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# Who's Your Daddy?: A Psychological Analysis of Father-Son Relationships in Rushmore and The Royal Tenenbaums

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Who's Your Daddy?: A Psychological Analysis of Father-Son  
Relationships in *Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaums*

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by

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## ABSTRACT

This paper offers an analysis of dysfunctional father-son relationships in Wes Anderson filmography. In particular, the films that will be analyzed are *Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaums*. Anderson films have a unique style and present relationships that feel authentic to the audience. The realistic nature of these relationships makes them the perfect candidates for examination through psychological analysis. Four psychological principles applying to father-son relationships were chosen in order to analyze the relationships presented in the films. The principles, outlined in the body of the paper, pertain to the presence of the father in the home and specific attitudes fathers have towards their sons. Using the principles to conduct an analysis will display how important fathers are to their sons' development, both behaviorally and emotionally. Despite the negative connotations of the principles, this paper seeks to show that there is the possibility for change in a relationship at any stage.

Who's Your Daddy?: A Psychological Analysis of Father-Son Relationships in *Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaums*

Every relationship is different, but all relationships are complicated. Relationships take a great deal of work, usually require a large time commitment, and demand considerable effort to maintain. However, in familial relationships families may take for granted the work, time, and effort deemed necessary to maintain healthy relationships. Once a child grows up and moves away from home, the necessity-based relationship between the child and their parents can disappear rapidly without the proper foundation and connection. Psychology as science seeks to understand relationships through the study of the human mind and behavior. Psychologists ask why they work or do not work and why they last or do not last. In psychology though, the goal is to narrow the field of study considerably. Instead of looking at all relationships, they look at familial relationships. Some even probe deeper and look at only parent-child relationships or sibling relationships. In a similar vein, this paper seeks to analyze two films that display dysfunctional father-son relationships in a real yet unique way and demonstrate whether or not they fit into the presented psychological principles defined in this paper.

Scholarship was needed in order to examine father-son relationships from a psychological standpoint. To do this, research was conducted to find principles to apply to how father-son relationships function. From there, these principles needed to be applied to case studies in order to discover how the validity of their claims. Filmography provides the perfect avenue by which to conduct case studies by which characters might be analyzed in scenarios that could be considered unethical if performed in real life. Characters often exemplify extremes or are placed in extreme cases that provide a life-

like look at how a human would interact given certain parameters. The writer, director, producer extraordinaire Wes Anderson is particularly apt at creating these situations and delving deep into the psychological nature of them in his films. By using his films *Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaums*, this paper seeks to understand how dysfunctional father-son relationships in the films follow or diverge from the following four psychological principles.

### **The Four Principles**

Presented below are four distinct, yet complimentary psychological principles that look at different aspects of father-son relationships. The goal of the principles is to show how important a functional father-son relationship is to the emotional and psychosocial development of the son(s). The first principle looks at a father's physical and emotional presence in the home and how that influences a child's emotional and behavioral development (Pitsoane & Gasa, 2018, p. 10748). The next principle postulates that sons of depressed fathers tend to be more depressed and anxious in youth and into adulthood (Reeb, et al., 2014, p. 154). The third principle argues that the loss of a mother is more difficult for children regardless of sex than the death of a father (Carver et al, 2014, p. 111). Finally, the fourth principle examines the level of ambivalence fathers feel towards their adult sons (Pillemer, et al., 2012, p. 1101).

#### **Principle #1**

In 2018, the University of South Africa conducted a study to determine the impact of a father's presence in the home on the development of the son(s). The researchers, Enid M. Pitsoane and Velisiwe G. Gasa, looked at a sample of roughly 403 adolescent boys between age 15 and 17 (Pitsoane & Gasa, 2018, p. 10751). Using a questionnaire to



gather their data and a statistical software called SPSS to quantify it, Pitsoane and Gasa presented their results which revealed the statistical importance both of the father's actual presence in the home and the son's perception of the father's attentiveness.

By looking at the son's perception, they determined that, while the boys rated high when asked if they felt secure with their fathers, they also reported feeling an emotional distance from their father-figures (Pitsoane & Gasa, 2018, p. 10752). The results of the questionnaire revealed that adolescent boys felt they were "unable to share their experiences with their fathers" and complained of distant fathers who had no time to participate in play with them (Pitsoane & Gasa, 2018, p. 10752). These results "... imply fathers are emotionally absent in the lives of the adolescent boys, even [when] the fathers are physically present" (2018, p. 10752). These studies suggest that even fathers who are physically present in the homes can often seem distant, detached, and disconnected from their sons.

