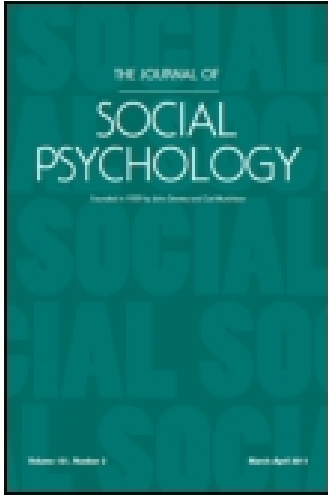


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### Human Affection Exchange: VI. Further Tests of Reproductive Probability as a Predictor of Men's Affection With Their Adult Sons

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# Human Affection Exchange: VI. Further Tests of Reproductive Probability as a Predictor of Men's Affection With Their Adult Sons

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**ABSTRACT.** The authors examined the communication of affection in men's relationships with their fathers. Drawing from Affection Exchange Theory, the authors advanced four predictions: (a) heterosexual men receive more affection from their own fathers than do homosexual or bisexual men, (b) fathers communicate affection to their sons more through supportive activities than through direct verbal statements or nonverbal gestures, (c) affectionate communication between fathers and sons is linearly related to closeness and interpersonal involvement between them, and (d) fathers' awareness of their sons' sexual orientation is associated with the amount of affection that the fathers communicate to them. Participants were 170 adult men who completed questionnaires regarding affectionate communication in their relationships with their fathers. Half of the men were self-identified as exclusively heterosexual, and the other half were self-identified as exclusively homosexual or bisexual. The results supported all predictions substantially.

Key words: affection exchange theory, fatherhood, sexual orientation

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FATHERS AND THEIR SONS may be at once the most important and the most challenging of male-male relationships. Fathers and sons can substantially influence each other's lives, both positively and negatively, even through a son's adulthood (Beatty & Dobos, 1993). Research has shown that positive father-son bonds improve sons' academic achievement (Snarey, 1993), sons' communication behaviors (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Yerby,

1981; Fink, 1993), sons' relational communication with their spouses (Beatty & Dobos, 1993), both sons' and fathers' emotional health (Berry, 1990), and fathers' development and psychosocial adjustment (Snarey).

However, much of the extant literature on the father-son relationship reflects a belief that most men have dysfunctional and emotionally distant relationships with their fathers. Dubbed the *role-inadequacy perspective* by Hawkins and Dolahite (1997), this research perspective focuses on men's shortcomings as fathers and appears to guide much of the research on men and fatherhood (Doherty, 1991; Levant, 1992). Although some scholars have investigated positive aspects of the father-child relationship, such as relational satisfaction (Beatty & Dobos, 1992; Martin & Anderson, 1995), confirmation (Beatty & Dobos, 1993), and intimacy (Buerkel, 1996), most research in this area has focused on the more negative aspects of this relationship, such as aggressiveness (Beatty, Zelle, Dobos, & Rudd, 1994), conflict (Comstock, 1994), and dysfunction (Lee, 1987).

The plethora of research on the negative aspects of the father-son relationship has obscured investigators' understanding of its more positive attributes, particularly those communication functions that are associated with positive relational outcomes such as the expression of affection. Even though affectionate communication is a central component of the relational development of families, it has received only moderate empirical attention (see Floyd, 1997a; Floyd & Morman, 2001, 2003). This lack of research could be a result of researchers' believing that most fathers and sons are not especially affectionate. However, relationships are often simultaneously characterized by seemingly contradictory communication patterns (see Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), making it plausible that affection and the expression of it are important even in the most contentious of father-son relationships.

Additionally, affectionate communication can be fraught with risk. Many fathers and sons have difficulty in expressing affection for one another even when they are emotionally close (Morman & Floyd, 1999). The present study, guided by the principles of Affection Exchange Theory (AET), examined (a) the relationship between men's sexual orientation and the affectionate communication that they receive from their fathers and (b) the differences in the behaviors that

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fathers use to express affection to their adult sons. In the present article, before describing the research method and results, we will briefly discuss AET.

