Bill" Cody. With this in mind, we realize that the accomplishments of the 10 subjects in this study have been celebrated perhaps because their particular talent domains are highly valued in our culture. Much can be learned from their life stories; however, researchers, educators, and parents may discover similar success stories in men less prominent and when they do, they can also celebrate those lessons.

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