The other aspect of this study explains that the perception of an absentee father can lead to a greater likelihood of "adolescent boys who...demonstrate a low internal locus of control," meaning that they believe they have less control over the outcomes in their respective life (Pitsoane & Gasa, 2018, p. 10752). Significantly, this lack of attachment perceived by adolescent boys "has been identified as one of the causes that push the adolescents to be involved in risky behaviours" as well as develop a "low-resistance" to unsavory behaviors including criminal activity (Pitsoane & Gasa, 2018, p. 10752). Pitsoane & Gasa further argue that "boys with involved fathers are more likely to demonstrate a greater internal locus of control," and are at a decreased risk of acting out in risky ways (2018, p. 10752). Thus, fathers who are physically and emotionally present

in the home are “highlighted as having significant benefits on social and emotional maturation of boys” (Pitsoane & Gasa, 2018, p. 10755). Those fathers who are absent entirely cause severe developmental complications for their sons who grow up “lack[ing] a strong male figure to emulate” (Pitsoane & Gasa, 2018, p. 10755). This leaves the son looking for a role model in all of the wrong places or attempting to become his own role model to his own detriment.

In other words, an increase in attentiveness from a father increases the adolescent's internal locus of control, allowing them to feel and behave as though they can manage their impulses instead of letting their impulses control them. This attentiveness from the father creates the male-role-model figure the son needs to have for healthy development. In addition, an attentive father would likely be more in control of his emotional appearance towards his children depending on the age and maturity level of the child. This provides a perfect segway to principle two.

### **Principle #2**

The second psychological principle is based on a study that examines how depression or depressive symptoms in a father can lead to increased anxiety and negative emotions in a child. Using a longitudinal study, Ben T. Reeb, Ed Y. Wu, Monica J. Martin, Kristina L. Gelardi, Sut Yee Shirley Chan, and Katherine J. Conger, followed 395 complete (both parents were present in the home) families from the child's adolescence through early adulthood. In order to conduct their study, the researchers checked in on the families twice a year starting when the children were in seventh grade and finishing when the children entered adulthood at 20 and 22 years of age (Reeb et al., 2014, p. 153).

The results noted that “children of depressed parents are at an increased risk of psychiatric disorders and developmental difficulties” (Reeb et al., 2014, 151). Through this study, it is suggested that regardless of the cause, children are affected by their father’s mood and take their social cues from him. Reeb et al. discuss the tendency of children to empathetically respond to their father’s emotional state: when the children see the depressive symptoms in their father, it has the potential for them to mirror their father's depression (Reeb et al., 2014, 154 & 157).

Due to the statistical increase in internalization found in the study, the authors claimed that fathers actually have significantly “more influence on their children than previously thought,” (Reeb et al., 2014, 151). The father’s influence has been underrepresented in the literature up until this point (Reeb et al., 2014, 151). This is important when discussing the statistical difference in the experiences of depression between mothers and fathers. Although no significant difference is reported during pregnancy, “an estimated 21% of fathers experience at least one episode of major depression by the time children reach 12 years of age,” (Reeb et al., 2014, 152). Due to the timing of these projected depressive episodes occurring during the formative adolescent years, the children would be greatly affected.

Another important aspect of this study is the longitudinal design. Rather than a cross-sectional design, a longitudinal study follows one group over a period of time. This allows the researchers to study the changes in that group rather than studying multiple groups all at once and comparing them. Reeb et al. discovered that by using this study, the results “were significant after controlling for effects of baseline youth symptoms, maternal depressive symptoms, and other potential confounding factors...including

parental hostility, marital discord, and economic hardship,” (Reeb et al., 2014, 157).

After using these control methods and running the analyses, the statistical significance of fathers' depression symptoms affecting the child's psychopathology were significantly higher than the maternal depression symptoms (Reeb et al., 2014, 157). This result can lead to the conclusion that in the absence of a mother or maternal figure the depression that a father might experience would have an even greater effect on the child especially in light of the third principle.

