Chapter One

The Disapproving Father

One of the most frequently occurring themes that emerges from my interviews, clinical work, and personal experience is that of the disapproving father: the father who failed to provide his daughter with the type of unconditional love and approval that children require in order to develop a positive self-concept and a sense of personal self-efficacy on which they can rely in their interactions with the world. These women reported that for one reason or another, their fathers failed to validate their existence and their intrinsic worth as human beings.

In some cases, the father's disapproval and his failure to validate his daughter's existence and worth resulted from active antipathy for her, such as may occur when the father wanted a son instead, and he feels that he can relate only to a boy's interests and activities. Such a father may simply ignore his daughter's accomplishments, leaving her to wonder what is wrong with her.

Alternatively, the father may fail to show love for his daughter and praise her accomplishments because he is emotionally disconnected and doesn't feel pride in her achievements. He may be too preoccupied with his work, or he may be the narcissistic sort who cannot think of anyone's needs or accomplishments save his own.

In still other cases, the disapproving father is not disconnected at all. In fact, he is well aware of his daughter's achievements. However, he may praise her only when she achieves his view of perfection. He will not love her and communicate her value to him simply because she is his daughter. Instead, he makes her feel that only her accomplishments matter. Furthermore, the father who

makes positive expressions of his daughter's worth contingent on her accomplishments may also set extremely high standards for approving these accomplishments. He may see the A that she earned in physics and ask her why she did not earn an A+.

All of these are disapproving fathers, and their failure to make their daughters feel valued unconditionally leads their daughters to assume that they are inadequate. These daughters often respond by redoubling their efforts to succeed in all areas of life in order to win the love and recognition that they require in order to feel good about themselves. This phenomenon explains why most of the women described in this chapter are remarkably successful by any objective criteria for success.

Unfortunately, it is often the case that nothing these women could ever accomplish during their formative years or even later would succeed in winning their father's approval. In the face of a consistent lack of love and approval, these daughters grow up feeling inadequate, often in the face of clear objective evidence to the contrary.

The stories that follow illustrate several different types of disapproving, invalidating fathers and the impact of their failure on the development of their daughters. They also provide us with an important clue regarding the means through which these women eventually gained self-acceptance and a feeling or personal worth. Time and again we find that when fathers fail to impart to their daughters a sense of personal worth, the daughters will seek out and secure validation through subsequent interaction with other significant individuals in their lives.

"If Only I Had Been a Boy"

Billie's father, Dan, clearly wanted a son. When his wife became pregnant, he went out and bought a large quantity of sports equipment and picked out the name William, the same name as his own father, whom he idolized. When a daughter arrived, Dan did his best to hide his disappointment and put the best face possible on

the situation. He said they could name the daughter Billie with an "ie" at the end, and he could still play sports with her. He assumed she would be an athlete and maybe a bit of a tomboy. But it didn't work out that way. Billie was not particularly athletic, and she was all girl. She much preferred dolls and frilly dresses to footballs and blue jeans.

As it became more and more clear to Dan that Billie was 100 percent little girl, he felt increasingly uncomfortable around her. He didn't know how to relate to a child that he couldn't push around, wrestle with, and slap on the back. In reality, Dan made little effort to learn how he might relate to a girl, and he left the job of raising Billie to her mom. When his subsequent children were boys, Dan stopped relating to Billie at all. Billie became keenly aware that her younger brothers got a great deal of attention from her dad, while she got none.

But Billie didn't stop trying to measure up and gain his approval. When she reached school age, she assumed that if she couldn't impress her father with her athletic prowess, then perhaps she could impress him by being a perfect student. As her younger brothers reached school age as well, Billie realized that through hard work, she could make school the arena in which she could surpass their achievements. She excelled in all academic work. Perhaps because her father was an electrical engineer, she made a special effort to do particularly well in math and science.

Yet Billie's prodigious academic efforts brought little recognition from her father. He gave her perfect report cards little more than a compulsory nod, then turned to his sons to heap praise on their athletic accomplishments. He attended all the boys' games and took them camping, but he never attended the school assemblies at which Billie received so many awards. On the same day that he missed her grade school graduation (it occurred during his workday hours), he attended his youngest son's Little League game (which required him to leave work a half-hour early).

As Billie grew up, her father's failure to make her feel loved and valued led her to doubt her worth. Although she was very attractive,

she was socially insecure. She was particularly uncertain of her attractiveness to men. She dated infrequently in high school and never had a steady boyfriend. She just focused on her studies.

