Brotherly Love II: A Developmental Perspective on Liking, Love, and Closeness in the Fraternal Dyad

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This research examined the nature of closeness, liking, and love among 59 dyads of full biological, nontwin adult brothers and the correlations of these variables with age. Five dimensions of relational development were measured and used in stepwise regressions to determine what predicted closeness, liking, and love in these fraternal dyads. It was expected that love would be predicted by expressive relational qualities, such as self-disclosure, whereas closeness and liking would be predicted by more instrumental qualities, such as commitment or interdependence. These predictions were generally supported. Moreover, liking and love were shown to remain relatively constant over time, whereas closeness decreased as brothers grew older. Comparisons with other male-male relationships were also made, and implications for the research and therapeutic setting are offered.

Brotherhood may be among the most significant same-sex relationships in a man's life. For one, the sibling bond outlasts nearly every other relationship in the life span (Bedford, 1993) and may be the only peerlike relationship with a significant shared history (Goetting, 1986). Although volumes of research have been conducted on rivalry and competition, far less is known about the more positive aspects of the relationship. The present research examined the nature of liking, love, and closeness in the fraternal dyad and their correlation with age within the period of late adolescence and early adulthood.

This article first summarizes research on the nature of the adult fraternal relationship, underscoring the need for a more developed understanding of its positive aspects. Next, predictions about what leads to closeness, liking, and love among adult brothers, drawn from theory and previous research on relational development, on siblinghood, and on male-male relationships, are detailed separately. The question of how these qualities, and their antecedents, will change over the course of the late adolescent and early adult life span is also addressed. Finally, the question is raised as to how fraternal relationships will differ from other male-male relationships, in general, in terms of their positive aspects.

Nature of the Fraternal Bond

Brotherhood is somewhat of a living paradox. As the union of two siblings, it is often the source of competition and rivalry unparalleled in other relational types. Indeed, many siblings continually compete with each other for parental approval and access to family resources, both economic and otherwise (Sandmaier, 1994). Rivalry and interpersonal conflict are likely to be most prominent during the parental custodial period, when siblings live together in their parents' home (see Dunn & Kendrick, 1982a), or during later adulthood when siblings are charged with caring for elderly family members (Brody, Hoffman, Kleban, & Schoonover, 1989; Matthews & Rosner, 1988).

Besides a sibling bond, the fraternal dyad is also the union of two males and is thus subject to influences of the masculine gender role. For example, sibling rivalry may be especially pronounced in the brother-brother relationship, in which a dispensation toward competition is a part of both partners' gender role identity (see
Lewis, 1978). Moreover, sociocultural proscriptions against male-male intimacy may further act to keep brothers apart (Floyd, 1996a). Collectively, these findings portray the fraternal union as one characterized by negativity, rivalry, and a lack of intimate connection.

Of course, this characterization of brotherhood is at best a half truth. As a sibling relationship, the fraternal union may also involve a notable sense of closeness and interpersonal solidarity. Siblinghood is often a significant source of emotional and instrumental support (Bedford, 1993; Floyd, 1995). Such support may be most overt during periods of familial crisis such as the illness of a parent (see Floyd, 1996a); however, there is evidence that a general sense of mutual support characterizes siblinghood from infancy (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982b) through old age (Cicirelli, 1982).

Despite the scholarly attention given to the sibling relationship, there remains a relative paucity of research focused on the fraternal union. Moreover, what research has been conducted on fraternity has tended to emphasize its negative aspects while overlooking its potential emotional and instrumental benefits. This deficit in understanding is an important one to correct, given the potential for the brother relationship to be among the most significant same-sex relationships in the lives of many men. Indeed, in a recent series of interviews with fraternal dyads, Floyd (1996b) reported that brothers often see their relationship as the most intimate male-male relationship they have, perhaps because sociocultural proscriptions against male-male intimacy may be somewhat attenuated by the familial context. Whatever the reason, the fraternal dyad may provide men with the supportive, intimate same-sex relationship many men have difficulty forming outside the family; a scholarly understanding of its positive aspects, therefore, can be of use to clinicians and social scientists alike who are attempting to understand the unique influences of gender role expectations within the familial context.

The goal of the present study was to examine three positive characteristics in fraternal relationships—closeness, liking, and love—by identifying those relational traits that predict them and by investigating how they change across the late adolescent and young adult life span. Each of these three criterion variables is discussed separately, and suggestions are offered from theory and extant research as to what may predict them within the fraternal relationship. Rather than proposing specific hypotheses about what will predict closeness, liking, and love, this article advances an overall prediction that closeness and liking will be predicted not by the occurrence of "expressive" behaviors, such as breadth or depth of disclosure, but by more "instrumental" relational qualities such as commitment and dependability. Love is postulated to be linked more strongly with disclosure than is closeness or liking. A specific discussion of each criterion variable follows. Those variables eventually used as predictor variables in the present study are italicized.

Closeness

Closeness is among the most studied variables in research on same-sex relationships. Seminal work on the conceptualization of closeness was done by Kelley and his colleagues (1983) and was later refined by Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto (1989). According to Berscheid et al., a close relationship is one in which there is regular interaction between the participants, diversity in their interaction, and strength in their influence on each other. More recent research by Parks and Floyd (1996b) has furthered conceptual understanding of closeness by distinguishing it from the related (and often synonymously used) construct of intimacy.

