

A "Changing Culture of Fatherhood": Effects on Affectionate Communication, Closeness, and Satisfaction in Men's Relationships with their Fathers and their Sons

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Fatherhood is a familial role that is historically bound, in the sense that it is subject to social, economic, and political influences that can change expectations for how fathers should act. In this essay, we discuss the cyclical nature of shifts in cultural prescriptions for North American fathers and echo arguments raised elsewhere that fatherhood is currently in the midst of such a shift, away from the authoritarian, emotionally detached father and toward the involved, nurturant father. We reason herein that such a shift should manifest itself in observable differences between the qualities of men's relationships with their fathers and the qualities of their relationships with their own sons. A study involving 139 father-son dyads revealed that men felt closer to, were more satisfied with, and expressed more verbal, nonverbal, and supportive affection with, their sons than with their own fathers. These findings emerged from both fathers' and sons' reports. Moreover, fathers reported feeling greater closeness and expressing more affection to their sons than their sons felt or expressed to them.

Without question, the relational dynamic experienced by men within the father-son dyad is a source of significant and long-lasting influence on a host of important psychosocial and developmental issues in the lives of men. For most men, the father-son relationship has an enormous influence on several developmental issues in nearly every area of their lives (Bochner, 1976). For example, the father-son relationship reportedly is an important predictor of sons' future communication behaviors (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Yerby, 1981; Fink, 1993), their relational success and communication with their spouses (Beatty & Dobos, 1993; Berry, 1990), their attitudes toward sexuality (Fisher, 1987), their academic achievement (Snarey, 1993) and educational attainment (Harris, Furstenberg, & Kramer, 1998), their future in-

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come levels (Duncan, Hill, & Yeung, 1996), their parenting style (Simons, Beaman, Conger, & Chao, 1993; Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Wu, 1991), their potential for delinquent behavior (Harris, Furstenberg, & Kramer, 1998), and their overall emotional health (Berry, 1990). For a father, the relationship experienced with his son influences the father's emotional health (Berry, 1990), adult development, and psychosocial adjustment (Snarey, 1993).

Recent research has indicated that fathers who choose to be actively involved in the lives of their sons help to develop young men who are less aggressive, less overtly competitive, and more emotionally expressive and empathic (Brody, 1996). Further, fathers who play a direct role in parenting their sons help to raise individuals who subsequently are better able to resolve conflict, who are more caring and better able to share intimacy, and who appear to be more relaxed concerning gender role expectations of traditional masculinity (Pollack, 1998; Pruett, 1989). Other scholars have focused on the positive outcomes associated with fathers taking an active role in raising their sons, such as the communication of affection (Morman & Floyd, 1999), relational satisfaction (Beatty & Dobos, 1992; Martin & Anderson, 1995), intimacy (Buerkel, 1996), and confirmation (Beatty & Dobos, 1993). Clearly, a growing body of research indicates that men who are actively involved in raising their sons can have an overwhelmingly positive impact on the life course their sons pursue.

An even larger body of literature has focused on what one might classify as the negative outcomes associated with poor, ineffective, or distant fathering behaviors, however. This body of work provides the foundation for the common assumption that most men have dysfunctional, contentious, and emotionally distant relationships with their fathers, relationships that produced emotionally disabled, angry, and resentful young men destined to fail in their attempts at fathering their own sons (Doherty, 1991; Gerson, 1993; Levant, 1992). Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) called this view the "role-inadequacy perspective"; Kindlon and Thompson (1999) referred to it as the role of the "disqualified dad," and Larson and Richards (1994) concluded that fathers appear to be the "weak link" in the emotional life of the family. Whatever the description, ineffective fathering ostensibly is central to a host of negative and socially dysfunctional outcomes associated with many American young adult men, adolescents, and boys in contemporary culture (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Pollack, 1998).

One study revealed that 23% of fathers were physically absent from their sons' upbringing, 29% were psychologically absent, and 18% were totally uninvolved with raising their sons (see Osheron, 1986, p. 7). Streiker (1989) reported that over 12 million children in the United States do not live with their fathers, whereas 88% of children who are part of divorced families end up living with their mothers (Osheron, 1986). A study of 300 male executives and midlevel managers dealing

with what single factor they would alter in their relationships with their fathers while growing up at home showed a majority as wishing that they could have been closer to their fathers and that their fathers had expressed more emotion and feeling toward them (DeLong & DeLong, 1992). Unfortunately, Osheron (1986) concluded that the primary experience of the father-son relationship is one of distance, estrangement, pain, and sadness.