As Billie neared graduation from high school, Dan made it quite clear to her that he would be able to provide only a modest amount of financial assistance for her college education. He had only one salary, and there were three children to put through college. Furthermore, he told her flat-out that "it was certainly more important for a boy to have a good college education than it was for a girl."

Although Billie had considered becoming a premedical student and was admitted to a prestigious private liberal arts college, she ultimately opted to attend the nearest branch of the state university, where she studied nursing. The idea of nursing also appealed to her because she thought of the nursing profession as a vehicle through which she could implement her nurturing impulses. Billie continued to excel in her studies. She graduated from nursing school ranked number one in her class, and she went on to a career as a neurosurgical intensive care nurse.

Once Billie began nursing school, her self-concept began to improve by leaps and bounds. There she received so many compliments from her professors and her fellow students that she finally began to think of herself as someone worthwhile. She also blossomed socially, discovering that many men in the college community sought her company because they found her physically and intellectually attractive.

After Billie started to work in the intensive care unit (ICU), her competence on the job and her excellent evaluations and promotions further boosted her self-concept. Eventually she mustered up the courage to apply to a doctoral program in nursing, and she was admitted with full financial support. She became the head nurse in the ICU, then the director of nursing at the hospital where the ICU was located.

In one of her graduate school courses, Billie met John, a doctoral student in psychology who loved everything about Billie—including her looks, her intellect, and her nurturing personality.

John was very demonstrative, and she flourished under the attention that he lavished on her. They got married, and today Billie is a confident, competent woman who loves her life and values the contributions that she makes to the world.

Billie's story illustrates the key problem experienced by women whose fathers fail to provide them with the unconditional love and validation that children require in order to develop a healthy self-concept. These women tend to overcompensate, often becoming high achievers, yet they typically fail to give themselves credit for their innate worth or accomplishments. Despite their successes, these women are often unsure of themselves.

Daughters of disapproving dads cannot think well of themselves and function well socially until they receive validation from some other source. Billie was fortunate in that the nursing education she pursued provided her with the validation that her father failed to provide, and over time she began to believe that she was a desirable individual. Once she felt that she had some intrinsic value, she could allow herself to interact with the world as both a giver and a receiver. When John told her that he loved her, she could believe him. She ended up happy, but she owes no thanks to her dad for her happiness.

Not all daughters of disapproving fathers have been so fortunate.

"He Never Showed Me He Cared"

Some fathers seem to be incapable of giving their daughters the affection and unconditional approval they must have to develop healthy, positive self-concepts. In these instances, there is virtually nothing that a daughter can do to get her father's attention and approval. Unfortunately, a developing child has no idea that the problem lies not with her but with her father's inability to bond. A young girl with a disconnected father is likely to assume that there must be something wrong with her to merit such treatment, and this assumption inevitably influences the manner in which she interacts with others. This dynamic of paternal disconnection is illustrated by Elizabeth.

Elizabeth is a thirty-nine-year-old vice president for catalogue design at the headquarters of a large sports store in the Midwest. She is married to a partner in a Minneapolis law firm. She has no children. Although she is attractive and successful, Elizabeth does not think of herself in these terms.

Elizabeth is truly a beauty. She's blonde, blue-eyed, tall, slender, and gorgeous. Nevertheless, Elizabeth believes she's ordinary looking. Within minutes of beginning our interview, she felt the need to tell me, "I'm really rather plain."

Elizabeth is also highly successful in her profession. She has garnered many prestigious awards for her professional work. She earns—with bonuses—over $300,000 a year. In addition, she spends hundreds of hours each year working, very quietly, for children's literacy. However, she is extremely modest regarding both her professional accomplishments and her community service contributions. She knows objectively what she has done with her life, but she seems to have difficulty identifying herself with her successes. It is as if she cannot admit that her own talent and hard work have brought her the successes she has achieved.

Elizabeth is an only child and is ambivalent about having children. She calls her mother in Boston, with whom she has always been close, once a week. She talks to her father every month or so. But this is not because he really wants to speak with her. Her father speaks with her when her mother puts him on the phone.

Today Elizabeth is pretty clear that her father's lack of validation has rubbed off on her in the form of her tendency to be unduly modest and even inappropriately self-effacing. In her interview with me, Elizabeth stressed that from the earliest memory right up to the present, her father has never praised her accomplishments. As an illustration, she described how she often brought home drawings from grade school. Her mother would attach the drawings with magnets to the refrigerator door. But, she said, "Invariably, my father took them down and threw them away. I used to think that if I tried harder and made a really good drawing, he'd allow it to stay. I know now nothing I did would ever have been good enough."