Among researchers of relational closeness in same-sex dyads, the overwhelming consensus has been that women's relationships are inherently closer than men's. Most such work reflects a long-standing assumption among relationship scholars that verbal self-disclosure is a definitive referent for closeness. Therefore, claims that women's relationships are closer than men's are defended with evidence that women self-disclose more than men in their same-sex relationships (e.g., Caldwell & Pepplau, 1982; Williams, 1985). This finding has emerged not only with respect to friendships...
and other voluntarily formed relationships but with respect to siblings; that is, fraternal dyads are consistently described as less close than sororal pairs (Gold, 1989).

Recent critiques of the closeness literature have posited an alternative explanation for this pattern of findings: Verbal self-disclosure may not be as important in men's same-sex relationships as it is in women's. Growing evidence suggests that men do not judge the closeness of their same-sex relationships according to the level of disclosing interaction nearly to the degree that women do (e.g., Floyd, in press; Inman, 1993; Parks & Floyd, 1996b; Swain, 1989; Wood & Inman, 1993). Rather, more instrumental relational qualities, such as the ability to depend or count on each other, are more likely to lead to closeness in male-male pairs. Theory and research on siblinghood have reflected this as well. In her theory of sibling bonding, Ihinger-Tallman (1987) proposed that strong sibling bonds are likely to form when siblings rely on each other and meet each other's needs within the relationship, and Tietz's (1992) research reported the same. Similarly, Floyd (1995, 1996d) found that closeness among siblings was founded on a sense of dependability, a shared understanding and acknowledgment of siblings' commitment to "being there for each other." These findings and theoretical perspectives collectively suggest that closeness in the fraternal dyad ought to be predicted more strongly by instrumental qualities such as interdependence or commitment than by verbal self-disclosure.

Liking and Love

In comparison with closeness, liking and love have not received the same level of scholarly attention in the research on siblinghood or male-male relationships. Seminal work on both constructs was done by Rubin (1969, 1970). Noting an existing lack of conceptual discrimination between love and liking, Rubin conceptualized them as related but independent constructs. He conceived of love as an attitude one holds toward another that involves a desire to affiliate with the other, a predisposition to assist the other when needed, and a heightened sense of importance or exclusivity about the relationship. Liking was likewise conceptualized as an attitude of interpersonal attraction toward another that involved admiration for the other, a sense of similarity toward the other, and the opinion that most people ought also to like the other.

There is almost no published research on liking or love in adult sibling relationships. However, some recent evidence suggests that liking and love are both salient and distinctive qualities of fraternal dyads. In a series of in-depth interviews with dyads of full biological brothers, Floyd (1996b) reported that brothers often agree that they love each other but indicate that they sometimes do not like each other. On the basis of these reports, Floyd suggested that, for brothers, love is not merely a graduated state of liking (contrary to Heider's, 1958, suggestion). Rather, brothers appear to like each other when they feel they are getting along, when their uncertainty about each other is low, and when they believe they can depend on each other for support. In this regard, liking appears to approximate closeness in the sense that it is not necessarily dependent on intimately disclosing or emotionally expressive interaction so much as it is connected to qualities such as mutual commitment to the relationship and the ability to understand or predict how the other will feel or act. The importance of predictability is further underscored by uncertainty reduction theory (Berger, 1988; Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Parks & Adelman, 1983), which predicts that the ability to reduce uncertainty about a relational partner will lead to increased positivity of the relationship.

By contrast, love appears to involve greater emotional complexity than liking or closeness. Despite social expectancies that family members should love each other by virtue of their familial connection (see Ihinger-Tallman, 1987), it is not uncommon to find siblings, particularly brothers, who claim no feelings of love for each other (e.g., see Matthews, Delaney, & Adamek, 1989). Indeed, the competitiveness associated with both siblinghood and the masculine gender role may make it difficult at times for brothers to develop strong feelings of love for each other. Moreover, sociocultural proscriptions against male-male intimacy may further prevent brothers from admitting to feelings of love for each other even if they have them (Floyd, 1996c).

Research on what leads to fraternal love in the face of such mitigating factors is still far from complete. However, in interviews with
brother dyads, Floyd (1996b) asked respondents to describe a situation in which they felt particularly strong love toward their brothers. Thematic analyses of these descriptions indicate that nearly all of them involved some type of intimate disclosing interaction; indeed, several respondents noted that the ability to talk intimately with their brothers is precisely what led to their particularly strong feelings of love. This finding suggests that, unlike closeness or even liking, love among brothers may require more in the way of breadth or depth of self-disclosure.

Taken together, these findings and perspectives suggest that closeness, liking, and love may be predicted by various combinations of five different dimensions of relational development: interdependence, commitment, predictability, breadth of disclosure, and depth of disclosure. Thus, the following research question was posed.

Research Question 1: During late adolescence and early adulthood, which of five dimensions of relational development, or combination thereof, best predicts (a) brothers' perceptions of how much they like each other, (b) brothers' perceptions of how much they love each other, and (c) brothers' perceptions of how close their relationship is?

Although the focus on predictor variables in the previous discussion may imply that the fraternal relationship is static and unchanging, a host of studies on siblinghood have suggested important changes in the sibling relationship related to age (e.g., Cicirelli, 1985; Lamb & Sutton-Smith, 1982). For example, Floyd (1996a) reported that brothers perceived shared memories to become more important to their relationships as they grew older. Others have suggested that relational qualities such as commitment or predictability may become more important in the sibling dyad over time (see Lamb & Sutton-Smith, 1982). These findings suggest the need for a developmental cross-sectional investigation of the predictors of liking, love, and closeness, leading to the formulation of a second research question.