### **Principle #3**

The death of a parent is difficult no matter what stage of life a child is entering. In a study published in 2014 at the University of North Texas, Kellye S. Carver, Bert Hayslip, Jr., Angela Gilley, and Justin Watts examined the effect of losing a parent in adulthood and how the sex of the parent effects bereavement. The authors note in the introduction that “although the parent-child relationship is significant throughout life, many changes occur as children grow, particularly during young adulthood” (Carver et al., 2014, 105). These changes can lead to stronger attachments in emerging adulthood, here defined as ages 18-28, which can also lead to an increase in grief at the death of a parent.

In this particular study, several questionnaires were compiled to create a scale and then administered to 179 participants (Carver et al., 2014, 107). The researchers compiled the results of the questionnaires and then quantified the data to determine the extent to which the independent variables, the gender of the child and the gender of the parent, affected the outcome. The study shows that female children were more likely to be affected by the death of a parent, regardless of sex, but both male and female children

were more emotionally affected by the death of a mother than a father (Carver et al., 2014, 111). In addition, the data reveals that children who lost a mother were more likely to maintain “ties with the deceased to a greater extent than those who lost a father,” (Carver et al., 2014, 111). This indicates that most children form tighter bonds with their mothers in life and continue them post mortem.

The authors commented on the fact that some of the results could be due to social factors, specifically the stronger grieving score reported by the females in the study. Society dictates that “men often learn to withhold emotion and act on their feelings instrumentally,” leading to men who “may not be as aware of their emotional experience and may express anger in place of more vulnerable emotions” (Carver et al., 2014, 112). Whereas when looking at female subjects, expressing emotion is expected, if not stereotypically attributed to women in such situations. By taking into consideration the first and second principles discussed in the thesis, perhaps this repression of emotion or outburst of other, less appropriate emotions in young men could be due to a lack of a strong, male role model or even as a response to the emotion the father expresses at the loss of his wife. Through the incorporation of parent-child ties after death presented in this principle, the following principle deals with the concept of parental ambivalence as the child ages while the parent is still alive.

#### **Principle #4**

As children age and leave the home, their relationship with their parents changes. Karl Pillemer, Christin L. Munsch, Thomas Fuller-Rowell, Catherine Riffin, and J. Jill Sutor published an article in 2012 that looked at the difference between mothers and fathers in their ambivalence towards adult children. The researchers interviewed 129

married couples “about aspects of relationships, including ambivalence, with each of their adult children, resulting in data on 444 offspring” (Pillemer, et al., 2012, 1105). The findings indicate that “fathers report higher levels of ambivalence towards their adult children than mothers” (Pillemer, et al., 2012, 1101). Specifically, Pillemer et al. looked at intergenerational ambivalence, which is defined as “simultaneously held opposing feelings or emotions that are due in part to countervailing expectations about how individuals should act” (2012, 1102).

Using this definition clarifies the difference between mothers and fathers. It additionally allowed the authors to hypothesize that the difference was due to the nature of fathers being more influenced by “negative” aspects of the parent-child relationship as well as placing a “greater emphasis on instrumentality” when compared to mothers (Pillemer, et al., 2012, 1109). Gendered results showed that fathers and sons and mothers and daughters as pairs tend to show higher ambivalence than fathers and daughters and mothers and sons. This is hypothesized to be because of a lack of contact between parents and children of the same gender due to changing roles. As sons step into the role of husband and father and daughters into the role of wife and mother, statistically the need for parental assistance decreases (Pillemer, et al., 2012, 1109 & 1110).

In reference to the overarching scenario of father-son relationships, this ambivalence, specifically when compounded with principle two and increased depression, can lead to an extremely strained relationship between fathers and sons. This is compounded by the fact that mothers tend to focus on more positive aspects of the parent-child relationship than the fathers often leading the son to feel more love from the mother and judgment or criticism from the father (Pillemer et al., 2012, 1102).

Having given a brief explanation of the principles, the concluding section of this paper will discuss the application of said principles to the case studies. This application will focus specifically on Wes Anderson's films and his depictions of father-son relationship dynamics. *Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaums* are fascinating films that will function in this paper as case studies for dysfunctional father-son relationships. Application of these four principles to the films allows for analysis of what these fictional fathers and sons are lacking and how they can move towards functionality. Anderson does an excellent job in his films of bringing his characters to a place of reconciliation or hinting at such a journey by the end of the film. The story-lines and redemption arcs found in *Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaums* serve as prime material to analyze in light of the aforementioned principles.