Her father is still withholding his affection and his approval. Recently Elizabeth was named Businesswoman of the Year by her state chamber of commerce. Her father didn't attend the banquet: he simply said that he was "too tired" to travel to the dinner. At first she was crushed by this continuing example of his inability to show approval, but ultimately she was able to put his disinterest in perspective and view it for what it was: a manifestation of his own inability to connect with her emotionally.

Now that Elizabeth has matured and received recognition from other sources, she has gained a better perspective on who she is and who her father is, and she has given up trying to please him. His decision to skip the chamber of commerce banquet was the final straw. According to Elizabeth, "That was it for me. He's always been too tired, and when it comes to showing any approval, he always will be. So I got to thinking it was time to put myself up for adoption, to get a new father. I've chosen a really nice widower who helps out at the literacy project. He listens and gives advice when I have problems on my job. He admires what I've done. He makes me laugh. I know I'm getting past the point where I might have children, but if I ever do, I'm going to ask him how he feels about being a grandfather."

This comment clearly indicates that Elizabeth has recognized that a child requires validation from her father. She has also recognized that she didn't get this validation from her own father, and that this was the result of his failure rather than her inadequacy. Finally, her response indicates that a part of her recovery from her father's failure to validate her existence was derived from validation she received through her subsequent, adult relationship with the widower at the literacy project.

"Just Being Myself Was Not Enough"

A common pattern of paternal failure is giving one's daughter approval not because she is intrinsically lovable but solely because she is a high achiever. The story of Karina illustrates the impact of

such conditional approval, which she summed up with the observation that throughout her life, she always "thought that people valued me because of whatever I had last achieved, not because I was a warm and affectionate girl who was easy to be with."

Karina, a successful writer, is a beautiful, willowy woman in her early fifties who attracts admiring looks when she walks down the street. Karina told me that her father always set high standards for her and that she strived diligently to meet his expectations. She understands that the goals he set for her have made her driven to succeed in her career. She also believes that she has some understanding of the reasons that he acted as he did: "We all walk through the world with baggage, and my father's baggage was heavier than most."

Karina was born in Eastern Europe in a country under the tight control of communist rule. "We were a very close-knit family, really. Our little apartment was a sanctuary against the hostile world outside. It was the four of us against the world." But when Karina was six and her sister not much older, her father was imprisoned for two years for dissident activities. Her mother too was briefly put in jail.

"Years later," she told me, "one of his cellmates said that my father had worried about what his imprisonment was doing to the soul of his younger daughter. So he wasn't blind to the fact that I was a sensitive little girl in a way that my older sister was not. In pictures taken before they took him away, I'm rarely smiling. It was when they took my parents away that I started smiling. It was my armor, my way of softening people. After my parents were released and we were able to come to this country, I was the biggest smiler on the block. I didn't speak English, and that was my way to ingratiate myself. Even now, when I'm in tense situations, I smile a lot."

Her family arrived in the United States with nothing. Karina's mother and father both worked, the latter at a university in Washington, D.C., teaching the language he'd left behind.

"There wasn't much time left over for us children. They didn't want us to spend our lives as poor refugees. They wanted us to go to good schools. Because they were both so ferociously proud, they

turned that whole prison thing into a positive force. 'Look at us, we prevailed, we survived with our heads held up.'

"Although my parents became totally assimilated, they were seen as very European by their circle of friends at the university and the State Department. At home we lived in a different world from my American world. It wasn't just that we spoke a different language. Our home was very European. Our things were old. My parents were very formal people, especially my father, cosmopolitan in their knowledge and taste. He could talk about pretty much anything: music, theater—and with great certainty. So there was never any doubt that this piece of music was the greatest piece of music. There was no room for negotiation there. Very antimodern. He was deeply rooted in the nineteenth century, early twentieth. But his cultivation was European, and that was my role model. I wanted to be elegant, cultivated, dignified.

"But one thing I didn't have from him was a sense of unconditional approval. I always thought—and this has stayed with me for my life—that people valued me because of whatever I had last achieved, not because I was a warm and affectionate girl who was easy to be with.

"I hugely admired him, but he was a role model as opposed to someone who offered closeness, coziness. He was not a physically affectionate person. I have no memory of sitting in his lap or holding his hand. I would have been very self-conscious doing that, because he was self-conscious about it. But I admired him and wanted to be like him. He was the bravest, most elegant, most dignified, cultivated man.

"His aloofness was a great motivator, a spur for me to try and get his approval. And I was never 100 percent sure that I had. He was embarrassed by others' emotions."