Research Question 2: How do predictors of liking, love, and closeness vary at different points in the late adolescent and young adult life span?

A more specific discussion of the effects of age on closeness, liking, and love in the fraternal dyad is offered subsequently.

Liking, Love, and Closeness Over Time

The question of how liking, love, or closeness in the fraternal relationship might change over time has been addressed by a number of relational development models and extant empirical findings. At least three possible relationships can be predicted. Some models, such as those offered by Altman and Taylor (1973) and Levinger (1983), posit a linear progression of relational intimacy. According to these models, liking, love, and closeness should be relatively low at relational inception but progressively increase as relational development continues. These models would predict that liking, love, or closeness ought to be positively correlated with age in the fraternal dyad.

An alternative prediction is offered by developmental models posited by Knapp (1984), Krug (1982), and Wood (1982). These models add a final developmental step not included in the others: relational dissolution. Although the notion of dissolution may at first seem immaterial to an ascribed relationship such as siblinghood, there are theoretical and empirical reasons to suggest otherwise. In a recently postulated theory of attraction in sibling relationships, Morman and Floyd (1996) suggested that the departure of siblings from their families of origin produces a shift away from the obligatory nature of siblinghood, causing siblings to assess the relative costs and rewards of continuing their relationship. If siblings are not sufficiently attracted to maintaining their relationship, for whatever reason, they may choose not to; a similar effect has been noted among elderly siblings, whose relationships may cease to exist once both parents have died and a need for the relationship is no longer perceived (see Matthews et al., 1989). Relational development models including a dissolution stage suggest a curvilinear progression of development, where in relationships increase in intimacy over time, but only to a point. Then intimacy begins to decrease as the relationship starts to dissolve. These models would predict that liking, love, or closeness ought to be curvilinearly related to age in fraternal relationships.

One perspective from the sibling literature makes yet a third prediction. The degree of such interdependence is likely to change as the sibling dyad matures (see Troll, 1985). As they mature and begin to pursue individual goals, siblings may depend less and less on each other;
this effect may be most pronounced in early adulthood, when spouses and children demand greater attention. If interdependence is indeed a predictor of liking, love, or closeness, then this perspective suggests that siblings’ perceptions of these relational qualities ought also to be negatively correlated with age. These competing predictions led a third research question to be posed.

Research Question 3: How do brothers’ perceptions of liking, love, and closeness covary with age during late adolescence and early adulthood?

An additional avenue to understanding the fraternal bond is found in its comparison with other male–male relationships. Speculation about such a comparison is offered next.

Comparing Fraternal Dyads With Other Male–Male Relationships

The significance of the fraternal bond is perhaps best understood by comparing it with other male same-sex relationships, such as with fathers, other family members, friends, or colleagues. There are reasons to expect that brothers will experience the positive aspects of their relationship differently than other male–male dyads. Brothers are more egalitarian than fathers and sons and usually have more frequent interaction and more intimate shared knowledge than male relatives outside the nuclear family, such as cousins or brothers-in-law (Scott, 1983). Beyond the family, brotherhood often resembles a male–male friendship in terms of companionship and voluntariness. In comparison with friends, however, brothers have a more extensive shared history, usually expect greater and more unconditional social support from each other, and are more likely to expect permanence in their relationship and to maintain contact at least for its own sake (Bedford, 1993; Walters, 1982). Thus, participants were asked how their fraternal relationships compared with their other male–male relationships.

Research Question 4: How do fraternal relationships compare with other male–male relationships in perceptions of closeness, importance, and affection?

Previous research on sibling relationships has been limited in scope and structure. With few exceptions (e.g., Matthews et al., 1989), data on sibling dyads are rarely collected from both siblings. Rather, the perceptions and experiences of one sibling are assumed to apply to the relationship as a whole, sometimes mistakenly so (Cicirelli, 1985). At times, it may even be unclear whether same-sex or opposite-sex relationships are being described (e.g., Pulakos, 1989). The present study sought to address these limitations by collecting data from intact brother dyads.

Method

Participants

The 118 male participants represented 59 intact brother dyads. Ages ranged from 16 to 33 years; the mean age was 22.02 years (SD = 3.67). Age differences between brothers ranged from 1 to 10 years; the mean age difference was 3.31 years (SD = 1.62). Brothers in all 59 dyads were full biological, nontwin brothers. In the respondents’ families of origin, the number of children ranged from 2 to 9; the mean number was 3.28 (SD = 1.61). The greatest percentage of respondents (37.4%) were firstborns; 34.3% were born second, 19.6% were born third, and the remaining 8.7% were born fourth or later. Just under half of the brothers had at least one sister (44.1%). No more than one sibling dyad came from the same family. At the time of the study, 20.5% of the respondents had a high school education or less, 47.9% had completed some college but had no degree, and 31.6% had completed a college or graduate degree.