### **Wes Anderson on Fathers and Sons**

Wes Anderson is an American filmmaker, who specializes in unique, indie-type films. In an interview with *Vanity Fair*, Jeff Goldblum describes shooting with Anderson as “a kind of art piece experience” (Jeff Goldblum, 2018). Anderson’s films create a suspension of disbelief that coincides with reality just subtly enough to allow the audience into the world of the film. By creating characters who “fumble their way through life,” he displays a natural tendency to highlight “a theme of alienation from the established order” (Dilley, 2017, p. 2). This theme of alienation is often portrayed in his characters' familial relationships. This is often surprising to audiences, especially in light of the fact that, while his parents divorced when he was young, he remains close to both of them.

### **Rushmore**

*Rushmore* is the second feature-length film written and directed by Wes Anderson which features a fifteen-year-old boy named Max Fischer who falls madly in love with one of the teachers at his school, the very beautiful Rosemary Cross. Max is ambitious and a go-getter by all accounts, although he lacks a properly-focused drive and impulse control. As the story progresses, Max forms a strong bond with one of his classmates' fathers, Herman Blume. Herman is a very successful business owner and appears to be leading the life that Max aspires to lead. Herman's life is a stark contrast to the life Max's father, Bert Fischer, leads. Bert, who is a barber, appears to not have amounted to much in terms social standing. Max appears to be ashamed of his father's job, but the film presents Bert, his father, as clearly devoted to his son and desiring only the best for him.

Over the course of the film, the audience learns that Max's mother died of cancer when he was seven. This is a very young age to lose someone to something as devastating as cancer. However, the death of Eloise, the mother, nearly eight years prior to the events of the film, allows the audience to have a deeper understanding of Max as a character. Additionally, when the audience is finally introduced to Max's father, it is very clear that the death of Eloise has not just affected Max.

In order to fully understand Max and his father's relationship, it is important to do so in light of the principles. While *Rushmore* does not perfectly fit all of the principles, it highlights the way in which they work together to produce a fascinating father-son relationship in the absence of the mother. Max and his father have a working relationship that is stereotypical of that between a father and a young man in his formative teenage years. Due to Max's strong drive to be the best at Rushmore, contrasted with his father's



blue-collar job, it is easy to find where the two differ in opinion and where the principles begin to line up.

For example, the first principle suggests that a father may be present physically but emotionally absent from the home. Bert is portrayed as very happy and supportive of Max. However, Max seems to avoid any connection with his father. Based on the study by Pitsoane and Gasa, Max's avoidance could be due to a perceived emotional distance between him and his father. Although not explicitly stated, Bert seems to want Max to follow in his footsteps and work at the barber shop. This is not to say he is unsupportive of Max's ambitions: it is merely a classic example of parents wanting their children's admiration. Through the subtle expression of these desires, Bert may have communicated disinterest in Max's extracurricular activities; however, this could also be because Max seems to avoid inviting his father to anything in which he participates.

The third principle can be used to explain many of Max's behaviors, especially when coupled with the mentions of Max's mother. Towards the end of the film, Max meets Herman in the cemetery his mother is buried in with the intention of flattening Herman with a tree. The act of meeting Herman at his mother's grave seems to communicate a familiarity with the space, indicating a significant amount of time spent there. The location could also convey the message that Max visits his mother for advice, like in the case of his plan to flatten Herman and his eventual decision to forego fighting. As mentioned in the study by Carver et al., children who lose a mother tend to retain stronger ties to the deceased than those who have lost a father. Although not explicitly mentioned, it would seem that Max maintains a level of closeness with his mother that he

does not have with his father. This merely perpetuates the findings of principle three regarding the difficulty children experience at the passing of their mother.

The third principle also helps explain Max's tendency towards overcompensation throughout the film in order to impress those he deems worthy of impressing. Making an impression on Ms. Cross is the driving plot of the film. While Max is romantically attracted to her, one might argue that he also sees aspects of his mother in her and longs for Ms. Cross's affection as one might a maternal figure, not a sexual partner. When a child loses a parent, there is the question of what that parent would have wanted from them constantly lingering in their mind. For Max, it seems that by using Rushmore as his avenue towards fulfillment, he is hoping to impress his mother and live up to the expectations he has created for himself through her memory.