Karina's father was home for dinner every night. If he had a day off, it was a day spent with his family. Vacations too were family affairs, and when Karina's mother was unavailable, her father took either Karina or her sister to the diplomatic receptions to which he was so often invited.

"We thought we were very cool, watching Indian ladies in their saris and Africans in their robes. My father would show us off with great pride. I preened under that attention. He was also very proud of my academic achievements. I was always trying very hard to get those grades for him.

"Just being myself was not enough. I had to bring home the prizes to keep his affection. It was never unconditional. And I don't think you need to be a shrink to understand that that has kept me pushing for more achievements, because even now when someone is unexpectedly nice to me I think, 'Oh, they must have read my book,' or 'They saw the good reviews.' It can't just be because they like me. Even with my children, I feel I have to earn their love."

Karina's attempts to win her father's approval took her to the top of her profession as a writer, but it destroyed her first two marriages. Her father had always told her, "Be a success; don't marry one." But in the early, struggling days of her career, Karina had ignored him.

She describes her first husband as rich, intelligent, cultured, from an old Boston family—the epitome of the American dream for a young woman still not sure of her place in a new country. But like her father, Karina's husband "never could really open up. And I was way too immature. I was in my early twenties and desperate to make my mark in the world. I wanted to write books, get the success."

A writing assignment led to her second marriage. Sent to interview a man whose ego was as great as his fame, she fell in love and married him. "He replicated my father's withholding, but in a far more poisonous way. My father would never have gone silent for days if I just displeased him, as my second husband did—not only with me, but with our daughter. Very punishing, very punishing.

"I was madly in love with both my first and second husbands, but I see in retrospect that they were also a symbol of achievement . . . and of assimilation. They were proof that I'd arrived." Karina is still affected by the conditional approval that she received from her father. However, the success that she has enjoyed with her writing seems to have given her a somewhat more realistic percep-

tion of her intrinsic worth, and she has given considerable thought to the manner in which her insecurity influenced her behavior. She observed that it was her need for success that led her to choose each of her first two husbands, both of whom were very successful and neither of whom was supportive of her own striving. At this point in her life, however, Karina has been able to make a more mature choice.

Married for the third time, she laughs and says, "I guess to avoid confusion we should call Paul my 'current husband.' " She has come to rest in a more secure place: "Paul is a happy medium. He is a man of supreme achievement who is also very, very lovable and doesn't hide his feelings. He's the steadiest person I've ever known. You could set your clock by Paul. And yet if I'd met him when I was in my twenties, I never would have married him."

The need to achieve instilled in a daughter by a disapproving father who offers conditional acceptance is typically the strongest and most distinctive aspect of her personality. It is also one of the most resilient to change, in part because some of the fallout from this need is positive. Women who become successful because they feel that only their achievements matter often gain a sense of their intrinsic worth over time. These women often enter into problematic or even destructive relationships during early adulthood. With continued exposure to positive regard from others over the course of a lifetime, however, they tend to understand that they can please themselves as well as others. These women frequently form more appropriate, mutually rewarding relationships as they mature.

"Achieve, Achieve, Achieve"

It's hard to believe that Adrienna has just turned sixty. She is still the gamin, with huge brown eyes and short, shaggy hair. She has dressed for the interview in dark slacks and a loose red linen shirt, but as the afternoon lengthens and a chill enters the late autumn air, she pulls a throw from the back of the couch lined up against one wall of her studio and wraps it around her shoulders.

"Mediterranean blood," she explains, shivering. Even wrapped in this cashmere cocoon, Adrienna gives off sparks of energy as she admits that when she thinks of her late father, she feels nothing at all.

"When I try to think back, a lot of my childhood is a blank. I was probably a depressed child without knowing it. I'm not talking about when I was a teenager, because once I was out of the house, I had my friends. Once you have your friends, you're in a whole different world. You could drive around and hang out and talk on the phone for hours. But I don't have much recollection of life before that. I can describe the house where we lived. I can remember my father's sentimentality. I can even visualize him clearly. But he's still a shadowy figure. I don't have a concrete sense of him as a three-dimensional person."

Adrienna's father came to the United States from Italy when he was nine years old. He and his two younger sisters settled with their parents outside Boston.

"It was the basic immigrant story. Lots of hard work with my father selling vegetables off a cart, my grandfather putting the money they all earned into real estate and getting rich enough so he could send my father to Harvard, where he excelled, becoming a John Harvard Scholar, a sports champion in both handball and speed skating. My father got his law degree from Harvard, and when the Depression wiped out my grandfather's business, he took on responsibility for his two younger sisters, sending them to teacher's college."

