

## CHAPTER FOUR: PATTERNS FROM THE PAST

Grace could hear her father's voice: ain't no kid of mine that can't look after 'emselfes. His own kid. And being disowned because he couldn't fight. What about Boogie's other qualities? Always near the top of the class, very kind, and very sensitive to the kids that everyone else forgets about, or scorns. Nope, you got to be able to fight first.

*(Once Were Warriors, Alan Duff, p. 23)*

The powerful story from which the above quote comes illustrates how certain stories are given more weight than others. Boogie's qualities of caring, sensitivity and intelligence are given less weight than his ability to fight. The strong message and enticement to be a fighter in a physical sense becomes a family legacy as well as a societal problem.

Fighting may have been useful for earlier generations but in this day and age it becomes a pathway to a life of trouble. Family traditions play a large part in how we as adults cope with living in today's world. The family traditions and legacies that you learnt in the early years of your life remain with you all your life, often standing in the way of what is learned subsequently. The family is the most significant place for handing down the blueprint for living from one generation to the next.

Our homes and families have been described as places of support, nurture and caring; a safe haven from the many dangers that lurk outside. For many, this is not the case. From our family we often learn unhelpful patterns of relating, beliefs that are outdated, and values that make adult life difficult. Many men that I have worked with have vowed and declared that they would not act like their parents when they grew up. And yet, fifteen or so years later there are distinct similarities in patterns of behaviour.

My own research on men who come to stopping violence programmes shows that a high percentage of these men have grown up in families where one or both parents had an alcohol problem. Many witnessed violence between parents and many were subjected to violence as children. These men describe an emotionally abusive climate which profoundly affected their sense of security. While some men who grow up in violent and abusive situations do not go on to be abusive physically to their partners, many describe recreating a verbally abusive atmosphere in their families as adults which includes behaviours such as name-calling, put-downs of their partners, criticism and verbal arguments.

Don't despair if this sounds like you. Once you understand what these longstanding beliefs, values and behaviours are, you are in a position to decide if they fit or if it's time to change them. In this chapter we will deal with Level 3 of the process of change.

The material important to this part of the journey relates to understanding if self-righteous anger and abuse are part of your family tradition. If it is, you have a good chance of giving it

the slip and creating a new tradition of safe and non-abusive relationships. We will also identify any abuse you were subjected to. This book is not designed to deal directly with the issues of victimisation. This may be an issue you need to deal with once you have broken the patterns of abuse and violence that are operating at the moment. While being on the receiving end of abuse is no excuse for being abusive to others, it does give you an important insight into what it is like for those on the receiving end of your abuse. You can use this knowledge effectively in order to keep yourself and others safe.

I believe that men who are abusive to others are not exceptions to the rule (remember the mad/bad debate earlier), but are carrying out the very behaviours they are trained to do. Besides what takes place in our families of origin, the training is contained in what I call the 'Old Rule Book'. This is the traditional blueprint for masculinity as we know it today. I will argue that this blueprint has had its day and no longer has relevance if we are truly committed to being with others in ways that are respectful and equal.

Many men (and women too) are now realising that many of the patterns of behaviour they learnt as children and as young people don't work in adult relationships. Before moving on, let's take time to understand how families actually work. Have you ever wondered about that?

## **How Families Work**

In my office I have a mobile of eight figures parachuting. Move one and all the others move. If not disturbed further, they will eventually find a sense of balance or stability and stop moving. In many ways families are similar to the mobile, except much more complex.

Each family member affects and is affected by other family members in positive and negative ways. Also, not all acts are of equal significance for other family members. For example, a child who gets into trouble for fighting with another child at school may simply be seen to be standing up for himself, whereas a father's dismissal from work for punching the boss may have dire consequences for the whole family in terms of getting another job, income maintenance and family security.

There are many different angles or views that we can take when looking at what is going on in a family. We can look at how the family is organised in terms of boundaries and hierarchy (the pecking order). We can look for who connects most with whom (the subgroups within the family). We can look at who has most power to influence decisions. We can look at the patterns of family life that have been passed down through the generations; or the paradoxes that exist in family life that is, the situations, beliefs or events that seem in contrast to each other. Each view will give us valuable information about the different ways each member influences the decisions of others in families.