Kindlon and Thompson (1999) discovered that most men want to do a good job raising their sons and want to do it better than their fathers did. These same men also expressed aggravation, disappointment, and discontentment with their sons' behavior or personality, communication styles, and decision-making abilities, however. Similarly, many of their sons reported frustration with fathers who do not listen, do not understand, and demand respect without offering it. These sons felt shortchanged by their fathers, not only in terms of affection and emotional-support, but also in the amount of time their fathers spent with them. It also appears that fathers and sons do not share perceptions of family reality. When asked to record their observations of the same event being experienced by both father and son, fathers and sons offered completely different accounts nearly 50% of the time (Larson & Richards, 1994). The overwhelming observation sons made about life with their fathers was that the father-son relationship is a significant source of conflict, competition, criticism, and lack of understanding (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999). Not surprisingly, Youniss and Smollar (1985) determined that of all the people in a boy's life, sons most frequently identified their fathers as the persons to whom they are least likely to confide their true feelings.

We believe that one reason fathers and sons may find it increasingly difficult to maintain positive, emotionally available relationships with each other as the sons become teenagers and young adults results from the demands both feel to meet the expectancies of the masculine gender role. The traditional masculine gender role is often characterized by restrictive emotionality, a preoccupation with success, the inhibited expression of affection, a need for control and power, and a competitive orientation to life (O'Neil, 1981; Pleck, 1987). The father-son relationship is not only a union between two family members; it is also a relationship between two men. As such, to the extent that either the father or the son feels motivated to adhere to the demands of traditional masculinity, the relationship will be influenced accordingly. For example, several studies have indicated that male-male relationships are generally less affectionate, less close, and less intimate than female-female or opposite-sex relationships (e.g., Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Williams, 1985). In this light, the lack of emotional connection between fathers and sons may be due to the masculine gender role demands for restricted emotionality between men. When confronted with opportunities to express love or affection to a son,

many fathers find themselves at a loss for how to respond and typically fall back on what they have been taught to do with other men, namely, to avoid such emotional expressions out of a fear of appearing feminine or weak.

As Kindlon and Thompson (1999) noted, when an adolescent son begins to challenge his father's position and/or authority within the home, a common response from a vulnerable father is to fight his son's perceived threat and respond with the time-honored, masculine, defensive responses of control, competition, and criticism. Most male teenagers and young adults desire to be their own men, control their own lives, and make their own decisions. However, this desire for personal control conflicts with the reality most of these young men face (i.e., that they are dependent on their fathers to provide for their physical, financial, and material needs). The competition in which many young men find themselves with their fathers for dominance, status, power, and control often results in damaging consequences for the father-son relationship. In the short term, a father may "win" the control and authority battle with his son, but the long term effect of such a victory is often an angry, distant, resentful, depressed, and emotionally unfulfilled young man longing for, but never achieving, approval and acceptance from his father (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Pollack, 1998).

There is reason to believe that the father-son union is not as contentious and emotionally distant at the start of the 21st Century as it was for much of the latter half of the 20th Century. The act of fatherhood, like most social roles, is historically prescribed and is, therefore, subject to historical social influences. Subsequently, we discuss evidence that the sociocultural dynamic of North American fatherhood is currently in the midst of a shift with respect to the expectations placed on fathers. In this article, we reason that such a shift should manifest itself in observable differences between men's relationships with their children and their relationships with their own fathers.

Fatherhood as Historically Bound

Although the act of producing offspring is purely biological in nature, the process of *being a father*, much like the process of *being a man*, is socially prescribed. Ideas and ideals about fatherhood vary not only from society to society, but also evolve over time within a given society. Griswold (1993, 1997), in discussing the evolution of the American fatherhood role, pointed out that this society's role expectations for fathers have undergone several important shifts in the last four centuries, often in response to changes in the political and economic climate. Most notably, social constructions of the fatherhood role have cycled during that time between one of being a detached, authoritarian father and one of being a nurturant, companionate father. In the 17th Century, for instance, the socially accepted duties of American fathers