It's like a Frank Capra movie: the poor Italian boy who climbs up in the world to become a star at Harvard, the bastion of WASPiness, his struggles rewarded by both business success and the hand of the princess.

"My mother's family back in Italy were minor royalty," Adrienna says. "When my parents fell in love, it was the union of the princess and the peasant. My mother was the youngest of eight kids. Her older sisters had married very rich guys, all of whom had gone to Harvard or Princeton. I think she married my father because she thought that with all his degrees, he'd become very rich too."

Although Adrienna's father was successful, she now describes him as incredibly insecure. "I think really my father hated his job and felt inadequate. I think he was a very insecure guy. All the achievements in the world didn't help him feel accepted in WASPy Connecticut, where we lived and where he felt he simply didn't belong. So he spent his life trying to further improve himself.

"My father liked to sit on the couch and read his law books from the minute he came home until the minute he went to bed. He would read his law books and listen to opera. So mainly I remember my father off by himself, reading. And then . . . nothing."

Although Adrienna feels that her father was always remote, she is also clear that he imposed his own incredible need to achieve on her. She explained that he made her feel that whatever she'd done wasn't good enough. In fact, she explained, "Both my parents constantly pushed me. Achieve, achieve, achieve.

"I never was able to please them, but I think some of that—at least with my father—was that he was never content with his own ability or performance. He once said to me, 'I wish I'd gone to Australia.' I think he never wanted to be a lawyer, but he had to survive. The Australia remark was him saying, 'I've never been happy.' It made a huge impression on me."

Adrienna did achieve. At school she was put into a program for intellectually gifted children and jumped up two grades. "The school recommended it," she says, "but it was terrible. I was much younger than the others, and my father wouldn't let me wear lipstick, though of course all the other girls did. Throughout this period, I remember that my parents were incredibly strict. I had to be home by ten when everybody else could be home by twelve—that kind of thing. As far as they were concerned, life wasn't about having fun; it was about achievement, and I was an extension of their ego."

Adrienna responded to the pressure by gathering together a group of friends. "I was terrified I wasn't going to get love unless I pleased people, so I tried to get everyone to like me. In large measure I succeeded; I was voted most popular in my class, best personality, and most likely to succeed.

"My parents had wanted me to go to Radcliffe, and my big rebellion was saying I wouldn't go there. So my father said, 'I'm not sending you to college unless you go to one of the Ivy League colleges.' I didn't want to pay for my own college, so I applied to Smith, Vassar, and Wellesley. I got into all of them, and I went to Smith. I should have gone to Radcliffe.

"I hated Smith. It was rural, and I was urban. It was freezing, and though Boston was only a little warmer, at least it was a city. I achieved well there, but I just loathed it. I had a battle with my father at Smith every semester. He would ask what courses I was taking and insisted I take music, which I almost failed because I hated it so. And he wanted me to take the big art history course, but I wouldn't do that because I was so viciously angry at him for telling me what to take."

After graduation Adrienna moved to New York City, where, despite her father's furious objections, she abandoned her background in literature and began to paint. To her astonishment, she was an instant success, with a gallery show her first year. "I never worked my way up," she says of the surprising speed that took her to the top of the art world.

In her second year in the city, she met and became engaged to a fellow artist. "I don't think I was really in love with him, but I just had to get married to get away from my parents. I thought they'd be very happy, but my father threw a fit."

Adrienna says it's ironic that after opposing the marriage, her parents fell in love with her husband—even more so after the birth of their son—although she points out that in the culture they both came from, males were more important than females. When the marriage eventually fell apart, it was her ex-husband who received more sympathy from their families.

"The thing that I did learn from my father was tremendous self-reliance. But the bad part of that is that I never allow myself to rely on anyone else. That's probably what broke up my marriage and the relationships that followed—until now.

"With Roger [Adrienna's second husband] it's totally different. When we became involved, he just said, 'Well, that's the way she's

going to be. Why try to change the pattern at a later stage in life?' And he was right. I doubt if I could be different now. Roger is a very confident man who grew up with a mother who adored him. He said to me the other day, 'You've never been adored. I really adore you.' And I believe that. I am really happy talking to Roger about work, and he and I can have fun. I think the most fun I've had in my life is with Roger.

"Sometimes he says I don't take enough time to enjoy life. But—surprise—my enjoyment comes from achieving something for myself. When I'm painting and hit something right, I get so turned on that I do a little dance in my studio."

When I ask Adrienna if she thinks her father loved her, she sinks further down into the warmth of the blanket and gives a shake to her shaggy head, as though she's trying to knock loose a memory.