Procedure

Undergraduate communication students received course credit for soliciting brother dyads to participate in the study. Male students who had at least one brother had the option of participating themselves and were given credit if both they and their brothers completed the questionnaire. As a means of preventing student fabrication of responses, students were asked to provide the telephone numbers of the brothers to whom they gave surveys. Random follow-up calling revealed that all of those called had indeed completed the survey. This method has been used with similar success by other researchers (e.g., Dainton, Stafford, & Canary, 1994; Dindia, 1989). Each respondent independently completed a written questionnaire and returned it anonymously to the investigator in a postage-paid envelope. Of 250 surveys distributed, 180 were returned (a return rate of 72%). Sixty-two of the respondents returning surveys were not included in the present analyses because they represented other than full biological siblings, because they were twins, or because they were outside the target age range. Data from these respondents were used in the analyses reported by Floyd (1996a).
Measures

Closeness. I measured closeness with the Relationship Closeness Inventory (Berscheid et al., 1989). This instrument conceptualizes closeness as an equal function of the frequency of interaction, the strength of mutual influence, and the diversity of shared activities. The instrument generates a total closeness score of 3 to 30 points, which is the sum of three individual scores for frequency, strength, and diversity, each scored 1–10. Of the three subscales, only the strength subscale uses the sum of multiple items to generate its score. Internal reliability was assessed with Cronbach's (1951) alpha; reliability for this subscale was .90. Frequency of interaction is measured as a function of how much time relational partners have spent together in a given period, and diversity is measured as a function of how many different activities partners have shared. The total alpha reliability for the scale was .73. The scale has demonstrated high convergent and discriminant validity (Berscheid et al., 1989).

Liking and loving. I measured liking and loving with Rubin's (1970) Liking and Love Scales. Each is a 13-item Likert-type scale in which respondents are asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements concerning their feelings toward the target relational partner. Responses are offered on a 7-point scale wherein higher values indicate higher agreement. Scores are calculated separately for each scale and fall within a possible range of 13 to 91. Internal reliability (alpha) values were .93 for liking and .85 for loving. The scale has demonstrated high convergent and discriminant validity in both correlational and experimental studies (Rubin, 1970).

Dimensions of relational development. I've assessed these five dimensions (interdependence, breadth, depth, predictability, and commitment) with a series of 7-point Likert-type scales developed by Parks and Floyd (1966a). Each dimension was measured with five to seven items scaled such that higher values indicated greater levels of relational development. Content validity for each scale was established in a pilot study of 60 undergraduates (33 men) who were asked to assess the extent to which each item reflected the construct in question. Only those items judged valid by at least 90% of the respondents were retained. Individual alphas were as follows: interdependence, .81; breadth, .84; depth, .81; predictability, .76; and commitment, .80.

Comparisons with other male relationships. Comparisons were made on three issues: relative perceived closeness, relative significance, and relative level of comfort and affection. Because it would have been impracticable to collect data on all other male–male relationships for each respondent and make statistical comparisons, respondents were asked simply to compare their target fraternal relationship with their other same-sex relationships on these three issues. The items used to assess relative closeness were “I feel closer to my brother (than to most other men),” “I know my brother better,” “I trust my brother more,” and “I love my brother more” (α = .78). Items used to measure relative level of affection and comfort were “I’d feel more comfortable telling my brother that I love him,” “I feel more comfortable being around my brother,” “I’d feel more comfortable hugging my brother,” and “It is easier to express affection to my brother” (α = .78). Respondents reported their level of agreement with each statement on a 7-point scale in which higher scores indicated greater agreement. The validity of each scale was established in a manner identical to that described earlier for the five dimensions of relational development; items were required to be judged valid by at least 90% of the judges to be retained.

Results

The first procedure was the determination of unit of analysis. When data are collected from both individuals in a dyad, each person’s score on a given variable is likely to affect the partner’s score. This interdependence of scores may be problematic because most statistical procedures carry the assumption that every data point in the equation is independent of every other data point. Therefore, one must determine whether partners' scores on each variable are, in fact, correlated; if they are, a dyadic score is calculated that can then be considered independent of all other dyadic scores. In the present sample, interdependence was assessed by correlating the older brothers' scores on each of the five predictor and three criterion variables with those of the younger brother. None of the eight correlations were significant; therefore, respondents' scores were considered to be independent, and the individual was retained as the unit of analysis.2

2 Pearson correlations between older and younger brothers were as follows: liking, .02, love; -.10; closeness, .26; breadth, -.004; depth, .08; commitment, .21; interdependence, .04; and predictability, .04. None of these values were significant at the α = .05 level.
Research Question 1

The first question asked which of the five dimensions of relational development would predict liking, love, and closeness. As a means of addressing this question, the dimensions of relational development (interdependence, predictability, commitment, and breadth and depth of disclosure) were entered into stepwise regressions to identify the extent to which they predicted liking, love, and closeness. The first set of regressions was conducted for the sample as a whole. Intercorrelations among the three criterion variables were as follows: The correlation between liking and love was .55 (p < .001, two-tailed), the correlation between liking and closeness was .29 (p < .01, two-tailed), and the correlation between love and closeness was .35 (p < .001, two-tailed). Zero-order correlations for these variables and the five predictor variables are reported above the diagonal in Table 1.

Liking scores and the predictor variables were entered into a stepwise regression. Commitment (β = .38), breadth (β = .34), and predictability (β = .25) predicted how much adult men like their brothers (adjusted $R^2$ total = .59).

Love scores and the predictor variables were entered into a second stepwise regression. Depth (β = .61) and commitment (β = .22) predicted how much adult men love their brothers (adjusted $R^2$ total = .55).

Closeness scores and the predictor variables were entered into a third stepwise regression. None of the predictor variables were entered into the final equation.