were to provide materially for their children and to educate them, both in trade and in religion. The emphasis in father-child relationships during this period was on respect, authority, and discipline. As Griswold (1997) pointed out, however, these expectations dramatically shifted in the mid-18th Century away from authoritarianism and toward greater mutuality and companionship in father-child relationships and then shifted back toward being a more detached, authoritarian father in the late 18th and 19th Centuries. A new conception of masculinity at the turn of the last century brought with it a renewed emphasis on men's involvement in child rearing, a concept Marsh (1988, 1989, 1990) referred to as "masculine domesticity." During the early part of the 1900s, the role of the American father was not only one of participation in home life, but also of concentrated attention to the social and psychological development of his children. Indeed, it was during this time that researchers proposed links between paternal involvement in child rearing and children's proper sex-role and personality development (see, e.g., the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, 1934).

According to Griswold (1997), this new conception of fatherhood persevered until the mid-20th Century, when increasing consumerism and consumption, encouraged by economic development, led fathers away from the domestic role and squarely returned them to that of breadwinner in demanding their time at work so that they could provide for their families' increasing material desires. This shifted the construction of the American father, once again, away from one of a nurturer and toward one of a provider and authority figure, a construction clearly reflected in American television portrayals of fathers during that era (see Arliss, 1993).

A number of scholars have opined, however, that role expectations for American fathers are currently in the midst of yet another cyclical shift, this one away from "father as breadwinner" and toward "father as nurturer" (see Daly, 1995; LaRossa, 1988). Paramount in this shift is the increased expectation that fathers should be more nurturant, more loving, and more involved in the raising of their children than fathers of the mid-20th Century were (Backett, 1987; Lamb, 1986; Marsiglio, 1995; Pleck, 1987). This renewed emphasis on paternal nurturing and involvement is at the heart of Hawkins and Dollahite's (1997) theory of generative fatherhood, which presumes an ethical obligation or "call" to modern fathers to raise, guide, be affectionate toward, and be involved with their children on a day-to-day basis. There is evidence to suggest that American fathers are, in fact, responding to this latest shift in the social construction of fatherhood. According to Griswold (1997):

The evidence suggests that as mothers work more hours outside the home and earn more of the total household income, fathers tend to share more housework and child care; so, too, as fathers value family

involvement over rapid career advancement, they spend more time with their children. In one recent study, for example, researchers found that 74% of men would rather have a "daddy-track" job than a "fast-track" job. In another study, 48% of the respondents reduced their working hours to spend more time with their children and 23% passed up a promotion for the same reason (Levine, 1991). A new mode of the new fatherhood is clearly at hand. (p. 85)

What implications does this new "culture of fatherhood" have for the nature of men's relationships with their sons? Most directly, it suggests that father-son relationships should be closer, more satisfying, and more nurturant in this generation than in the previous generation. That is, fathers should report having more affectionate, closer, and more satisfying relationships with their sons than they had with their fathers (H1). Following suit, men's sons should report that their relationships with their fathers are more affectionate, closer, and more satisfying than the relationships their fathers report having with their own fathers (H2).

Importantly, the social shifts outlined herein pertain to role expectations for fatherhood, not for sonhood. One could argue that changes in the fatherhood role presume complementary changes in the role of sons, but this is not necessarily the case; whereas a "provider" father in the 1950s and a "nurturant" father in the 1990s would certainly have differing ideas about their proper orientation toward their children, they may not have systematically disagreed in their children's proper orientation toward them. Given that the contemporary construction of American fatherhood is one of an involved, nurturant father, we further hypothesize that an additional effect of the "changing culture of fatherhood" is that men are more affectionate, closer, and more satisfied with their sons than their sons are with them (H3).

Method

Participants

Participants were 278 males comprising 139 father-son pairs. The fathers ranged in age from 30 to 74 years, with a mean age of 50.07 years ($SD = 6.72$), and the sons ranged in age from 12 to 46 years ($M = 21.94$, $SD = 5.83$). Most of the fathers (88.2%) and sons (87.1%) were Caucasian, while 7.4% of fathers and 7.9% of sons were African-American, 1.5% of fathers and 2.2% of sons were Hispanic, 1.5% of fathers and 1.4% of sons were Asian, and the remainder were of other ethnic origins. Most of the fathers (89.7%) and few of the sons (14.5%) were married, while 8.1% of fathers and 0.7% of sons were divorced, 2.2% of fathers and 84.8% of sons were never married, and none were widowed. At the time of the study, 9.6% of fathers and 23.7% of sons had a high school education or less, 20.6% of fathers and 34.8% of sons had completed some college but had no degree, 36.8% of fathers and 37.1% of sons had an associates' or baccalaureate degree, and 33.0% of