"As much as he was capable," she finally says, "and who knows how much that was? When I was successful in my career, he'd say, 'I'm so proud,' but it was more sentimentality speaking. Maybe I'm being unfair to him, and it was the real thing. I *cringe* when somebody gets sentimental. I was brought up to have a tough-girl attitude."

Adrienna often did precisely the opposite of what her father thought that she must do to become appropriately accomplished and to fit in. She became self-reliant, yet at the same time she clearly adopted her father's need to achieve. She still derives great pleasure from her professional successes. However, through the validation she received from the circle of friends she developed outside her family, she gradually learned to be able to allow herself to be loved for herself.

"Are You Going to Make Me a Birthday Cake?"

The story of Naomi illustrates still another way in which a disapproving father can invalidate his daughter. Naomi's father had a close relationship with her, particularly when she was very young. However, he was (and still is) an extremely rigid person who can view the world and his relationships in the world only through his

own particularly narrow perspective regarding what is right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate. Accordingly, the expectations that he has placed on Naomi have never taken into consideration her own feelings and thoughts. He has always told her exactly what to do to make him happy, exactly how to love him. And if she ever deviated from his demands, he has made her feel selfish for doing so. Naomi has never had a mutual give-and-take relationship with her father, and this has driven her crazy for her entire life.

"Until I was eleven or twelve I have more memories of my dad than of my mom," says Naomi. "He was the one who got up with me early in the morning, who taught me to write my name, so when I went to preschool I was able to sign myself in on the blackboard. He was a university professor, and when I was six, we went on sabbatical to Indonesia and lived in this teeny town where most people had never seen a foreigner—particularly not one like my dad who is six feet, three inches. We were like aliens."

In that foreign environment, Naomi's relationship with her father became even stronger. The two of them went off on frequent excursions, and later her father twice took Naomi with him on six-week trips to Asia. "We had a very strong relationship. I was really my dad's daughter."

The relationship changed dramatically Naomi was twelve and her parents divorced. Naomi explained that when she learned of the impending divorce, "I was beside myself. I threw myself on the floor in a temper tantrum. My mom is a counselor, and she's trained to make a lot of space for irrational emotions and anger. My dad is a scientist, logical and rational. He'd try to reason with me, and the situation would become very explosive. He wasn't good at anticipating what would set me off. I think my father really didn't want to get a divorce and that it was my mother who precipitated it. It must have been a double blow to him—first he loses his wife and then his daughter, who used to think he was great and who spent a lot of time with him.

"My relationship with my father was never the same after that. It must have been very hard for him, and the problems in our rela-

tionship have continued into adulthood. A lot of that is no longer about the divorce but who he is as a person.

"My father has to call the shots. It's not so much a relationship as a command performance: 'Call me every Sunday.' 'Are you going to make me a birthday cake?' He has to tell you what he wants you to do, and if I don't do it, it's because I'm really selfish. He doesn't yell. It's all very measured and logical. It makes me crazy, and I become a child again, hysterical. I get really, really upset. I can't show him I love him my way. It has to be his, or he'll be 'disappointed.'"

Naomi understands why her father is as rigid as he is. She attributes her father's need for control to the fact that his father is bipolar. "He had a horrible go of it," she says. "I think living with someone who's bipolar creates a sense of chaos; you can't control anything, so you want to control everything. And not enough love. I don't think he felt much love from his father, and when my grandfather would show it, it would be in a material way, buying stuff, and that was scary because it was part of his being on the way up into a manic phase."

Although Naomi is able to understand, and to a certain extent rationalize, what causes her father's controlling behavior, as you listen to her talk, you can hear the hurt child lingering inside, still angry at the father she had idolized. She acknowledges that her father loves her but says, "I don't feel loved the way I think I should be."

Today Naomi is happily married, the mother of a small child, and successful in her career. But to this day, she finds herself bending over backward to comply with whatever demands her father might make on her, and she still feels frustrated because he will not allow her to love him in the way that feels right to her.

"Chasing After a Man Who Is Looking Away from Me"

Deborah's father was narcissistic and completely self-absorbed as she was growing up. He wanted and expected to be taken care of, and he had little use for any of his six children. Deborah said that her

mother was at least interested in the children, but that her father was interested only in the news and the stock market.

Today Deborah understands that her father's lack of interest or approval has affected her orientation toward men in a significant manner. She married and then divorced a man who was sensitive but unsuccessful, and to this day, she finds it difficult to allow the possibility that a man can be both emotionally connected and competent.