Although the fourth principles deals with parental ambivalence towards children in early adulthood, the principle applies to this situation as a future caution. Max has created a rift between him and his father that must be bridged. Unless an effort is made on Max's part to rebuild his relationship with his father, that ambivalence could increase as Max ages and moves out. The dismissal of his father is shown in the few instances throughout the film where Max tells other characters that his father is a doctor, a neurosurgeon to be exact, which is why he is not present at many of Max's events. One such instance occurs when Mr. Blume offers Max a position at his company, to which Max responds, "Look, I may not be rich, Mr. Blume, my father may only be a doctor, but we manage" (Anderson, 1998, *Rushmore*). This compensation for his father's lack of prestige could lead to resentment and ultimately ambivalence from Bert when Max enters early adulthood.

It is important to note that, at the end of the film, strides are being made towards reconciliation. When Max is expelled from Rushmore and begins working with his father, it creates a drive in him to achieve more even without Rushmore backing him. By the time Max debuts the play he writes at his public high school, he has come to terms with his father's status and invites him to come see the performance. While there, Bert is introduced to several people from Max's life, including a friend of Ms. Cross who knew Bert to be a neurosurgeon. When Bert is confronted with this lie, he corrects it without hesitation, seemingly knowing that Max must have made it up. However, the fact that Max allowed their paths to cross in such a public and easily controlled way reveals that Max may have begun to accept his father for who he is and is even willing to acknowledge the facts to others.

*Rushmore* is a whimsical film that explores the plights of teens around the world. Max is a relatable character who experiences life-altering trauma at a formative stage in his development. His personality has been shaped by the fallout of this trauma, and, thus, he is constantly seeking validation from the one person who can no longer give it. Due to this need for validation from his mother, he and his father maintain a convoluted bond through necessity and fatherly affection. However, it is tainted by the fact that Bert is a constant reminder of what Max lost, and Max, in return, is a constant reminder of what Bert lost. Through the application of three of the four psychological principles of father-son relationships, it is easier to understand much of the nuanced relational aspects of Max and the other characters as well as his father.

### **The Royal Tenenbaums**

One of Wes Anderson's more widely-known films, *The Royal Tenenbaums* deals with similarly dysfunctional father-son relationships as *Rushmore*. However, *The Royal Tenenbaums* looks at the intergenerational relationship of grandfather to grandsons which has not previously been explored. This film deals with not one but two similarly convoluted father-son(s) relationships and one instance of a mother's death at a developmental stage in her children's life. Starring many of his collected cast members, it is a film that is quintessentially Andersonian. There are two main relationships in this film that follow the scenario this paper seeks to analyze: the relationship of Royal Tenenbaum to his son Chas, and the relationship of Chas to his sons Ari and Uzi.

The film begins with the entire Tenenbaum family moving back under one roof. The three Tenenbaum children, Chas, Margot, and Richie, who were prodigies as children, have become trampled shadows of their former selves. Etheline, the mother, and Royal, the father have been separated since the children were little, and Royal has been living in a hotel for 22 years completely estranged from his family. After hearing about a proposal Etheline has received from her long-time friend and accountant Henry Sherman, Royal decides it is time to win back his family.

The main problem keeping Royal at arms-length from his family is that he is a chronic liar and a cheat. Both are facts that have caused significant rifts between himself and Chas. As a disbarred lawyer and estranged father, Royal's coffers are running on empty, and he decides it is time to fight for the life he has presumably always wanted. After convincing Etheline of his supposed impending demise to stomach cancer, Royal moves back into the families large home and begins to rebuild his relationship with his

children and his grandchildren, whom he had previously never met. Unfortunately, the only Tenenbaum child who seems even remotely interested in allowing Royal back into the family is Richie, the youngest of the three children, and the one who received the most attention and praise from Royal as a child.

The oldest Tenenbaum child, Chas, showed remarkable expertise in the fields of finance and chemistry. In grade school he began his own company and was earning what seems to be a tidy sum of money, which his father regularly dipped into to help pay off his own personal debts. Chas constantly felt cheated by Royal and was treated like an outsider. Next to his brother, Richie, and Royal's chummy father-son relationship, Chas experienced solitude and dismissal.