Families are complex organisations, always changing to meet the demands of an evolving world as well as their own life cycles. Early on in the family life cycle people join together to form a couple, each bringing with them their own experience, attitudes and beliefs about how families should be. Bring in children (biological, stepchildren or adopted) and we see unfolding before our eyes two adults trying to parent. The styles of parenting are nearly always derived from their own experience of being parented. If parents have not talked through and understood their own backgrounds, it can feel like World War III is emerging.

I remember well the struggles of joining a ready-made family with three children who were, in the early stages, wary about me being around. All very reasonable issues for step-family situations. I began to draw from my own experience of being in a family where what adults

say goes. This didn't work too well with very bright children who could string together very coherent arguments to contradict mine. The learning for me was to admit I could be wrong, that I was learning how to be in a new family, and working together to sort out the unspoken rules that would operate so that everyone knew what was going on. It is pretty unrealistic to expect children to guess what you might be thinking about certain situations or events.

Families face different issues at different times in their lives. You will agree that the issues for families with young children are very different from the issues facing families with adolescent children or teenagers. In families a constant struggle exists to balance the need to change with the need to remain the same. This may sound contradictory and confusing but think for a moment. Often the need to remain the same stifles the ability to pioneer new ways to respond to situations. When this happens families become stuck. There is no room in families for stuckness. The Smith family story which follows illustrates what I mean.

*John came to me one day complaining about the conflict he was having with his adolescent son, Sam. It seemed that whenever John told Sam to carry out a task John was ignored and openly told to do it himself*

*John was a large man who had a history of playing first division rugby and could certainly look after himself in a fight. There had been an increasing number of physical fights between John and Sam over recent months which John worried about. He told me of the tension that this caused other family members.*

*The situation came to a head one day when John came home from work and asked Sam to clean up the kitchen which was a mess from after-school snacks. Sam continued to ignore John, who after shouting to clean up the kitchen, walked into the lounge, picked up the television, went out the back door and threw it on the ground. Sam looked on in disbelief and thought his father was really over the edge this time.*

*The next evening John came home to find a black and white television in the lounge with Sam perched in front. Sam had organised with his mates to buy a \$50 television. John didn't know what to say when Sam suggested John pay for the second-hand television.*

*I agreed to meet with the whole family to explore what the story behind the dominant story was. I was sceptical about putting down and describing a fifteen-year-old boy as being lazy, self-centred and out of control. What became obvious was that this family was struggling with a pattern of behaviour that had not just developed overnight, but had built up over a number of years.*

*John was from a strict family and, when told to carry out tasks by adults, he did, or got a whipping if he did not. John expected his own boys (he had two others in addition to Sam) to do as he said. John was trying to implement a blueprint on his children that belonged to his parents' generation. With more assertive children who were quick to point out the failings and inconsistencies of adults, John felt at a loss to know how to respond.*

*He resorted to the only way he knew — his strength and physical prowess. His son, however, was getting to an age where he was prepared to take his father on in a fight. John was disturbed by this.*

*Sam was trapped in another way and at another level. Other family members described Sam as being just like John, a description that frightened and annoyed Sam. In this way other family members became tuned into the similarities between father*

*and son, and not the differences. It was as if Sam was destined to follow in his father's footsteps.*

*The other significant issue for this family system was that the 25-year relationship between John and his wife Stephanie had stagnated and lost its emotional closeness. As the children in this family began to establish their independence, claim their own sexuality and move towards an adult lifestyle, these same issues re-emerged for John and Stephanie. Stephanie had developed many new interests outside the family while John hadn't.*

*Sam was the member of this family who picked up the undercurrents of John and Stephanie's relationship distress most acutely. By being seen as the troublemaker within the family Sam drew attention away from the adult conflict. As long as they were worrying about him, they wouldn't have time to face their own issues. Each member in this system was unconsciously acting out a part in a play that was heading for tragedy.*

*Stephanie was avoiding issues by putting her energy outside of the family and confiding in friends. Sam was the most obvious problem in the family. The other children knew that as long as Sam was in the limelight they were free to keep on doing their own thing. The more John felt like he was losing his sense of control of the situation at home and with his partner, the more he resorted to drastic and forceful actions, attempting to assert his authority. By doing this John became more stuck with what was familiar — the old blueprint from his own childhood.*

### **Questions to Ponder**

- What parts of this family's story do I relate to?
- How often have I had the sense that the more I tried to resolve a difficult situation the worse it became?
- What blueprint did I receive from my family of origin?