Deborah explained, "My father was very remote. He was a Wall Street stockbroker, but he was very withholding when it came to money." Deborah told me that she could remember "making efforts to engage him, trying to make of him a daddy, like my idealized image of an American dad—like the TV show *Gidget*, where the main parent was the father and there was no mother, and the show always began with Gidget talking about how a problem had been resolved when she talked to her father. I would watch *Gidget* avidly, but my father was never like hers. He roared; he had obsessions. If he couldn't find one of his pencils, the whole house went into a mode of emergency, and we had to look for it."

Deborah described her family as "a tightly run German Jewish family, Orthodox but with a German emphasis on order and quiet. "My father was what today you'd call a news junkie—cerebral, somewhat overweight, sitting hours upon hours with the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Financial Times*, the *New York Times*. English was his third language, and both my parents were very language conscious. He loved words and kept lists of those he'd come across in his reading in his sort of obsessive handwriting."

Deborah is a writer who had early success writing fiction but has now shifted to more analytical essays, a change she thinks was an attempt to move toward her father's world. "I love critical writing, but I probably also thought that was the most acceptable to him, a smart mind commenting on issues. Or maybe I just didn't have enough ego to continue writing fiction," says the woman who admits, "I think I saw my father as proof that men wouldn't find me attractive. I used him as a kind of litmus test. Could I intrigue a man? No. I felt I was of no interest."

With a father who either ignored her or diminished her, Deborah grew up feeling uncomfortable with emotionally open men. "My template of what it was to be male was to be closed off emotionally, not know how to boil water, and to be catered to. My father had very little ability to show love, and I don't know if he did love. He was mind-bogglingly self-absorbed—a big, pampered child—and my mother encouraged this."

In an attempt to break with her upbringing, Deborah married her father's opposite: a man who "had developed a side of himself that was the feminine; he could cook, he could do everything my brothers and fathers could not do, like change a light bulb. I think I also found him artistic. I probably didn't count on how much it would bother me—not the lack of money but the lack of direction."

Or the disdain her father openly showed to her own husband. They divorced, and today Deborah says, "There is a whole side of me that verges on anti-male. I'm certainly a feminist, but I also think I took in that what matters is whether my father would notice. I sometimes feel it's an effort that will never be gratified, that I'll always be chasing after this man who's looking away from me."

Deborah, with her analytical mind, noted that a father like hers who ignores his daughter sometimes produces a woman unable to flirt: "My sister and I are the least flirty people you could meet, but I find it fascinating that friends of mine who are no more attractive assume people will be interested in them. I think that to flirt, you need to have the confidence established in your own mind that you're intrinsically of interest to the person."

Flirting is to give consequence to the inconsequential, to have one conversation on the surface while a provocative and unspoken one slides along beneath. A daughter whose father never even listened to the words on the surface will find it hard to believe a man might hear those that aren't spoken.

Thus, Deborah has a degree of understanding regarding the manner in which her uninvolved and disapproving father has affected her life with respect to both her career and her relationships. However, she doesn't seem to have gone as far as some of the other

women discussed in this chapter in terms of establishing a strong sense of self and developing mutually satisfying adult relationships.

"Why Can't He Accept My Sexuality?"

Maura is a twenty-eight-year-old who works as a stagehand in Broadway and off-Broadway theaters in New York. She has always wanted to work in the theater, and she majored in theater arts at a prestigious woman's college in New England. After graduation, she moved to New York, and she showed remarkable strength of character and determination in securing entry into the stagehands union, which is difficult for anyone to get into—and nearly impossible for a woman. Through hard work and dedication, she has gained the acceptance of her fellow workers and is very happy in her work.

Maura is a lesbian who became aware of her sexual orientation at the age of fourteen, after a period of struggling to understand why she did not feel attracted to boys as did most of her girlfriends. She had always been a joy for her parents, never getting into trouble and doing well in school. She had felt loved by both her parents, whom she perceived as taking great pride in her looks, her personality, and her diligence. When Maura became quite certain of her sexual orientation, she simply informed them both. She had no idea that this disclosure would have any impact on how they felt about her.

But it did. She could see immediately that both of them were disappointed. Her mother accepted what Maura was saying, but she also expressed disappointment because she would not have the grandchildren she was looking forward to having.

Maura's dad could not accept the disclosure. At first he dismissed it as a childish phase, suggesting, "All young girls go through a period during which they think they are attracted to women, but they grow out of it." As time went by, however, he began to realize that Maura might in fact be a lesbian. And when this reality began to sink in, his whole attitude toward her changed.