One flashback scene recounts a BB Gun war between the brothers and their father Royal. In one shot, Royal can be seen on the roof aiming at Chas and demanding that Chas "hold it right there!" (Anderson, 2002, *The Royal Tenenbaums*). An incredulous Chas responds with "what are you doing? You're on my team!", to which Royal laughingly responds, "there are no teams!" (Anderson, 2002, *The Royal Tenenbaums*). The narrator informs the audience after the scene ends that "the BB was still lodged between two knuckles in Chas's left hand," a constant reminder of his father's betrayal (Anderson, 2002, *The Royal Tenenbaums*).

The first principle provides an excellent basis to understand Royal and Chas's dynamic. Based off of this scene, as well as several others throughout the film and Royal's general relationship track record, it is fairly obvious to the audience that he was not the most attentive father. Despite his short stint in the Tenenbaum family home, the argument can be made that for two-thirds of his children, Royal was an absentee father,

even when he was at home. This, as shown above, led to major psychological symptoms in Chas. First, as a child, Chas felt constantly overlooked by his father, despite his great accomplishments. One might even go so far as to say that Chas felt that his accomplishments were only good to Royal as a source of financial gain and that the fact that he had become successful was of no consequence. This feeling of inadequacy, coupled with Royal's abandonment of his family makes the perfect scenario for Chas to experience psychological dissonance. Although the study by Pitsoane and Gasa highlights sons of absent fathers as acting out and behaving in unsavory ways, Chas's tendency towards paranoia, social reclusion, and anxiety could all be negative ramifications of the lack of a strong male role model in his formative adolescent stages.

However, another potential contributor to Chas's anxious disposition is Royal's abandonment. Instead of viewing Royal leaving as depriving Chas of a role model, it might be viewed as a choice, specifically the choice to leave. Couple that abandonment with the tragic death of Chas's wife in a plane crash, and a picture begins to form that explains the anxiety Chas feels in reference to loss and separation.

The emotions displayed to Chas by both of his parents, whether indirectly by his mother or directly and indirectly by his father, were primarily negative in nature. His mother, despite all of her support and love for her children, was wasting away in a loveless marriage with a man who cared for nothing other than himself and money. She was unhappy, and as a human was unable to entirely hide that from her children. Chas understood firsthand the shortcomings of his father and was no doubt affected by the emotional charge of his household during his development as an adolescent. It is also likely, and the introduction of the movie seems to suggest, that the children were very

close to their mother. Chas, being the eldest child and already beginning to feel abandoned by his father, may have stepped in to support his mother and formed a tighter bond with her, further excluding himself from his father.

Along the same lines as above, the application of the fourth principle dealing with parental ambivalence towards adult children can also be seen as the film begins. At this point, Royal has been distant for over two decades with no indication of attempted contact. Etheline has been the sole parental figure in her children's lives, and even she has been distracted by her own life, both professionally and socially. As Royal makes the decision to return and rebuild his family, the ambivalence towards Chas is placed front and center. Royal desires to meet and form relationships with his grandsons, who prior to meeting him had been told of his existence only in that he had passed. By forming a bond with his grandsons, who fall for him instantly due to his happy-go-lucky personality, Royal further isolates Chas and reestablishes the feelings of abandonment and ambivalence that were begun in his childhood.

In direct contrast with Royal, the absentee father, stands Chas, the overprotective father. After the death of his wife in a plane crash, Chas is determined to protect his sons at all costs. Accidents happen every day, but he and his boys will be prepared for anything and everything. This paranoia that Chas faces is rooted in love for his children but is also being used as a coping mechanism. He is experiencing feelings of helplessness in the face of his wife's tragic end. In order to regain power and autonomy, he must take action; however, his action plan may be pushing his sons away instead of bringing them all closer like Chas so desperately desires.