## **Families of Origin**

You might like to believe that you are your own boss, that you are in charge of your own life and can make decisions independently of others. Not true. How you respond as an adult is greatly influenced by what you learn when growing up. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, family legacies (ways to behave, beliefs, values) are passed down from generation to generation. You may not even recognise many of these, let alone question them. The model that the significant adults in your childhood family provide is critical for how we work out ways to handle situations. Fill in the following questionnaire. Think about particular situations that come to mind. Try to be aware of what you remember before the age of eight years old as these are significant years. If a question does not apply, leave it out and continue with the next.

A word of caution: working through this questionnaire may be painful and difficult. Stick with it. If you cannot do it in one go, put it down and come back to it at a later stage.

**Family Patterns**

How did your father or stepfather act when he was angry or uptight?

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How did your mother or stepmother act when she was angry or uptight?

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How did your caregivers handle their conflict and differences?

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Was there any abuse or violence at home? If so, what forms did this take?

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Was anybody afraid at home? Who? How did you know they were afraid?

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Were you hit or abused as a child in your family? What effect did this have on you?

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How did you express your feelings when you were a child?

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What did you learn in the setting you grew up in about:

(a) How men deal with their feelings?

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(b) How men deal with conflict and difference?

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(c) How women deal with their feelings?

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(d) How women deal with conflict and difference?

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Who are you most like when it comes to expressing your uptight and angry feelings?

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Who are you most like when it comes to resolving conflict?

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What would others who know you well say or want to add if they were answering these questions?

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It can be quite revealing looking at the influence and impact of family traditions on your behaviour as an adult. Many men tell me they despair that they made promises to themselves to be different and break family patterns of abuse. Mike was one such man.

*Mike was working hard in one of my groups to overcome his problem with violence towards his wife and children. At the end of the session we came together in the usual group circle or hug. Mike began to shake and burst into tears. Several group members*

*were uncomfortable with such a show of raw emotion. Mike told us that he hadn't touched another male in a caring way (his own boys included) since he beat his father up when he was sixteen years old. Mike had spent years putting up with his father beating his mother and being beaten himself He couldn't take any more.*

*Mike learnt an important lesson when he was violent to his father — violence works. The pattern of behaviour that Mike took into his own adult relationships was very similar to his father's pattern. Mike was sad that his own boys were as distant from him as he was from his own father. He decided on the spot that enough was enough; he pledged to begin changing how he related with his own boys.*

This moving story has stayed with me as clearly as the day I witnessed Mike realise the impact of his family patterns on his own life and family.

### ***Questions to Ponder***

- What do I now understand about who has influenced me most when it comes to expressing self-righteous anger and abuse?
- Are there family traditions — patterns of behaviour that run through generations that I would like to change?


## **Healthy and Unhealthy Families**

The phrase 'dysfunctional (dis-functional) family' has recently come into vogue. Dysfunctional family is jargon for a family that doesn't work too well, and passes on to its members all sorts of problems that they then take into other relationships. I have yet to meet anyone who is totally satisfied with their parents or with their upbringing. Their parents were too strict, not strict enough, too square, embarrassing because they wouldn't act their age (remember parents have to act like parents), too interested, not interested enough, and so on.

I have often wondered if there is such a thing as a healthy family. As someone working in the field of helping people manage relationships better perhaps I only see men and women who come from unhealthy families.

So how would you set out to evaluate what is healthy and what is not? There is no blueprint for the perfect family but there are criteria that, if followed, would go a long way towards improving the quality of life for others, especially the children.

### ***Exercise***

-  Write down the elements which you consider contribute to an unhealthy family — for example, lack of trust, poor communication, fear, and so on.