### *Affection Exchange Theory*

*Affection Exchange Theory* (AET; Floyd, 2001b, 2002, in press; Floyd & Morman, 2001, 2003) treats affectionate communication as an adaptive behavior that contributes to humans' long-term viability and procreative success. Assuming the Darwinian principle that survival and reproduction are superordinate human motivations, AET posits that affection exchange contributes to survival because it promotes pair bonding and the increased access to ongoing resources that pair bonds provide. One's affection exchange also contributes to short-term reproductive success by signaling to potential mates that one is a viable candidate for parenthood. Finally, AET posits that affection communicated from parents to their children contributes to the parents' long-term reproductive success by increasing the chances that the children will reproduce, causing some of the genes of the parents to pass on to future generations. Because affection exchange is an adaptive behavior, according to AET, it is also governed by the very motivations that it serves. AET thus further suggests (a) that affectionate behaviors vary in their forms according to which superordinate motivation the behavior serves and (b) that the more that affection exchange occurs, the more directly such motivations are being served.

AET has a number of implications for affectionate communication in father-son relationships. In the present article, we examine four issues in particular: (a) how men's sexual orientation is associated with the amount of affection that they receive from their fathers, (b) how the amount of affection that fathers communicate to their adult sons varies with the manner in which it is expressed, (c) how affectionate communication is associated with relationship quality, and (d) how fathers' knowledge of the sexual orientation of their sons is related to the amount of affection that fathers communicate. Subsequently, we will discuss each of these issues in detail and advance applicable hypotheses.

### *Sexual Orientation as a Mediator of Affection From Parents*

The third postulate of AET posits that parents contribute to their long-term reproductive success (that is, success beyond the generation of their own children) by expressing affection to their children, because AET treats affection as a resource that ultimately contributes to the children's ability to attract mates. If reproductive success is, in fact, an underlying motivation for communicating affection to one's children, then it stands to reason that the children's ability to pass their parents' genes on to future generations mitigates the amount of affection that they receive from their parents. This reasoning is reflected in Daly and Wilson's (1995) construct of *discriminative parental solicitude*, which explains

that parents are sometimes forced to invest resources unequally in their children so as to maximize their own chances of having their own genes passed on.

An implication of this discussion is that parents should express more affection to children who are the most likely to contribute to the parents' long-term reproductive success. Applying this reasoning, Floyd (2001b) hypothesized and found that men communicate more affection to their biological sons than they do to their nonbiological sons (such as step-sons and adopted sons), their nonbiological sons being unable to contribute to the fathers' reproductive success because they do not carry his genes. An additional implication of this reasoning, however, is that even biological children may not receive equal amounts of affection, or any other resource, if they are not equally likely to reproduce. One context in which such a prediction can be tested is the relationships of parents with their heterosexual children and with their homosexual children.

Specifically, AET predicts that parents communicate more affection to their heterosexual children than they do to their homosexual or bisexual children because their homosexual or bisexual children should be less likely to reproduce biologically. Importantly, the theory implicates not the children's actual reproductive behavior but their probable reproductive behavior, giving the prediction weight even if the children have, in fact, already had biological children of their own. The specific hypothesis follows:

*Hypothesis 1:* Heterosexual men receive more affection from their own fathers than do homosexual or bisexual men.

### *Forms of Affection Between Fathers and Sons*

AET also posits that the manner in which affection is communicated varies with which superordinate goal(s) it serves. Several scholars have posited that men adopt a "covert" manner of communication when it comes to affectionate or other intimate behavior, in which they hide affectionate behavior in seemingly innocuous behavior so as to avoid possible ridicule (see Floyd & Morman, 1997; Swain, 1989; Wood & Inman, 1993). For example, a man may express affection to his male friend not through overt verbal statements (e.g., saying "I care about you") or nonverbal gestures (e.g., hugging) but through favors like helping with a project or giving him tickets to a sporting event. Swain proposed that these modes of communicating have the advantage of expressing an affectionate message while leaving that message plausibly deniable should its intention be questioned. In this example, the first man may invite questions about his sexual orientation, for instance, if he were to express his affection through direct verbal or nonverbal statements. However, such questions can be mitigated by encoding the message in supportive but not overtly affectionate behavior.

It may seem at first that fathers and sons would be immune to questions about the intentions behind their affectionate communication, and to a certain extent,

they are. Floyd (2000) found that men's homophobia significantly predicted negative evaluations of overt male-male affection that they observed, except when they were told that the men they were observing were related (as brothers or fathers and sons). In the same vein, Floyd (1999) reported that observers of overt male-male affection commonly concluded that the men whom they were observing were probably related to each other. However, even father-son relationships are subject to masculine-role prescriptions for socially appropriate behavior. AET predicts the following:

*Hypothesis 2:* To avoid even the appearance that their affectionate behavior might be sexual in nature, men communicate affection to their sons more through supportive activities than through direct verbal or nonverbal expressions.