Looking at Chas and Royal's relationship, the principle that did not fit into this dynamic was principle three (dealing with the death of the mother), seeing as Etheline Tenenbaum was a constant presence in her children's lives until early adulthood. In the case of Chas, Uzi, and Ari, applying the third principle is difficult because of the age of the boys. In Max's case, he was at least old enough to be his own person and have his own storyline. As secondary characters and mini-mes of their father, Ari and Uzi are more difficult to dissect. Due to Racheal's death happening during her boys' adolescence and not during their young adulthood, it is more likely that they would form a close relationship to an idea of her than to the actual memories. The memories they have of her will begin to fade and become tainted by stories and their own emotions, leaving a version of her that could be manipulated to suit whatever their need may be.

It is lucky for Chas that his sons are still at a young and formative age, given that change is common and easier to implement during the adolescent years. However, the first principle, when applied to Chas and his sons, shows the effects of an emotionally absent father. When paired with the second principle (looking at depression in fathers), Chas's mental state becomes a breeding ground for psychological damage. In an effort to keep them safe, Chas has locked Uzi and Ari away from the world and stunted their social development. Anderson expertly communicates the transference of Chas's own values and desires by styling Uzi and Ari as mini carbon copies of their father. All three are seen in matching red track suits with curly brown hair participating in fire drills, workouts, and safety checks throughout the film. Although the boys seem, by Tenenbaum standard, to be developing relatively normally, it is clear that Chas's emotions have the potential to deeply affect them.



The boys inherited anxiety is highlighted when they are first introduced to their grandfather Royal, who wants to show them the side of life they have been missing. Initially, they are cautious and apprehensive of the unknown, but once Royal convinces them to spend a day with him out on the town, they quickly realize what they have been missing. Contrary to previous relationships addressed in the paper, it would seem that although Chas is falling apart at the seams, Ari and Uzi are primed and ready for a healthy father-son relationship, if it can present itself.

Chas presents a new take on the first principle in that rather than being absent physically or inattentive to his boys, he is absent in an emotional sense. He approaches his boys with the desire for safety at all costs, even at the cost of their happiness. Chas has convinced himself that never leaving their home will be the best thing for them and the most practical way to protect them. Unfortunately, if allowed to progress, this Rapunzel-like prison sentence will lead to all of the negative outcomes postulated in Pitsoane and Gasa's study.

Instead of becoming accustomed to a life of seclusion, it is probable that Ari and Uzi would begin to develop "risky behaviours" as well as "low-resistance" to unsavory behaviors (Pitsoane & Gasa, 2018, p. 10752). This would create increased anxiety for Chas, which would ultimately end in stricter rules and increased sneaky and risky behavior from Ari and Uzi. In addition to these behaviors, the boys would be socially stunted and therefore have difficulty integrating into society.

Thus, by moving home and reconnecting with his family, Chas is setting his own little family up for success in the future. Chas is only able to begin his journey towards positive relationships when he admits at the end of the film that he needs help (Anderson,

2002, *The Royal Tenenbaums*). As his boys come into contact with their extended family and begin to be exposed to the real world and all of its flaws, they are more equipped to deal with real life than any of Chas's training could train them to be. In addition, their view and attachment to their mother will be shaped by Chas's own stories as he heals, rather than second-hand knowledge or tainted memories.

### **Future Direction**

In the future, it would be interesting to see how other relationships in Anderson films, such as mothers and daughters, hold up when analyzed using similar psychological principles. An even broader study could be conducted looking at the parent-child relationships displayed in the films and creating a dialogue on different parenting styles and their effects on the children. Specifically looking at an animated film like *Fantastic Mr. Fox* would provide a new approach while still maintaining the Andersonian touch. Another avenue would be to look at stand-in father-son relationships like those displayed in *Moonrise Kingdom* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*.

### **Conclusion**

Understanding how complicated relationships are is an important step to understanding how to create strong, lasting relationships. The analyses conducted above sought to display the psychology behind father-son relationships, even in a fictional setting. By performing an analysis of film relationships, this study was able to display extreme scenarios like the death of a mother and the abandonment of a father. Furthermore, the characters allowed the study to look into specific personality types that may not have been present in a traditional study. This allowed for an in-depth analysis of specific applications of the principles.

In addition to the understanding that relationships are hard, understanding that change is always an option is of equal importance. When talking about dysfunction in a relationship, as most of these principles do, the understanding is that there is always a path back to a functional relationship. Unfortunately, forgiveness can be hard, and often this is the first step on the path back to functionality. An additional step is admitting that the blame may lie on both sides of the relationship, not just one.

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