Research Question 2

The sample was then divided by age into three age categories of relatively equal size to allow examination of cross-sectional differences in late adolescence and young adulthood. Parameters for each category approximated those used by Floyd (1996a). The adolescent category included those 16 to 20 years of age and younger and accounted for 43 respondents (36.4% of the sample), the early 20s category included those 21–23 years of age and accounted for 37 respondents (31.4% of the sample), and the late 20s category included those 24–33 years old and accounted for 38 respondents (the remaining 32.2% of the sample). Multiple regressions testing the effects of the five predictor variables on liking, love, and closeness, conducted separately for each age group, are reported subsequently.

Adolescent age group. Intercorrelations among the three criterion variables were as follows: The correlation between liking and love was .61 (p < .001, two-tailed), the correlation between liking and closeness was .36 (p < .05, two-tailed), and the correlation between love and closeness was .29 (p < .07, two-tailed). Zero-order correlations for these variables and the five predictor variables are reported below the diagonal in Table 1.

Liking scores and the five predictor variables were entered into a stepwise regression; an alpha level of .05 was the criterion for inclusion in the final equation. Commitment (β = .48) and depth (β = .36) contributed to adolescents’ perceptions of how much they like their brothers (adjusted $R^2$ total = .56).

Love scores and the predictor variables were entered into a second stepwise regression. Depth (β = .75) contributed to adolescents’ perceptions of how much they love their brothers (adjusted $R^2$ total = .55).

Closeness scores and the predictor variables were entered into a third stepwise regression. None of the predictor variables were entered into the final equation.

Early 20s age group. Intercorrelations among criterion variables were as follows: The correlation between liking and love was .60 (p < .001, two-tailed), the correlation between liking and closeness was .33 (p < .05, two-tailed), and the correlation between love and closeness was .48 (p < .01, two-tailed). Zero-order correlations between these variables and the five predictor variables are reported above the diagonal in Table 2.

Liking scores and the predictor variables were entered into a stepwise regression. Commitment (β = .38), breadth (β = .34), and predictability (β = .25) predicted how much men in their early 20s like their brothers (adjusted $R^2$ total = .59).

The fact that the intercorrelation between liking and love was higher than the intercorrelation between either variable and closeness may be partially attributable to common method variance; liking and love were measured with scales similar in length and format to each other and different from the scale used to measure closeness.
Table 1
Zero-Order Correlations for Study Variables: Total Sample and Adolescent Age Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
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<td>.292**</td>
<td>.450***</td>
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<td>.646***</td>
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<td>2. Love</td>
<td>.606***</td>
<td></td>
<td>.354***</td>
<td>.572***</td>
<td>.583***</td>
<td>.763***</td>
<td>.548***</td>
<td>.658***</td>
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<td>3. Closeness</td>
<td>.358*</td>
<td>.291</td>
<td></td>
<td>.466***</td>
<td>.269**</td>
<td>.276**</td>
<td>.217*</td>
<td>.333***</td>
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<td>4. Interdependence</td>
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<td>.557***</td>
<td>.215</td>
<td></td>
<td>.557***</td>
<td>.622***</td>
<td>.357***</td>
<td>.569***</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Breadth</td>
<td>.639***</td>
<td>.560***</td>
<td>.165</td>
<td>.538***</td>
<td></td>
<td>.743***</td>
<td>.461***</td>
<td>.678***</td>
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<td>6. Depth</td>
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<td>.566***</td>
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<td>.563***</td>
<td>.670***</td>
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<td>.620***</td>
<td>.665***</td>
<td>.644***</td>
<td>.508**</td>
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</table>

Note. Values above the diagonal represent the total sample; those below the diagonal represent the adolescent age group.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Love scores and the predictor variables were entered into a second stepwise regression. Depth (β = .41), predictability (β = .29), and commitment (β = .29) predicted how much men in their early 20s love their brothers (adjusted \( R^2 \) total = .63).

Closeness scores and the predictor variables were entered into a third stepwise regression. Interdependence (β = .56) predicted how close men in their early 20s feel to their brothers (adjusted \( R^2 \) total = .29).

Late 20s age group. Intercorrelations among criterion variables were as follows: The correlation between liking and love was .49 (p < .01, two-tailed), the correlation between liking and closeness was .17 (p > .05, two-tailed), and the correlation between love and closeness was .35 (p > .05, two-tailed). Zero-order correlations for these variables and the predictor variables are presented below the diagonal in Table 2.

Liking scores and the five predictor variables were entered into a stepwise regression. Predictability (β = .70) predicted how much men in their late 20s like their brothers (adjusted \( R^2 \) total = .48).

Love scores and the predictor variables were entered into a second stepwise regression. Depth (β = .78) predicted how much men in their late 20s love their brothers (adjusted \( R^2 \) total = .59).

Closeness scores and the predictor variables were entered into a third stepwise regression. Interdependence (β = .57) predicted how close men in their late 20s feel to their brothers (adjusted \( R^2 \) total = .31). For descriptive purposes, Table 3 provides means and standard deviations for the five predictor and three criterion variables for the sample as a whole and for each age group.