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### **Your Family of Origin Assessment**

In the previous exercise you identified what you thought were elements used to describe unhealthy families. I now turn your attention to a number of elements that make for healthy family relationships. Rate from zero (low) to ten (high) your experience of these qualities. Circle the number that best describes the family you grew up in. Put a cross over the number that best describes the situation in your own family now, as an adult.

People listen to each other.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

People feel connected and close.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

All members have some degree of power appropriate to their age and stage of development.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

There is an acceptance of who you are.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

There is respect for each other.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Members are appreciated for their contributions and for being themselves.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Punishments fit the crime.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Members trust each other.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Members work together.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Members show warmth and affection to each other.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Members are honest and truthful with each other

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Members can have fun.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

There is a sense of commitment.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Rules are fair and negotiable.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

It's okay to make mistakes.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Members solve problems together

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

The family is a safe place to be.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Members have a clear appreciation of each other's boundaries — that is, they respect the personal and emotional space of each member.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Reflect upon how you felt about doing this exercise. It may raise some uncomfortable feelings. Some men report that they are amazed and shocked by how low they score on these scales for their own childhoods and their adult lives. It starts to make sense of how they are now.

You wouldn't have had much choice about the rule book you received from the family you grew up in. What you do have a choice about is whether you want to continue the traditions from your family of origin or to pioneer the building of a New Rule Book.

*Paul grew up in a poor family, where his father and mother both worked in low-paying jobs. Paul's father was an alcoholic and was unpredictable when he was home. At times he would be fun to be around, promising to do all sorts of activities and buy things for his children. He rarely delivered on his promises.*

*At other times he was scary to be around, physically abusing Paul's mother, Paul and his brother. Paul grew up with the uncertainty of a family system where abuse was common. He tried to protect his mother at times, bearing the brunt of his father's abuse. Paul left home at fifteen years of age, alone in the world.*

*It wasn't long before he developed relationships with young women his own age, but these did not last long as his ability to trust was scarred. He was often possessive and jealous, afraid that the women he had relationships with would leave him. Deep down, Paul did not see himself as very lovable and was afraid to risk allowing others to get close to him.*

*Paul finally married and became the father of three children. He did not become a drinker like his father, but had many other of his father's patterns of behaviour. He was inconsistent with his children, wanting to be close but finding himself irritated by their behaviour. We are talking about very typical children's behaviour, I might add! The family separated and it wasn't long before Paul remarried. He now had to cope with stepchildren, who were used to a different model of family life.*

*Paul seriously assaulted his stepson, which jeopardised his new relationship. Through counselling, Paul began to see that, although he thought he was acting differently in his family system, it mirrored much of his family of origin. He learnt to give his children and stepchildren the chance to defend their rights and space to put across their point of view. In the past he would have expected them to jump when he said jump. Paul was able to enact a different way to be in his new family system, instead of continuing on with a tradition of abusiveness.*

### **Questions to Ponder**

- What do I now know about the family I grew up in that I didn't before reading this chapter?
- What patterns of anger and abusive behaviour did I learn in the family I grew up in?
- What has my experience of healthy or unhealthy families taught me about how to relate as a respectful adult?
- What is it that I would like to change about how I am in the family I now live in?

## **The Old Rule Book**

What we have seen so far is that families are the main place where people learn their blueprint for living as adults. These underlying beliefs also exist outside of families and are reinforced in the wider systems of our society. Many of the blocks you may experience when you begin to change belong to an old outdated rule book and the block wall. Let's take a closer look at the old rules about how men are supposed to be, and explore ideas about whether some of these rules are redundant and need updating.

Men learn very early on in life that masculinity and femininity have very clear boundaries, and that there are clear rules and roles to follow. By the age of six, boys are very clear about the differences between boys and girls, men and women. You will have learnt the contents of the Old Rule Book — the guidelines that, for better or worse, are used to steer our behaviour

I guess we all had guidelines about how we were supposed to act at high school. Let's call these guidelines our High School Rule Book. After a while it got a bit battered around the edges. It may have been constantly leafed through, with some pages missing, some torn, some dirty, others hardly looked at. You may have lost yours but not having one still wasn't valid as an excuse for breaking the rules.