#### *Associations With Relationship Quality*

The foundation of AET is that affectionate communication serves as an important resource that contributes to survival and reproductive success. The benefits of affection, both to the individual and to relationships in which it is expressed, are well documented (see, e.g., Floyd, in press). In fact, predictions that investigators derive from AET with respect to affection in parent-child relationships should have no theoretic force if affectionate communication is not also related to positive aspects of the relationship. Given that affection has long been regarded as a fundamental human need (Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972), the present investigators predict here that it is linearly associated with the quality of men's relationships with their fathers. Specifically, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 3:* The amount of affectionate communication that men receive from their fathers is linearly related to the closeness and interpersonal involvement that characterizes the father-son relationships.

#### *Relationship of Fathers' Knowledge About Sons' Sexual Orientation to Affectionate Communication*

A final point of interest in the present study is the association, if any, between fathers' knowledge about their sons' sexual orientation and the amount of affection that the fathers communicate to those sons. Following the reasoning behind AET, we posit that fathers who know or suspect that their sons are gay are motivated, even if only subconsciously, to decrease their provision of resources to those sons, whereas fathers who do not know of their sons' homosexuality do not share the same motivation.<sup>1</sup> In fact, gay sons whose fathers are unaware of their sexual orientation may even approximate straight sons in terms of the amount of affection that they receive from their fathers. Some gay sons, of course, do not know whether their fathers are aware of their sexual orientation or not. We posit that these sons should receive more affection than those whose fathers know they

are gay but less than those whose fathers do not know. Thus, our final hypothesis follows:

*Hypothesis 4:* Of gay and bisexual sons, those whose fathers are not aware of their orientations receive the most affection from their fathers, those whose fathers are aware of their orientations receive the least affection, and those who are unsure about their fathers' awareness receive affection that is in between.<sup>2</sup>

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 170 adult men whose fathers were living at the time of the study. Half of the participants were self-identified as exclusively heterosexual, and half were self-identified as homosexual or bisexual.<sup>2</sup> The participants ranged in age from 18 to 58 years, with a mean age of 30.64 years ( $SD = 8.92$  years). At the time of the study, 10% of the participants had a high school education or less, 23.5% had completed some college but had no degree, 47.1% had an associate's or baccalaureate degree, and 19.4% had a graduate or professional degree. Participants were predominantly Caucasian (82.4%); 8.8% were African-American, 4.7% were Hispanic, 2.4% were Asian, and 4.7% were of other ethnic origins.<sup>3</sup>

### *Procedure*

The present researchers and their research assistants recruited participants to take part in the study. To qualify, a potential participant had to be an adult male (age 18 years or older) whose father was living. Those men in the first subsample self-identified as exclusively heterosexual; those in the gay subsample self-identified as exclusively homosexual or bisexual. Participants were recruited through announcements in undergraduate classes, through snowball sampling with other participants in the study, and through recruitment at a gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community center.

The present researchers and their research assistants asked qualified men who agreed to participate to complete a short written questionnaire and return it to the researchers. Each participant was asked to report on communication in his relationship with his father, regardless of whether he was raised by a biological father, a step-father, or an adoptive father. Most participants (94.1%) reported on their relationship with their biological father, whereas 3.5% reported on a step-father, and 2.4% reported on an adoptive father. The fathers on whom participants reported ranged in age from 38 to 95 years with an average age of 60.11 years ( $SD = 11.91$  years).

The first page of the questionnaire provided informed consent information. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they



could skip any questions that they did not wish to answer. They were also informed that completion and return of the questionnaire would signify their consent and were given the information necessary to contact the authors' institutional review boards, should they need to do so. Participants were not formally debriefed after handing in their questionnaires, although the researchers made themselves available to answer any questions that participants had about the study.

### Measures

*Affectionate communication* was measured with the factor-based Affectionate Communication Index (ACI; Floyd & Morman, 1998). The 19-item, Likert-type scale is comprised of three subscales that measure the amount of affection that participants communicate to a particular target person through direct verbal expressions (*verbal*), through direct nonverbal expressions (*nonverbal*), and through affectionate social support (*support*). Internal reliabilities for the straight subsample, based on Cronbach's alpha, were .82 for verbal, .78 for nonverbal, and .74 for support. Alphas for the gay subsample were .89 for verbal, .84 for nonverbal, and .85 for support. The ACI has demonstrated multiple forms of convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity (see Floyd & Mikkelson, 2002; Floyd & Morman, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2003; Morman & Floyd, 1999).