**Research Question 3**

The third research question asked how liking, love, and closeness would covary with age. First, scatterplots were created for each of these variables to determine whether a curvilinear pattern would emerge across the age range. Curvilinearity was not suggested by any of these graphs. Eta values for each variable were small (.10 for liking, .18 for love, and .11 for closeness), further suggesting noncurvilinearity. Thus, linear relationships were tested. Two-tailed Pearson correlations revealed a nonsignificant correlation between age and liking \((r = .02, p > .05)\). A nonsignificant correlation also emerged between age and love \((r = -.04, p > .05)\). However, a significant negative correlation was identified between age and closeness \((r = -.37, p < .001)\). These results indicate that perceptions of liking and love do not vary systematically with age; however, brothers’ perceptions of closeness decreased in the older age categories.

**Research Question 4**

The fourth research question asked how fraternal relationships would compare with other male same-sex relationships (e.g., with fathers, other male relatives, or male friends) in terms of how close, significant, and affectionate they are. Participants responded to Likert-type items in which they were asked to compare the fraternal
Table 2
Zero-Order Correlations for Study Variables: Early 20s and Late 20s Age Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<td>.329*</td>
<td>.544**</td>
<td>.671***</td>
<td>.542***</td>
<td>.475**</td>
<td>.707***</td>
</tr>
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<td>2. Love</td>
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<td></td>
<td>.479**</td>
<td>.642***</td>
<td>.654***</td>
<td>.779***</td>
<td>.638***</td>
<td>.671***</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Closeness</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>.346</td>
<td></td>
<td>.576***</td>
<td>.654***</td>
<td>.779***</td>
<td>.245</td>
<td>.462**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Interdependence</td>
<td>.269</td>
<td>.550**</td>
<td>.573**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.580***</td>
<td>.727***</td>
<td>.307</td>
<td>.673***</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Breadth</td>
<td>.515**</td>
<td>.517**</td>
<td>.255</td>
<td>.560**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.681***</td>
<td>.354*</td>
<td>.710***</td>
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<td>6. Depth</td>
<td>.565**</td>
<td>.777***</td>
<td>.389**</td>
<td>.615***</td>
<td>.805***</td>
<td></td>
<td>.562***</td>
<td>.673***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. predictability</td>
<td>.704***</td>
<td>.505**</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>.570***</td>
<td>.608***</td>
<td></td>
<td>.355*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Commitment</td>
<td>.540**</td>
<td>.685***</td>
<td>.287</td>
<td>.399*</td>
<td>.560***</td>
<td>.739***</td>
<td>.637***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Values above the diagonal represent the early 20s age group; those below the diagonal represent the late 20s age group.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

relationship on which they were reporting with their other male relationships in general. They indicated their level of agreement with four statements assessing the relative closeness of fraternal and nonfraternal male relationships, three statements assessing the relative importance of these relationships, and four statements assessing the relative level of comfort and affection. Responses were offered on a 7-point scale wherein higher values indicated higher agreement. The score on each scale represents the mean of the individual scores; thus, each scale also has a theoretical range of 1 to 7.

The first comparison involved how close respondents felt to their brothers as opposed to other men in their lives. This score was the average of responses to four statements: "I feel closer to my brother," "I know my brother better," "I trust my brother more," and "I love my brother more." The mean for this scale was 5.76 (SD = 1.11). The second comparison involved how significant respondents felt their fraternal relationships were, as compared with their nonfraternal male relationships. This score was the average of responses to three statements: "My brother is more important to me," "I confide in my brother more," and "I love my brother more." The mean for this scale was 5.21 (SD = 1.38). The final comparison involved the relative level of affection and comfort respondents felt with their brothers as opposed to other men in their lives. This score was the average of responses to four statements: "I'd feel more comfortable telling my brother that I love him," "I feel more comfortable being around my brother," "I'd feel more comfortable hugging my brother," and "It is easier to express affection to my brother." The mean for this scale was 4.83 (SD = 1.63). The items just mentioned represent all of the items used in this portion of the study. These scores were not entered into any of the regression analyses. However, correlations were examined between each of these scores and respondents' age; none of the correlations was significant.

Discussion

Results are discussed in relation to predictions offered by theory and research on relational development, siblinghood, and male-male relationships. Support emerged for the present study's proposition that closeness and liking would be predicted by instrumental relational qualities and that love would be predicted by expressive qualities.

The first research question asked which of the five dimensions of relational development would best predict fraternal liking, love, and closeness for dyads of full biological brothers in

4 This approach was admittedly broad in scope. Although a more precise comparison would have had men rate their fraternal dyads in relation to a specific other male–male relationship (as has been done with brothers and male friends; see Floyd, 1994, 1995; Floyd & Parks, 1995), the goal of the present study was simply to assess where fraternity stood in relation to other male–male dyads in general. Future studies should indeed compare the fraternal dyad with specific other male–male relationships, such as relationships between cousins, coworkers, fathers and sons, or brothers-in-law; it simply would have been impracticable to attempt to draw all of the possible comparisons within this single study, which is why this broader approach was chosen.
Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for the Five Predictor and Three Criterion Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Total sample</th>
<th>Adolescents</th>
<th>Early 20s</th>
<th>Late 20s</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
<td>12.56</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>12.95</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking</td>
<td>69.30</td>
<td>12.99</td>
<td>70.88</td>
<td>11.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>62.49</td>
<td>12.19</td>
<td>60.14</td>
<td>12.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td>26.39</td>
<td>7.79</td>
<td>27.03</td>
<td>6.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>31.06</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>31.09</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictability</td>
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<td>5.78</td>
<td>32.21</td>
<td>6.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breadth</td>
<td>31.83</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>31.60</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth</td>
<td>35.85</td>
<td>8.23</td>
<td>34.45</td>
<td>8.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Possible ranges were as follows: closeness, 3–30; liking and love, 13–90; interdependence, 7–49; commitment, predictability, and breadth, 7–35; and depth, 7–56.

the late adolescent and early adult life period. Notable patterns emerged within the sample as a whole and across age categories in the properties predictive of each criterion variable. Each criterion and its associated predictors are discussed in greater detail subsequently.