Rules change over time to fit the circumstances, with some rules clearly becoming outdated. When I was at school, hair length was a major issue. Boys' hair wasn't allowed to extend over the ears or collar. We found very creative ways to deal with this rule. We would tuck it behind our ears, brush it inside our collars and avoid the Principal. If we were caught (and we often were), we would go to the barber and get him to cut off as little as possible. We often had to make more than one trip as we attempted to push the rules as much as we could. We believed that the old rule was outdated and took the risk of challenging it.

In the same way, many men are now looking closely at the Old Rule Book for being a man and considering its current usefulness, while other men grimly cling to their Old Rule Book, finding it too scary or too hard to let it go.

*Peter (37) clung on to the Old Rule Book. He grew up in a family with an older sister and brother, as well as a sister seven years younger than himself. He described his father as a very aggressive man who did not spend much time at home. When his father was at home he was treated as the most important member of the family, a position reinforced by comments such as, 'Your father's home. Be quiet — don't annoy him', from Peter's mother.*

*Peter remembers lots of arguments at home. If Peter's mother answered back then 'Dad would erupt into a verbal rage.' His father would push and push until he got his own way. And if he didn't he would walk out, saying things like, 'I don't need this; to hell with this.' His mother would give in to keep the peace and to protect Peter and his sister.*

*Peter's father was not physical in his abuse but verbal and emotional. Peter's mother suffered a nervous breakdown when he was about ten years old, at which time his father changed and became more involved in the family. Peter came to recognise that he had developed a similar pattern in his first marriage to Linda, whom he had married when he was nineteen. After returning to the relationship a couple of times he walked out for good. Peter then met Mary and it wasn't long before the old patterns began to re-emerge. He had taken his issues and his style of abusively relating to others with him into his new relationship.*

*Mary, however, was not prepared to be part of Peter's story as it was, and she was significant in promoting the development of a new story. Peter describes it like this:*

*'My present wife, Mary, was becoming more involved in other things, and at that stage I wasn't involved in anything. I wasn't changing and we started having conflict between us. She said that the change was upsetting me but I denied it. The more she did, the more angry and abusive I became. I was jealous that Mary was involved in things and I wasn't. Mary was changing. I couldn't, or thought I couldn't, change, so I was getting angry at Mary for changing and leaving me behind. I was getting worried that I was going to lose her and so we would argue and scream at one another.'*

*At about this time, Peter and Mary were going to a Child and Family Counselling Centre because of behaviour problems with their eldest daughter. One day Mary announced she was leaving unless Peter did something about his anger problem. She handed him a card with a phone number and said, 'Ring this guy.' Peter states:*

*'I was angry enough to go along and ring him to prove that I hadn't got a problem ... Mary had the problem. We had a communication problem, but I didn't have a problem ... I'm a hell of a nice guy, so I went along to prove I didn't have a problem with abuse.'*

*Peter had been presented with a challenge. A challenge to prove to these people that he was all right and didn't have any difficulty with his anger and violence. His rule book was similar to the one that his father used. Peter found that the rules had changed and his rule book needed updating. He was left with a choice — to re-write his rule book and develop relationships based on respect and equality, or to continue the traditions from his family of origin which operated under the Old Rule Book.*

Men have not had a choice about this blueprint. Kevin Ireland, in *One of the Boys* (edited by Michael King), summed this up very well in describing what it was like for him growing up in the 1930s:

*The men would come home and in house after house, street after street, night after night, I would turn sick with fright as I biked back through the yells and bellows. The favourite instrument of torture was the razor-strop ... I've seen the backs of small boys whipped black and blue for little reason and no prospect of reform.*

*The creepy feature of the punishment was that it was not carried out in a temper or in the heat of the moment. It was like a legal execution: performed long after the crime, premeditated, merciless and clinical. Unlike a legal execution, however, it was performed without a trial.*

*Transgressions were corrected with irrational severity, the fist sometimes followed the boot. Occasionally you got more of a hammering than a beating. Our house was the sixth in the street, counting the corner section, and I remember my brother once being kicked past each of them like a human football — lifted up into the air on the toe of my father's boot. The viciousness of the sentence was out of all proportion to the trivial crime, but was quite in keeping with the habits of the times. In fact we thought our father a hard man, but a bloody sight softer than the child-bashers all about us. (pp. 90—91)*

Given this model of behaviour, an Old Rule Book based on abusive and violent behaviour is not that surprising. What men are in effect carrying on is a tradition of their fathers and their fathers' fathers. Is this the type of legacy we want to pass on to future generations?