fathers and 4.5% of sons had a graduate or professional degree. Just over half (55.2%) of the fathers and nearly half (44.5%) of the sons lived in the Southwestern United States, while 20.1% of fathers and 35.8% of sons lived in the South/Southwest, 19.4% of fathers and 15.3% of sons lived in the Midwest, 3.7% of fathers and 2.9% of sons lived in New England, and 1.5% of fathers and 1.5% of sons lived in the Northwest.

Procedure

Undergraduate research assistants at two medium-sized universities recruited volunteer father-son pairs to participate in the study, using convenience and snowball sampling techniques. To qualify, a potential father had to have at least one son who was at least 12 years of age, and both father and son had to agree to participate. The decision to exclude from the sample relationships involving sons younger than 12 was made based on research suggesting that the nature of the father-son relationship changes substantially once the son enters adolescence, such that men discontinue orienting toward their sons as children and begin orienting toward them as fellow males (Salt, 1991).

Qualified males who agreed to participate received questionnaires to complete on their own and addressed, postage-paid envelopes in which to return them to the researchers. Each father reported on his relationship with his oldest son (and it was the oldest son completing the son's questionnaire). The purpose of this decision was to avoid a selection bias whereby fathers might choose to report on the son with whom they have the most positive relationship. Fathers and sons were instructed to complete their questionnaires independently and not to consult with each other about their answers until both had submitted their questionnaires to the researchers. Most of the sons were biological sons conceived in the fathers' current (70.5%) or former (21.0%) marriages, whereas 6.2% were step-sons and 2.3% were adopted sons.

Measures

Affectionate communication was assessed via the factor-based Affectionate Communication Index (ACI: Floyd & Morman, 1998). This measure is comprised of separate subscales relating to affection communicated through direct verbal statements (e.g., saying "I love you"), through direct nonverbal gestures (e.g., hugging), and through supportive activities (e.g., doing favors for another). The ACI has demonstrated multiple forms of validity and reliability in previous studies, including studies establishing its predictive validity with coded behavior (Floyd & Morman, 1998, 2000; Morman & Floyd, 1999). *Closeness* was indexed by means 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," the other circle is

labeled "other," and participants select the pair of circles that best depicts the nature of their relationship. The IOS scale has been extensively validated in both experimental and correlational research (see Aron et al., 1992). *Relational satisfaction* was assessed with a nine-item scale developed by Floyd and Morman (2000). The measure addresses the extent of participants' satisfaction and contentment with the nature of their relationships with their sons and with their fathers (e.g., "My relationship with my son/father is just the way I want it to be").

The father and son in each dyad completed each measure. Sons completed the measures with respect to their relationships with their fathers (e.g., how affectionate they were with their fathers, how close they felt to their fathers). Fathers completed the measures with respect both to their relationships with their sons (e.g., how affectionate they were with their sons) and to their relationships with their own fathers (e.g., how affectionate their own fathers were with them). In the case of closeness and relationship satisfaction, fathers completed these measures with respect to their own fathers only if their own fathers were living at the time of the study. Internal reliabilities for all multiple-item measures are reported in Table 1.

Results

Initial Data Reduction

We subjected multiple-item measures to principal-components factor analyses to assess their dimensionality. In the case of affectionate communication, examination of the eigenvalues and scree plots for both fathers' and sons' reports suggested that either a one- or three-factor solution was viable. The ACI has been used in both ways in published research (see, e.g., Floyd & Morman, 1998, 2000). Although we did not advance different hypotheses for the three dimensions of affectionate communication measured by the ACI, we elected in this study to retain the original three-factor solutions because they would allow us to test our predictions with greater specificity. In the case of relational satisfaction, the factor analysis yielded a clean single-factor

TABLE 1
Internal Reliability Estimates for Multiple-Item Measures

Variable	Fathers reporting on sons	Fathers reporting on own fathers	Sons reporting on fathers
Relational satisfaction	.93	.93	.90
Verbal affection	.83	.89	.83
Nonverbal affection	.84	.85	.80
Support affection	.72	.86	.66

Note. Reliability estimates are based on Cronbach's alpha.

structure with high primary loadings, high internal reliability estimates, and few complex items.