We assessed *closeness* with the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). The IOS scale consists of a set of Venn-like diagrams, each representing different degrees of overlap of two circles. One circle in each pair is labeled "self" and the other circle is labeled "other," and participants are instructed to select the pair of circles that best depicts the nature of their relationship. The IOS scale has been extensively validated by the research done in both experimental and correlational paradigms (see Aron et al.). The present investigators measured *positive relational involvement* with a 12-item Likert-type scale (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) developed by Floyd and Morman (2000) and Floyd (2001b). The scale includes items that assess how much time fathers and sons spend with each other, how involved they feel in each other's lives, and how positive their interactions are. Alphas were .91 for the gay subsample and .90 for the heterosexual subsample.

## Results

### *Comparing Homosexual Sons to Heterosexual Sons*

Hypothesis 1 predicted that homosexual men receive less affection from their own fathers than do heterosexual men. The three forms of affection (verbal, nonverbal, and support) were analyzed together (average  $r = .59$ , Bartlett test of sphericity  $\chi^2(3) = 267.71$ ,  $p < .001$ ) in a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), with sample (heterosexual vs. homosexual) as the independent

factor. The covariate was the age of the participant. An independent-samples *t* test indicated that the homosexual subsample was significantly older ( $M = 36.53$  years,  $SD = 7.82$  years) than the straight subsample ( $M = 24.74$  years,  $SD = 5.34$  years),  $t(168) = 11.48$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .44$ . The average correlation between participants' age and the three forms of affectionate communication was  $-.20$ . Consequently, we included age as a covariate. The MANCOVA showed a significant multivariate effect for sons' sexual orientation,  $\Lambda = .83$ ,  $F(3, 165) = 11.21$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .17$ .

Univariate results indicated that the heterosexual participants received more nonverbal affection from their fathers than did the homosexual participants,  $F(1, 167) = 6.46$ ,  $p = .012$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .04$ . Heterosexual participants also received more supportive affection from their fathers than did the homosexual participants,  $F(1, 167) = 32.45$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .16$ . Finally, the heterosexual participants reported receiving more verbal affection from their fathers than did the homosexual participants,  $F(1, 167) = 15.75$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .09$ . Table 1 shows means and standard deviations. Thus, the results support Hypothesis 1.

### *Comparing Modes of Expressing Affection to Sons*

Hypothesis 2 predicted that fathers communicate affection to their sons more through supportive activities than through direct verbal or nonverbal expressions. A repeated-measures MANOVA, with form of affection as the within-subjects variable and sample (heterosexual vs. homosexual) as the between-subjects factor, showed a significant multivariate within-subjects effect for form of affection,  $\Lambda = .23$ ,  $F(2, 167) = 273.68$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .77$ , and a significant form-by-sample interaction,  $\Lambda = .84$ ,  $F(2, 167) = 15.94$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .16$ .

Because of the ordinal nature of the interaction, we probed the within-subjects multivariate effect separately for each sample, using one-tailed, pair-wise *t* tests.

**TABLE 1. Group Differences in Affection Received From Fathers**

Group	Verbal		Nonverbal		Support	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Heterosexual sons	3.78	1.42 <sub>a</sub>	2.70	1.01 <sub>a</sub>	5.15	1.01 <sub>b</sub>
Gay or bisexual sons	2.54	1.64 <sub>a</sub>	2.20	1.22 <sub>a</sub>	3.68	1.73 <sub>b</sub>

*Note.* For all three forms of affectionate communication, the means for heterosexual sons significantly exceed those for gay or bisexual sons. Within each row, means with different subscripts differ significantly from each other, per pair-wise *t* tests at  $p < .05$ .

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for the three forms of affection, separated by sample. Pair-wise comparisons indicated that fathers in the heterosexual sample communicated affection more through supportive activities than through verbal expressions,  $t(84) = 11.21, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .60$ , or through non-verbal expressions,  $t(84) = 20.51, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .83$ . For the homosexual sample, results likewise indicated that fathers communicated affection more through supportive activities than through verbal expressions,  $t(84) = 10.55, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .57$ , or through nonverbal expressions,  $t(84) = 11.71, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .62$ . Thus, the results support Hypothesis 2.