Closeness in fraternal dyads was predicted by interdependence, for the sample as a whole and within every age group except adolescents. Moreover, interdependence was the only predictor of closeness to emerge in the analyses. This finding is not surprising in light of theory and research on sibling relationships that has repeatedly pointed to the relational virtues of siblings relying and depending on each other and knowing that they can do so. Indeed, Floyd (1995) reported that closeness in sibling dyads, whether male or female, was founded on a shared sense of dependability and the cognition that the siblings would always “be there” for each other. The relationship between interdependence and closeness was also forecasted by Ihinger-Tallman’s (1987) theory of sibling bonding, in which she proposed that strong sibling bonds are likely to form when siblings rely on each other and meet each other’s needs within the relationship (see also Tietz, 1992).

Although breadth and depth of self-disclosure emerged as predictors of liking in various age categories, the consistent predictors of liking were commitment and predictability. These qualities emerged as the top two predictors for the sample as a whole, and at least one or the other predicted liking for every age category. The focus on commitment is consistent with Swain’s (1989) perspective of covert intimacy, suggesting that mutual commitment is central to the experience of intimacy in male–male relationships. In addition, its salience in sibling relationships may be suggested by the increasingly voluntary nature of the relationship as siblings grow older. As Floyd and Parks (1995) suggested, the sibling relationship becomes an increasingly more voluntary union once siblings have left their parents’ home; thus, the continuation of the relationship in light of its less obligatory nature may give brothers high confidence in each other’s commitment to it.

The emergence of predictability as a predictor of liking is easily understood within the context of uncertainty reduction theory (Berger, 1988; Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Parks & Adelman, 1983). According to the theory, relational development progresses only to the extent that partners are able to reduce their uncertainty about each other. As partners become more certain about the other’s attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors, the theory predicts that they will become more positively disposed toward each other. Within this theoretical framework, therefore, it stands to reason that brothers will be inclined to like each other if they can predict what each other will say, think, feel, or do (i.e., if their uncertainty about the other has been reduced).

Finally, the primary predictors of love in fraternal dyads were depth of self-disclosure and mutual commitment. The implications for commitment were discussed earlier; its emergence as a predictor of love as well as liking further underscores its centrality to fraternal relationships. Moreover, depth of disclosure predicted love for the sample as a whole and for every age category. This further supports the present study’s postulation that love will be predicted more strongly by expressive relational qualities
than will liking or commitment. As predicted, love in the fraternal relationship appears to require more in the way of intimate verbal interaction than either closeness or liking. Although closeness and liking were both largely predicted by the qualities of commitment, predictability, and interdependence, the development of love is predicated more strongly on the more expressive function of deep self-disclosure. In this regard, love is set apart from closeness and liking, both of which appear to be developed with comparatively little disclosing behavior.

Collectively, these findings on the predictors of closeness, liking, and love have important implications for the study of both sibling relationships in particular and male–male dyads in general. For one, they point convincingly to the relative importance of the more instrumental qualities of these relationships, such as commitment and interdependence, as antecedents for liking, love, and closeness. This is in contrast to the intuitive (and often operationalized) notion that all of these states ought to be related more strongly to more affective or expressive relational qualities. Notwithstanding that depth of self-disclosure emerged as an important predictor of love, the other major predictors of liking, love, and closeness to emerge in the present study (commitment, predictability, and interdependence) all represent qualities that are relatively independent of personal self-disclosure, emotional expressiveness, or other overtly affectionate behaviors that have, for decades, been considered by social scientists to be the definitive referents of close, personal relationships (Cancian, 1986; Parks, 1982; Wood & Inman, 1993). Indeed, after reporting that women are more expressive than men, Pearson, Turner, and Todd-Mancillas (1991) suggested that “self disclosure is simply more important to women than men. By implication, one would also conclude that relationships are more important to women than men” (p. 177). Clearly, the present findings provide reason to question this conclusion.

At the very least, these findings suggest that closeness and liking can be predicted by relational qualities other than verbal expressiveness. In addition to its implications for how relational research is conceptualized, this finding may also have implications for the therapeutic setting. For example, in cases of persistent or destructive sibling conflict, encouraging increased self-disclosure may be beneficial in understanding and identifying problematic issues, but, at least for brothers, increased disclosure appears not to lead to increased closeness or mutual liking. Instead, qualities such as commitment to and dependence on each other should be emphasized if greater liking or closeness is the therapeutic goal.

It will also be important for future research to examine whether this focus on the more instrumental qualities of relationships is linked generally to siblinghood or male–male relationships or whether it is specific to fraternal dyads. These questions could be examined by replications of the procedures with sororal or brother–sister dyads and with peerlike relationships outside the family, such as friendships.

As a means of addressing the second research question, the sample was divided into three age groups to examine the predictors of liking, love, and closeness at varying developmental points in the adolescent and early adult life span. Although analyses for the first research question indicated that age was not related to liking or love and was negatively related to closeness, the division of the sample made it possible to determine whether there was any noticeable variation in the predictors of these qualities across the age range sampled.