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis was that men are closer, more affectionate, and more satisfied in their relationships with their sons than in their relationships with their fathers. The second hypothesis was that sons are closer, more affectionate, and more satisfied with their fathers than their fathers are with their own fathers. The third hypothesis was that men are closer, more affectionate, and more satisfied with their sons than their sons are with them. To test the hypotheses, we analyzed closeness, satisfaction, and the three forms of affectionate communication (verbal, nonverbal, supportive) together in a repeated-measures MANOVA, with perspective (sons reporting on fathers; fathers reporting on sons; fathers reporting on own fathers) as the within-subjects variable. The MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate main effect for perspective, $\Lambda = .55$, $F(10, 204) = 7.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .26$. When significant main effects of perspective were obtained at the univariate level, planned contrasts were used to test the specific hypotheses.

Verbal affection. The within-subjects main effect for perspective on verbal affection was significant, $F(1.934, 102.518) = 27.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .34$. Planned contrasts indicated that men reported more verbal affection with their sons ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.39$) than with their own fathers ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.48$), $t(138) = 10.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .36$. Moreover, men's sons reported more verbal affection with them ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.47$) than men reported with their own fathers, $t(138) = -6.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .34$. Finally, men reported more verbal affection with their sons than their sons reported with them, $t(138) = 3.36$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$. All three hypotheses were supported with respect to verbal affection.

For illustrative purposes, we examined the correlations among the three perspectives with respect to verbal affection by means of two-tailed Pearson tests. Men's verbal affection with their sons was linearly related to their verbal affection with their own fathers, $r(137) = .34$, $p < .001$, as well as to their verbal affection with their sons, $r(137) = .42$, $p < .001$. Sons' verbal affection with their fathers was not significantly related to their fathers' verbal affection with their own fathers.

Nonverbal affection. The within-subjects main effect for perspective on nonverbal affection was significant, $F(1.836, 97.307) = 11.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .18$. Planned contrasts revealed that men reported more nonverbal affection with their sons ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.11$) than with their own fathers ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 1.21$), $t(138) = 7.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .17$. Moreover, men's sons

reported more nonverbal affection with them ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.15$) than men reported with their own fathers, $t(138) = -4.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$. Finally, men reported more verbal affection with their sons than their sons reported with them, $t(138) = 2.71$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$. All three hypotheses were supported with respect to nonverbal affection.

Correlations among the three perspectives with respect to nonverbal affection indicated that men's nonverbal affection with their sons was linearly related to their nonverbal affection with their own fathers, $r(137) = .46$, $p < .001$, and to their nonverbal affection with their sons, $r(137) = .47$, $p < .001$. Sons' nonverbal affection with their fathers also related to their fathers' nonverbal affection with their own fathers, $r(137) = .20$, $p = .02$.

Support affection. The within-subjects main effect for perspective on support affection was significant, $F(1.621, 85.888) = 21.23$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .29$. Planned contrasts revealed that men reported more support affection with their sons ($M = 5.71$, $SD = 0.87$) than with their own fathers ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.49$), $t(138) = 8.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .35$. Moreover, men's sons reported more support affection with them ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 0.95$) than men reported with their own fathers, $t(138) = -5.38$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .20$. Finally, men reported more verbal affection with their sons than their sons reported with them, $t(138) = 4.90$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$. All three hypotheses received support with respect to support affection.

We examined the correlations among the three perspectives in relation to support affection, and found that men's support affection with their sons linearly showed a positive correlation to their support affection with their own fathers, $r(137) = .25$, $p = .004$, and to their support affection with their sons, $r(137) = .40$, $p < .001$. Sons' support affection with their fathers was not significantly related to their fathers' support affection with their own fathers.

Closeness. The univariate within-subjects main effect for perspective on closeness, which employed Hunyh-Feldt-corrected degrees of freedom due to violation of compound symmetry assumptions, was significant, $F(1.685, 89.302) = 5.95$, $p = .006$, $\eta^2 = .10$. Planned contrasts revealed that men felt closer to their sons ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.53$) than to their own fathers ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.95$), $t(58) = 3.18$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$. Moreover, men's sons reported feeling closer to them ($M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.41$) than men felt to their own fathers, $t(58) = -2.65$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .11$. Finally, men felt closer to their sons than their sons felt to them, $t(131) = 2.65$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .05$. All three hypotheses were supported with respect to closeness.¹

Correlations among the three perspectives with respect to closeness indicated that men's closeness with their sons was linearly

related to their closeness with their own fathers, $r(57) = .32$, $p = .02$. Men's closeness with their sons also related to their sons' closeness with them, $r(130) = .47$, $p < .001$. Sons' reports of closeness and their fathers' reports of closeness with their own fathers were not significantly related.