### *Associations With Closeness and Involvement*

Hypothesis 3 predicted direct linear relationships between affectionate communication and the closeness and involvement that characterizes participants' relationships with their fathers. The hypothesis was tested for the homosexual subsample and the heterosexual subsample separately, using one-tailed Pearson correlations against an effect-wise, Bonferroni-corrected alpha of .008. For gay sons, closeness was directly related to verbal affection,  $r(83) = .66, p < .001$ ; non-verbal affection,  $r(83) = .67, p < .001$ ; and support affection,  $r(83) = .76, p < .001$ . Likewise, involvement was directly related to verbal affection,  $r(83) = .68, p < .001$ ; nonverbal affection,  $r(83) = .63, p < .001$ ; and support affection,  $r(83) = .79, p < .001$ . Notable here were the magnitudes of the correlations, all of which represent large effect sizes.

For straight sons, closeness was directly related to verbal affection,  $r(83) = .35, p = .001$ ; and support affection,  $r(83) = .34, p = .001$ . A direct relationship emerged between closeness and nonverbal affection,  $r(83) = .21, p = .031$ , but the probability value exceeded the Bonferroni-corrected value of .008. Because this correlation would be significant by an uncorrected standard alpha of .05, it must be interpreted with some caution. Involvement was likewise directly related to verbal affection,  $r(83) = .27, p = .006$ ; and support affection,  $r(83) = .35, p < .001$ . A direct but nonsignificant relationship emerged between involvement and nonverbal affection,  $r(83) = .17, p = .062$ . Thus, the results largely support Hypothesis 3.

For exploratory purposes, we examined differences in the magnitudes of the correlations between affection, closeness, and involvement for the gay and straight subsamples, using  $z$  tests for comparing independent correlation coefficients. In all cases, the association between a particular form of affection and a particular relational outcome (either closeness or involvement) was significantly stronger for the gay subsample than for the straight subsample ( $p < .05$ ).

### *Fathers' Knowledge of Sons' Sexual Orientation*

Hypothesis 4 predicted that fathers' knowledge of their sons' sexual orientation is inversely associated with the amount of affection that fathers commu-

nicate to their gay sons. Specifically, we predicted that gay sons whose fathers are not aware of their orientations receive the most affection from their fathers, that sons whose fathers are aware of their orientation receive the least affection, and that sons who are unsure about their fathers' awareness receive affection that is in between. We tested this hypothesis using a MANOVA with the three forms of affection as the dependent variables and with fathers' awareness as the independent variable. Only data from the homosexual subsample were included because the hypothesis speaks only about this group. The MANOVA showed a significant multivariate effect for fathers' awareness,  $\Lambda = .76$ ,  $F(6, 160) = 3.96$ ,  $p = .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .13$ . Univariate effects were significant for verbal affection,  $F(2, 82) = 11.49$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .22$ ; for nonverbal affection,  $F(2, 82) = 5.91$ ,  $p = .004$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .13$ ; and for support affection,  $F(2, 82) = 10.19$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .20$ .

Table 2 shows means and standard deviations for each of the three forms of affectionate communication, divided by categories of fathers' knowledge. As indicated, gay sons received the most of all three forms of affection if their fathers were unaware of their orientation and received the least if their fathers were aware. Those who were unsure whether their fathers knew of their orientation were in the middle of the range for all three forms. Post hoc analyses with the Tukey *b* test indicated that, for all three forms of affectionate communication, the mean differences between fathers who know of their sons' orientation and fathers who do not know are significant. Likewise, the differences between fathers whose knowledge is uncertain and fathers who do not know are also significant. However, fathers who know and fathers whose knowledge is uncertain did not differ significantly from each other. Thus, the results support Hypothesis 4 with respect to the comparison between fathers who are unaware of their sons' sexual orientation, those who are aware, and those who may be aware.

**TABLE 2. Effects of Fathers' Knowledge of Sons' Orientation on Affection That Sons Received From Fathers**

Fathers' knowledge	Verbal		Nonverbal		Support	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Father knows	2.17	1.50 <sub>a</sub>	1.98	1.19 <sub>a</sub>	3.27	1.68 <sub>a</sub>
Unsure if father knows	2.62	1.17 <sub>a</sub>	2.33	0.97 <sub>a</sub>	4.11	1.31 <sub>a</sub>
Father does not know	4.38	1.51 <sub>b</sub>	3.22	1.08 <sub>b</sub>	5.45	1.09 <sub>b</sub>

*Note.* Means in each column with different subscripts differ significantly from each other, per Tukey *b* test.