First, her father asked Maura not to be "too obvious" about her "choice." He said that he would be embarrassed to have everyone in town know that she was gay, even if she did eventually get over it. He told her that she could not bring her "girlfriends" to their house, and he urged her not to go out on dates in places where people who knew him would see her "holding hands with another girl."

Over time, his negative response to Maura's sexual orientation began to generalize to other aspects of her life. Soon he was attributing her lesbianism to her interest in the theater, and he no longer wanted to go to see the high school productions that she acted in, directed, or staged. He criticized her decision to major in theater arts in college, and he made sarcastic remarks about the college she chose, suggesting that it was the "intellectual capital of the Daughters of Sappho." He asked her at one point why she couldn't choose a regular profession for a modern woman, such as a district attorney or a stockbroker. He generally regarded these kind of comments as "good-natured humor." However, when Maura told him how much they hurt her, he became angry, claiming that she had a "very thin skin" and suggesting that she wouldn't react so strongly if she didn't feel deep down that she was making a mistake.

Even worse, Maura's dad became increasingly less affectionate toward her. The big bear hugs that she had loved became a thing of the past. She even thought that he showed signs of contempt when he looked at her.

Her father's inability to accept her sexual orientation threw her for loop. She found herself from time to time wishing that she were not a lesbian, something that had never occurred to her while she was in the process of trying to sort out her sexual feelings. She became depressed and felt that she was undergoing a process of grieving for a lost father. "It was almost as if he had died," she said.

She had a period of nearly a year during which she withdrew from many of her activities, and her grades suffered. It was only the understanding of some of her high school teachers that kept her emotional crisis from jeopardizing her chances of attending her first choice among the colleges to which she applied.

Fortunately, Maura received a great deal of support and understanding from her friends at school, both straight and gay. They attributed her father's response to his age and to the fact that "you can't teach an old dog new tricks." They told her that she should try to understand where he was coming from, but at the same time she shouldn't let his old prejudices "mess up her head." Although it was difficult at first for her to try to follow this advice, their continued support and encouragement helped her to work it through.

Eventually Maura got back on an even keel and pursued her interests with the same diligence and enthusiasm that she had shown for her entire life. She felt completely accepted for who she was at college and among her colleagues in the theater in New York. She is doing well professionally and socially. She has not yet found her ideal life partner, but she has had several meaningful relationships, and she continues to date and share her life with people she feels she can trust and rely on—people to whom she can feel close.

Maura still has a very close relationship with her mother, and her relationship with her father is improving. He is becoming more accepting over time, partially due to being exposed to more lesbian women, whom Maura is now allowed to bring home with her on vacations and holidays. Maura says that she will always feel somewhat betrayed by her dad because of his initial response to her disclosure, but she also acknowledges that with the help of her friends, she has learned to accept him for what he is. She gives him credit for "making the progress that he has."

The Path to Recovery

The women described in this chapter share the relentless failure of their fathers to provide unconditional love and approval. They share as well the natural response to their fathers, which is to try harder and harder to please him by achieving more and more. Ironically the fathers who fail so miserably at the task of helping their

daughters develop healthy positive self-concepts succeed very well at producing daughters who are high achievers.

The daughters are controlled by the need to please. They keep trying to be perfect. They are good students. They are often well liked. But they don't feel good about themselves. They refuse to admit that they are attractive, or intelligent, or successful, or lovable. They often get involved with men who cannot feel or display emotion, because this is the kind of man with whom they grew up.

Fortunately, most of these women come to recognize the reality that as great as their successes may be, they will never satisfy their dad. This realization may come relatively early or not until quite late in life, but when it comes, it is truly liberating. Moreover, many of these women with disapproving fathers begin to obtain the validation they need from other sources. In some cases, a loving mother will compensate for the failure of the disapproving father. In that case, the dynamic of achieving success without giving oneself credit may never play out. But in other cases, this validation comes from peers during adolescence, from teachers during adolescence and young adulthood, or from colleagues in the employment setting. As these women come to feel validated, they begin to realize that they are lovable. At this point, they often find supportive, loving partners.

The clear lesson to be learned from the stories of the women in this chapter is that if you are a woman who feels unworthy of being loved and never gives herself credit for her personal accomplishments, you need to pay very careful attention to what the people around you are telling you about yourself.

Just because your father never told you that you were beautiful, warm, loving, intelligent, or hard working does not mean that all of these things are not true. And when you receive affection and praise from those around you, do not dismiss it out of hand. Once you begin to believe the positive things that others are saying about you, you will feel better about yourself and allow yourself to participate in relationships of all kinds that are mutually rewarding. At that point, you will be well along the road to allowing yourself to be loved.