Relationship satisfaction. The univariate within-subjects main effect for perspective on satisfaction was significant, $F(1.653, 87.619) = 21.99$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .29$. Planned contrasts revealed that men felt more satisfaction with their sons ($M = 5.70$, $SD = 1.15$) than to their own fathers ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.64$), $t(58) = 6.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .18$. Moreover, men's sons reported greater satisfaction with them ($M = 5.63$, $SD = 1.19$) than men ostensibly felt with their own fathers, $t(58) = -5.71$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .35$. Contrary to the third hypothesis, however, men did not feel more satisfaction with their sons than their sons felt with them, $t(137) = 0.75$, $p = .46$. The first two hypotheses were supported with respect to relationship satisfaction.

Finally, we examined the correlations between the three perspectives with respect to satisfaction, and found that men's satisfaction with their sons was linearly related to their sons' satisfaction with them, $r(136) = .44$, $p < .001$. The other two comparisons were nonsignificant.

Discussion

Although the father-son relationship is potentially the most socially significant same-sex relationship many men experience in the life course, it is commonly fraught with contention, competition, and aggression, due in part to sociocultural prescriptions for masculine behavior that are not entirely immune to familial influence. These prescriptive expectancies are predominantly social, however, in that they are subject to political and economic trends that cause them to shift periodically. Indeed, research on historical trends in fatherhood has demonstrated the presence of such shifts along a continuum ranging from an emotionally detached, authoritarian father to an involved, emotionally nurturant father. We reasoned in doing this study that shifts in the social construction of fatherhood would manifest themselves in generational differences in father-son relational communication and satisfaction.

With one exception, all three hypotheses received support for all five dependent variables investigated. Specifically, men reported greater levels of closeness, relationship satisfaction, and the three forms of affectionate communication with their sons than with their fathers, and their sons also had higher scores for the variables with respect to their fathers than their fathers did with respect to their own fathers. In some ways, the support for the second hypothesis is more meaning-

ful than for the first because it suggests that the differences between the two generations of father-son relationships cannot be accounted for by single-source bias. That is, one might be tempted to attribute the support for Hypothesis One to men's own desires to represent themselves as being better fathers than their fathers were, a type of social desirability bias. That the same differences were also significant when the comparisons involved the sons' reports is important because it replicates the findings from a separate source.

These findings collectively demonstrate a clear shift in father-son interaction and relationship satisfaction from the previous generation to the current generation, which is consistent with the position of Griswold (1997) and others that the historical expectation of American fatherhood shifted toward one of a more involved, nurturant father during the last decade of the 20th Century. Whether this type of shift would also manifest itself in decreased negativity—contention, aggression, negative competition—in father-son relationships is an interesting question for future research. Although one might intuit that increased positivity—closeness, satisfaction, and the like—in a relationship implies decreased negativity, dialectic theorists have suggested that this is not necessarily the case (e.g., Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Rather, it may be the case that the positive and negative characteristics of father-son relationships are somewhat orthogonal and, thereby, reflect different sets of social and personal influences.

Fathers in our study also reported that they felt closer and communicated more verbal, nonverbal, and support affection to their sons than their sons reported communicating to them. Again, this finding represents a comparison of men's reports to their sons' reports, a more valid approach than having fathers report on both sets of variables (see Floyd & Morman, 2000). Surprisingly, however, fathers and sons reported nearly identical levels of satisfaction with their relationships, a finding that, when considered alongside the others, suggests to us that fathers and sons may differ from each other in regard to the predictors of their relationship satisfaction. Fathers, for instance, may derive their satisfaction from their sons' achievements or from their sons' obedience; sons, on the other hand, may derive their satisfaction from their fathers' provisions or from their levels of freedom from their fathers' control. These are empirical questions, of course, and ones that must be deferred to later studies.