In addition to the obvious entitlement of men to be abusive to their families, the Old Rule Book sets out other entitlements. No one spells it out very clearly, but men learn by getting the message if they get it wrong. So what is this Old Rule Book? What are the ideas, values and beliefs that are in it? Are there adapted versions or is it the same for all? The fourteen rules are on page 15.

In summary, the Old Rule Book teaches us that:

- men are more important than women;
- men are more entitled to respect, loyalty and services than others — they expect to be in charge and others to take second place;
- men don't have to take responsibility for the social and emotional climate in relationships; they can rely on others to face these social and emotional responsibilities;
- it is acceptable for men to dodge responsibility and blame their actions on to other people, events or factors.

### ***Exercise***

Go through the fourteen rules listed on the next page and answer the following questions.



-  Which of the old rules have I adhered to?
-  In what ways does the Old Rule Book contribute to me acting in disrespectful ways towards others?
-  If I continue adhering to the Old Rule Book, will people like me more, or less?; respect me more, or less?
-  Where do I see my life and relationship going?

Perhaps it is time to begin thinking about rewriting this rule book with something more appropriate for our time and age. Before we can begin this process of rewriting it is useful to look in more detail at the specific beliefs that form our understanding of masculinity and femininity. The chart on page 17 outlines the traditional messages we receive more fully. We have been learning about men's conditioning. We also know that women are encouraged by their conditioning to behave in certain ways.

Clearly, what these beliefs do is trap both men and women into a narrow range of choices about what is and isn't acceptable behaviour. When men or women choose to step outside of these old messages they risk being judged by others who still adhere to the old rules. It takes courage to stand up against these expectations from the Old Rule Book. To not do so invites men to stay in the system that perpetuates abusive ways to relate to others.

*Exercise*

Look through the traditional gender prescriptions that are so much a part of the Old Rule Book and answer these questions:

-  Which of the gender prescriptions do I believe?
-  Which of the gender prescriptions have I questioned?

*Questions to Ponder*


- How do these traditional restraints limit the choices that men and women have in both their public and private worlds?
- Do these restraints enhance or detract from having a caring, respectful relationship with others?
- What costs have I and others paid by following the Old Rule Book?
- How have I and others benefited from living out these restraints?

**The Traditional Man's Old Rule Book**

1. Men are biologically superior to women, and so better at activities using physical strength (the myth of the hulk).
2. Men's thinking is rational and logical and superior to women's thinking, which is emotive and illogical. (Men can't really understand women.)
3. A man's image is based upon being more powerful, being fiercely competitive, dominant and controlling. (If you are none of these things then questions may be asked.)
4. Masculinity rather than femininity is the more valued gender identity to have — men rule OK.
5. Work and career success are the mark of a man. (Watch out for redundancy and unemployment.)
6. Self-esteem is established through achievement, competence and success.

7. A natural order exists whereby men are expected to assume control over others — especially their family, children — and their environment.
8. A man who needs help to deal with issues or problems is weak, vulnerable and incompetent — the myth of ‘I must do this all on my own’.
9. Expression of soft emotions is unmasculine and a sign of weakness — ‘Little and big boys don’t cry.’
10. Communication based on sharing feelings, intuitions, and physical non-sexual contact is to be avoided. (I don’t understand it so it must be wrong.)
11. Sexuality is performance and goal oriented. Intimacy and sensuality are of lesser importance.
12. Intimacy and sharing with other men means either homosexuality, or that the other man will take advantage in a competitive setting.
13. It is acceptable for men to use their power, dominance and violence to keep control inside and outside the home.
14. Real men are tireless, invincible and keep working regardless of the personal or health risks. (Real men die early of heart attacks, lung cancer, alcoholism, strokes.)