A perusal of the regression results for each age group suggests very little difference in what was predictive of liking, love, or closeness. For example, depth was a predictor of love for every group, and interdependence predicted closeness for every group except adolescents. Predictors of liking differed most between adolescents and those in their late 20s, with commitment and depth predicting liking for the former group and predictability leading to liking for the latter. An additional pattern to emerge was that, relative to the two younger age groups, those in the late 20s group except adolescents. Predictors of liking differed most between adolescents and those in their late 20s, with commitment and depth predicting liking for the latter. An additional pattern to emerge was that, relative to the two younger age groups, those in the late 20s group except adolescents. Predictors of liking differed most between adolescents and those in their late 20s, with commitment and depth predicting liking for the latter. An additional pattern to emerge was that, relative to the two younger age groups, those in the late 20s group except adolescents.

The third research question asked how brothers’ perceptions of liking, love, and closeness would correlate with age. All manner of correlations have been called for by previous theoretical speculations. Results indicated that, among older age groups, fraternal relationships were less close than among those at younger
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ages, whereas liking and love were largely unchanged across age groups. The decrease in closeness supports empirical observations that siblings (particularly brothers) tend to "grow apart" over the life course. Some research has suggested that this pattern reverses in later life (e.g., Connidis, 1989), although much of that work has focused specifically on sisters and should be expanded to include examination of the fraternal relationship. The greater closeness among brothers in younger age categories might also be at least partially attributable to greater propinquity. It is likely that brothers in each dyad live closer to each other in the younger age groups than in the older age groups, although this demographic information was not specifically elicited. Were this to be the case, however, it may augment younger respondents' perceptions of relational closeness.  

That liking and love remained unchanged across age categories is an interesting and theoretically useful finding. It appears that, although brothers may feel less close to each other as time passes, they do not like or love each other any less in adulthood than in childhood. Liking and love appear to be less temporal and context-specific states than closeness. As the present results indicate, both liking and love are linked significantly with commitment, which may be a relatively permanent and fixed relational quality. It is possible that brothers maintain their liking, love, and commitment to each other as a function of the permanence of their relationship—that is, because they know they will always be brothers—regardless of how close they feel to each other.

An additional avenue to understanding the nature and significance of the fraternal bond is to compare it with other male–male unions. The fourth research question addressed this issue by asking how fraternal and nonfraternal relationships would compare in terms of how close, significant, and affectionate they are perceived to be. This portion of the research did not involve direct statistical comparisons of relational development scores for brothers and all males outside the fraternal dyad, because collecting the necessary data from all other important males in a respondent's life would have been impracticable. Rather, respondents were asked to compare their fraternal relationships with their other male–male relationships in general.

As a means of comparing the relative perceptions of closeness of their fraternal and nonfraternal male relationships, respondents were asked how much they agreed with statements such as "I feel closer to my brother (than to other men)" and "I love my brother more." The mean score on this four-item scale was 5.76 (of a possible 7.00). They were then asked to compare how important or significant their fraternal relationship was; the score on this scale was 5.21. Finally, they assessed the relative comfort and affection present in their fraternal relationships, as opposed to their relationships with other men; this scale yielded a mean score of 4.83. Although purely descriptive in nature, these data suggest that, on the whole, fraternal relationships are among the most central same-sex relationships in men's lives. Later research should put these comparisons to a more direct test by statistically comparing scores for perceived closeness, importance, or affection generated by samples of brothers and of male friends, for example, or fathers and sons. This line of research would help to identify which aspects of the fraternal relationship are a product of the male–male configuration and which are not.

In summary, the present study was designed to explicate the nature of liking, love, and closeness in fraternal relationships and to examine their variation over time. The prediction of extant research and theory was that love would be predicted by expressive relational qualities, such as self-disclosure, whereas closeness and liking would be products of more instrumental relational qualities, such as commitment, interdependence, or predictability. This prediction was generally supported both for the sample as a whole and within each of three age categories across the late adolescent and early adult life span.

These findings have implications for the further study of close personal relationships. For one, they contribute to a growing dialogue, arising primarily in the literature on closeness, on gender-specific approaches to close relationships. This literature has begun to suggest that expressive relational qualities, such as breadth or depth of disclosure, may not be as important to the closeness of men's relationships as women's. Although the bulk of the extant research on this perspective has examined friendships, the present study suggests that it may apply with equal validity to the context of sibling relationships.

In addition, these data could inform the de-

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5 I thank one of the reviewers for this observation.
development of new instruments for the study of the fraternal relationship or siblinghood in general. It would certainly be worthwhile to make comparable inquiries on the nature of sororal or brother–sister dyads for a more complete understanding of the nature and significance of sibling bonds.

Two limitations are also important to note and provide further directions for future research. First, although the age range sampled was chosen intentionally to focus on a period of life much neglected in sibling research, it may also limit the generalizability of the findings to those in late adolescence or early adulthood. It would be fruitful to replicate these inquiries with brothers in later adulthood so as to understand more fully developmental changes in the nature of the relationship's positive aspects. Second, the self-report format of the study, although useful for the generation of a large amount of quantitative data, may be more susceptible to memory bias or social desirability effects than other methodologies. Future studies in this line of research involving diary, observational, or experimental methods could identify whether the methodology used influences the pattern of findings in any meaningful way.

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