As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, a competing explanation for differences in fathers' and sons' reports on their relationships is that parents and children manifest a different "generational stake" in their relationships. Specifically, parents rate their parent-child relationships more favorably than children do because parents' motivation is to cast the family in a positive and cohesive light, whereas children's motivation is to distance themselves from their parents (see, e.g., Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993). If the historical shift explanation has

merit, then a critical test comparing it to the generational stake explanation can be conducted when the historical expectations for fatherhood shift again, toward a more detached, stoic model of fatherhood. In such an instance, the two perspectives would offer competing predictions that could be empirically compared.

Considered collectively, however, the present findings reflect what we believe to be a significant shift in historical expectations for fatherhood. If the past is any indicator, then such expectations should eventually shift again, toward a more detached, authoritarian father, and we would surmise that changes opposite to those identified here would be observed in relational communication between fathers and sons.

These findings have at least two important implications for family communication researchers and consumers of their work. First, they highlight the connection between communication patterns in family systems and the broader social context in which they occur. The family, as a social system, is continually influenced by the political, economic, and historic circumstances in which it is embedded, and although this study only examined one such influence—the influence of generation on father-son communication behaviors—it provides reason for scholars and their audiences to take such influences into account when evaluating research on family interaction patterns.

Second, the findings support the idea of a “culture” of fatherhood. Many scholars have used this metaphor to acknowledge socially shared expectations for proper paternal behavior (e.g., Daly, 1995; LaRossa, 1988), and we contend that such expectations apply to communicative behavior as well. That the current generation should expect fathers to be more nurturant and affectionate with their children than fathers in previous generations have been strikes us as embodying part of a culture of fatherhood that must be understood if researchers are to interpret paternal behavior accurately.

Some limitations of the study should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the sample was relatively homogeneous, particularly with respect to ethnicity. Researchers, such as Allen and Connor (1997), have made clear, however, that fatherhood can be greatly influenced by ethnic heritage and its corresponding cultural effects, and studies that incorporate ethnicity as a variable are certainly in order. A second limitation is that fathers with multiple sons consistently reported about their relationships with their oldest sons. As noted, we imposed this rule to standardize selection procedures so that fathers would not consistently choose to report on the son with whom they have the most positive relationship, and we selected the oldest son because that seemed to make those fathers’ reports most comparable with the reports of fathers who had only one son. Whether the results would have been different if fathers had reported on later-born sons is unknown. Men may feel closer to their oldest sons than to later-born

sons because the oldest sons are closest to the fathers in age; conversely, their closeness in age may make fathers more competitive with first-born sons than with later-born sons. Future studies could examine these differences.

The present findings also raise at least two important questions for researchers of family communication and relationships. First, do historical shifts in the conception of American fatherhood affect interaction father-daughter relationships in the same ways as they do father-son relationships? Although it may seem intuitively sensible that they would, Griswold (1993, 1997) suggest otherwise, in noting that even during historical periods in which fatherhood was conceptualized as authoritarian and detached, fathers remained more emotionally involved with their daughters than with their sons. In addition, the father-son relationship is distinguished from the father-daughter pair because in the former, both participants are subjected to masculine role prescriptions. This observation leads logically to the prediction that changes in cultural masculinity would affect fathers' relationships with their sons more than with their daughters.

A second important question for future research concerns the extent to which the present findings generalize to nonbiological father-son relationships. Because the majority of dyads in the present study were biological, this is a matter that must be deferred to later studies. It is, nonetheless, an important one to address for at least two reasons. First, increasingly high rates of divorce and remarriage in North America make other configurations of the father-child relationship, such as those involving step-children and even adopted children, more common (see White & Booth, 1985). Second, there is little reason to assume that culturally bound expectations for biological fathers necessarily translate to step-fathers or adoptive fathers. On the contrary, some researchers have opined that nonbiological parenting is inherently "role ambiguous," by which they mean that expectations surrounding biological parenting often fail to apply in nonbiological contexts (e.g., Giles-Sims, 1984). We wish to encourage future research along both of these lines of inquiry.

NOTE

¹ Variation in the degrees of freedom is due to our having men report on their closeness and relationship satisfaction with their own fathers only if their fathers were living at the time of the study. Hence, comparisons involving men's closeness and relationship satisfaction with their own fathers (as in Hypotheses one and two) reflect the subsample of dyads in which the father's own father was living.

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