## Discussion

The present study addresses affectionate communication in the relationships of fathers and sons and the conditions under which it is more or less likely to occur. AET was applied to the task of predicting that a man's sexual orientation is related to the amount of affection that he receives from his father. AET explains this difference as a function of parents' investing discriminately in their children so as to maximize the likelihood that the children will reproduce. According to the theory, children who are unlikely to reproduce biologically receive, on average, fewer resources from their parents than children who are more likely to reproduce, and affection is one such resource. We thus predicted that fathers communicate less affection to sons who are gay or bisexual than to sons who are heterosexual.

Our results demonstrated that men who were self-identified as homosexual or bisexual received less verbal, nonverbal, and supportive affection from their fathers than did heterosexual men. Paradoxically, it is theoretically irrelevant whether or not any of the gay or bisexual participants in the current study had, in fact, biologically reproduced. According to the theory, these men's sexual orientation ought to make them less likely than heterosexual men to have done so. Of course, an important potential moderator of the relationship between sexual orientation and affection received from parents is the parents' knowledge about their children's orientation. We thus predicted that, among gay sons, those whose fathers are not aware of their orientation receive the most affection from their fathers, those whose fathers are aware of their orientation receive the least affection, and those who are unsure about their fathers' awareness receive affection that is in between. The results supported this prediction for all three forms of affection.

Affectionate communication between fathers and sons is not always in the form of overt verbal statements or nonverbal gestures. Our second hypothesis predicted that fathers communicate affection to their sons more through the use of supportive activities, such as doing favors for them, than through direct verbal statements or nonverbal affectionate gestures. This prediction was supported for both the heterosexual sons and the homosexual sons. Notable here were the effect size estimates, which indicated that form of affection accounted for an average of over 65% of the variance in the amount of affection that fathers communicated to their sons. This finding supports the speculation of other theorists (e.g., Swain, 1989; Wood & Inman, 1993) that men are most likely to express intimate or affectionate feelings for each other in ways that are not overtly affectionate, perhaps to avoid the possible embarrassment from ridicule that such behaviors might lead to from others. As previous researchers have found (Floyd, 1995, 1996, 1997a, 1997b; Floyd & Morman, 1997; Morman & Floyd, 1998), even men who are related to each other are not immune to concerns for avoiding such ridicule.

AET's prediction that parents "invest" affection in their children discriminately relies on its conceptualization of affection as an important resource that contributes to the children's viability. There is ample evidence of the individual-

and relational-level benefits of affectionate communication (see, e.g., Floyd, in press; Frank, 1973; Harlow, 1974). However, recent studies have also indicated that affectionate communication can be detrimental to individuals or relationships under certain circumstances (see Floyd, 2001a; Floyd & Burgoon, 1999; Floyd & Voloudakis, 1999). The negative outcomes are often elicited under circumstances of relational ambiguity or concern over what attributions to make for affectionate expressions, circumstances in which fathers and sons should rarely find themselves (see Floyd & Morman, 2000). We thus predicted that affection would, in fact, act as a valuable relational resource for fathers and sons and that it should, thus, be associated with positive qualities of that relationship. Our results support the prediction for closeness and relationship satisfaction, with large effect sizes for the gay subsample and moderate effect sizes for the straight subsample.

Investigators have offered two alternative explanations for these findings, and their explanations deserve discussion. The first is that differential treatment of straight and gay sons is grounded in social stigma and discrimination involving sexual orientation, not in their fathers' motivations to maximize their own reproductive potential. The second alternative explanation, which is based on Gouldner's (1960) norm of reciprocity, is that men are more affectionate with their straight sons than they are with their gay or bisexual sons simply because their straight sons are more affectionate with them. Although these explanations might appear, at first glance, to be mutually exclusive, in fact they are not necessarily so. Rather, they may simply reflect different levels of analysis. Evolutionary psychologists routinely distinguish between *proximal* and *ultimate* levels of causality. As a simple example, the question "why do people eat?" can readily be answered both in proximal terms (e.g., because they feel hungry) and in ultimate terms (e.g., because they need nutrients to survive). Both are valid answers to the question, and neither contradicts the other. It may likewise be the case with the first alternative explanation; from an evolutionary standpoint, one could argue that social stigma and discrimination toward homosexuality exist because of the loss in reproductive potential that it entails. Importantly, no evolutionary psychologists would argue that people are (or need to be) aware of the ultimate, higher order causes for their emotions or behaviors; people can certainly feel negatively toward others without considering the evolutionary implications of their feelings.