### *Exercise*

 Pretend you have been given the task to debate the question: ‘Should the Old Rule Book prevail or a new one be developed?’ You have to argue for men developing a New Rule Book. Work out an argument that would challenge the messages in the Old Rule Book. You may wish to engage the help of others in working out your ideas. Your partner, children and friends may have helpful ideas about the advantages of developing a rule book based on respect, trust and equality.

### *Questions to Ponder*

- What have I and others (partners, children, friends) lost by sticking to the Old Rule Book?
- What do I and others stand to gain by developing a New Rule Book based on non-abusive and respectful behaviour?

*Note:* Be aware of the blocks that would stop you arguing for the New Rule Book and the blocks that would stop you hearing the ideas of others.

**Traditional Gender Prescriptions**

(after Alan Jenkins)

**Male**

**Female**

*Physical* -----

Strong, tough, powerful, muscular

Weak, gentle, helpless, dainty, demure, petite, vulnerable, cute

Ruggedly handsome

Graceful, sensual, sexy, pretty

*Status* -----

Ownership – more entitled

Property – less entitled

Dominant – in authority

Submissive, demure

Leader

Follower

Independent, free

Dependent

Protector

Protected

*Interpersonal style* -----

Active; a doer

Passive, receiver, responder to male

Direct and assertive

Indirect, female wiles

Worldly, experienced

Inexperienced

Bold, adventurous, daring

Retiring, modest, self-conscious

Aggressive – win at all costs

Easily intimidated, shy, patient

Conqueror, victor

Be conquered, the prize

Competitive, ambitious, performance oriented in outside world

Non-competitive, unambitious in outside world

*Roles* -----

Economic provider; the breadwinner




Economic dependence



Work outside the family	Work within the family: nurturer, relationship repairer/maintainer, support provider, child-rearing, domestic duties, sexual partner, emotional counsellor
Head of the family	Neck that turns the head
Separateness; space	Belongingness, togetherness
<i>Emotional style</i> -----	
Unemotional, insensitive, cool, aloof	Emotional, sensitive, warm, expressive, caring
Calm in crises, stoic, level-headed	Understanding, easily distressed
Rational	Irrational, intuitive
Practical	Impractical in the outer world, frivolous, vain, gossipy, sentimental
Clever/suspicious	Dumb/cunning
Non-verbal communication, action	Verbal communication, words

***Exercise***

This exercise is an easy one. Find three hours to sit down and watch television. Answer the following questions:

-  How are men portrayed? What roles do they have and how active are they?
-  How are women portrayed? What roles do they have and how active are they?
-  Is there a difference in what is expected from women and what is expected from men?

I gave this exercise to a couple I worked with some time ago. They returned amazed by the narrow range of behaviours that were portrayed for men and for women. They found men were active and made all the major decisions while women tagged along behind. This gave

new insight about the influence of television on shaping the expectations of men and women for themselves and for their children.

## **Summary**

In this chapter we have explored another story to men's lives that is only now being heard as men make public their private worlds. These stories include growing up in families where there was abuse between significant caregivers, where children were on the receiving end of abusiveness and feeling somehow responsible for other people's actions.

Some men carry for years the guilt that comes from being a scapegoat in a family. Others harbour deep anger at the lack of intimacy and unavailability of fathers who had more important things to do than give time to their sons. Many men take these issues into their own adult relationships, helping to create yet another generation of dysfunctional families.

We can see that abuse isn't just to do with one man's behaviour, but sits in a context of wider expectations of how men and women should be in our society. When men see themselves as more important, rely on others to do the 'emotional' work in relationships, and blame others for abusiveness, they have bought into the Old Rule Book which supports an abusive lifestyle.

Patterns of abuse are often learned from the families in which we grow up. While this is sad, the fact that patterns of abuse are learned is good news. Anything that is learned can be unlearned and changed. In the next chapter you will be challenged to do something with all the information you now have. You will be challenged to make a decision — to either break with family traditions and the traditional culture of masculinity, or to consciously continue the destructiveness of the Old Rule Book.