If the two explanations are, in fact, mutually exclusive (so that they can not both be right), then critical tests should be developed to compare them. One such test could involve the direct comparison of gay sons to bisexual sons. Presumably, bisexual sons would have higher reproductive potential than gay sons, yet they may experience equal levels of social stigma. Therefore, if both groups receive the same amount of affection from their fathers, that result would suggest a social stigma explanation and not an evolutionary one.

In the present study, we did not ask men in our gay or bisexual subsample to indicate whether they were gay or bisexual; rather, we invited their participation

in that subsample if they (by their own determination) fit either category. This lack of specificity was due to an unfortunate oversight on our part because the ability to separate this subsample into gay and bisexual groups might allow us (if both groups were adequately sized) to address the possibility that either evolutionary variables or social variables were associated with paternal affection—but not both. Future researchers in this vein would make an important contribution by doing so.

As indicated earlier in the present article, the second alternative explanation, which is based on Gouldner's (1960) norm of reciprocity, is that men are more affectionate with their straight sons than they are with their gay or bisexual sons simply because their straight sons are more affectionate with them. People express more affection to people who are more affectionate to them than to people who are less; in a recent study, Floyd et al. (2003) reported that the amount of affection that people communicated to others was strongly ( $r = .70$ ) associated with the amount of affection that other people had communicated to them. This idea is not a viable alternative as an explanation for the current findings, however, because its circularity makes it entirely possible that our evolutionary explanation is still valid. Specifically, if straight sons are, in fact, more affectionate with their fathers than are gay or bisexual sons (a proposition that we have not yet empirically tested), this phenomenon could simply be because the straight sons' fathers had been more affectionate with them, for the reasons that AET articulates. In other words, although affectionate behavior patterns are reciprocal, their reciprocity does not explain them, but simply moves the focus of the analysis from one transmission of affection (from father to son) to another (from son to father). The group difference (between (a) the group of straight sons and (b) the group of gay or bisexual sons) is left unexplained.

In addition to our failure to separate gay and bisexual sons, researchers should bear a few other limitations of the current study in mind when interpreting the results. The first limitation stems from having participants report on their relationships with their fathers, without also collecting comparable data from those fathers. This single-source approach may inflate the magnitude of relationships between variables in much the same way that common-method variance can influence findings. Two observations mitigate our concern over this methodological characteristic. First, within-subjects statistical designs such as those employed herein are equipped to deal with such shared variance. Second, Floyd (2002) reported that, in dyadic research in which both people in the dyad report on the same person's behaviors (e.g., with both father and son reporting on the father's affection level), the partners' reports are significantly correlated. However, future studies using father-son dyads could aid in mitigating the potential problems of the single-source approach.

A second limitation is that participants were predominantly Caucasian, with Black or African-American participants and Hispanic participants as the next most populous groups. This is an important limitation to the research, given the

extent to which affectionate behavior is affected by social norms and expectations that can be dictated by one's culture (see, e.g., Harrison-Speake & Willis, 1995). This limitation suggests an important direction for future research.

A final limitation is that nearly all participants reported on relationships with their biological fathers, making comparisons to other relational configurations (father-stepson, father-adopted son) tenuous. This is a particularly important issue because of the reasoning underlying AET, which would also predict that parents are less affectionate with nonbiological children than with biological children (for evidence that this is the case, see Floyd & Morman, 2001, 2003). An intriguing point of inquiry for future research would concern the additive (or nonadditive) effects of sons' sexual orientation and their biological status with their fathers on the amount of affection from their fathers that the sons receive.

### NOTES

1. Importantly, neither an evolutionary perspective in general nor AET in particular would posit that men curtail resource provision in this instance conscientiously. Rather, both theoretic perspectives would argue that humans need not be consciously aware of the adaptive functions that motivate their actions for those functions to be served.

2. For parsimony's sake, we use the terms *gay sons* and *homosexual sons* when referring to the subsample of both homosexual and bisexual sons. However, these terms should be understood as including both homosexual and bisexual sons.

3. These percentages sum to greater than 100 because some participants reported belonging to more than one ethnic group.

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