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AFFECTIONATE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN FATHERS AND YOUNG ADULT SONS: INDIVIDUAL- AND RELATIONAL-LEVEL CORRELATES

MARK T. MORMAN AND KORY FLOYD

Men's relationships with their fathers may be among the most important and influential same-sex relationships they form in the life course. Although several studies have examined issues such as aggressiveness, conflict, and dysfunction between fathers and adult sons, far less attention has been paid to more positive communication behaviors in such relationships. The present study examines the individual- and relational-level correlates of affectionate behavior in adult paternal relationships, using data from 55 pairs of fathers and their young adult biological sons. As predicted by the gendered closeness perspective, results indicated that fathers and sons communicate affection more through the provision of social support than through direct verbal or nonverbal expressions. Furthermore, results found that fathers are more affectionate toward young adult sons than sons are toward fathers. Affection was largely associated with psychological femininity and the endorsement of father-son affection as an appropriate behavior. Affection was also associated with relational closeness, self-disclosure, and communication satisfaction.

Few male-male relationships may be more socially significant than that between father and son. While the strength and influence of friendships, work partnerships, and even fraternal relationships often waxes and wanes over the life course, fathers and sons can affect each other's lives substantially, in both positive and negative ways, even during sons' adult lives (see Beatty & Dobos, 1993). The father-son relationship has been found to be an important predictor of sons' parenting style (Simons, Beaman, Conger, & Chao, 1993; Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Wu, 1991), sons' communication behaviors (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Yerby, 1981; Fink, 1993), relational closeness between the father and son (Ivy & Backlund, 1994; Messner, 1992; Reid & Fine, 1992; Sillars & Scott, 1983; Wellman, 1992), sons' relational communication with his spouse (Beatty & Dobos, 1993), sons' attitudes toward sexuality (Fisher, 1987), and sons' emotional health and relational success in adulthood (Beatty & Dobos, 1993; Berry, 1990). Indeed, Bochner (1976) argued that communication within the family of origin shapes how men communicate in nearly every area of their lives.

While the father-son relationship is receiving increasing attention in both scholarly and popular arenas, most such attention has focused on the negative aspects of the relationship. Although some have examined correlates of relational satisfaction (Beatty & Dobos, 1992; Martin & Anderson, 1995), confirmation (Beatty & Dobos, 1993), and intimacy (Buerkel, 1996) in adult paternal relationships, far greater attention has been paid to aggressiveness (Beatty, Zelle, Dobos, & Rudd, 1994), conflict (Comstock, 1994), and dysfunction (Lee, 1987). This is particularly true in the popular press associated with the men's movement. Writers such as Keen (1991) and Bly (1990) have advanced an image of father-son relationships as chronically dysfunctional and emotionally bankrupt, with fathers who care little for sons and sons who are socially crippled as a result.

There can be little argument that many paternal relationships are enormously

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challenging and that characteristics such as aggression and conflict are useful to study. A focus on these aspects, however, can obscure attention on the more positive aspects of the relationship, particularly those communication functions associated with positive relational variables. One such communication function that has received little attention in father-son relationships is the expression of affection, even though affectionate communication is a central component of familial relational development (see Floyd & Morman, 1997). Possibly because anecdotal accounts abound of highly contentious father-son relationships, researchers may be inclined to believe that most fathers and sons are not especially affectionate. However, as dialectic theorists have noted, human relationships are often simultaneously characterized by seemingly contradictory communication patterns (e.g., Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), making it plausible that affection, and the expression of affectionate feelings, are important even in the most contentious father-son relationships.

The purpose of the present study is to examine affectionate communication in the relationships of fathers and young adult sons. First addressed are the individual-level correlates of father-son affection and the ways in which they are expressed. Additionally, we examine how affection between fathers and sons is associated with more positive qualities of their relationships and communication behaviors.

The Nature of Father-Son Affection

The relationship between fathers and their young adult sons is both a union of two family members and a union of two men. Each of these relational characteristics has the potential to influence how, and how much, affection is expressed within the relationship. Several studies, for instance, have demonstrated that male-male relationships are generally less affectionate, less close, and less intimate than female-female or opposite-sex pairs (e.g., Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Williams, 1985). As a result, men's relationships have come to be regarded as less satisfying and more emotionally deficient than women's (Swain, 1989). According to this perspective, we should expect father-son relationships to be characterized by a relatively low degree of affection. However, there are at least two reasons to question this prediction.

First, as a familial relationship, the father-son dyad may be shielded from some of the factors that inhibit affectionate communication in other male-male relationships. Second, men may express affection differently than women do, which would qualify the meanings and implications of observed mean differences. The implications of these issues for the father-son relationship are addressed below.

Affection Between Men. In particular, two interpersonal perspectives inform the common finding that men's relationships are less affectionate than women's. The first adopts a rules or expectancy approach, positing that men refrain from expressing affection to other men, even when they feel it, out of conformity to sociocultural prescriptions for normative male-male behavior (see Burgoon & Walther, 1990; Major, 1981). This approach views affection as a "feminine" behavior; therefore, men avoid expressing affection to other men *to avoid appearing feminine*. Empirical research has found that affectionate behavior is indeed more expected, and considered more appropriate, in female-female and opposite-sex relationships than between two men (see Floyd, 1997a). However, research has also indicated that the proscription against male-male affection is attenuated in familial relationships. That is, among family members, there is little sex difference in how appropriate affection is considered to be. This finding has consistently emerged whether individuals are reporting on their own

relationships (Floyd & Morman, 1997, 1998) or on relationships in general (Floyd, 1997b). Between fathers and sons, past research has shown that this is particularly true the younger the sons are (see, e.g., Parke, 1981; Yogman, 1981).

The second interpersonal perspective posits that homophobia, or the fear of appearing homosexual, accounts for the sex difference in affectionate behavior. In a study of touch, Derlega, Lewis, Harrison, Winstead, and Costanza (1989) suggested that touch is more likely to be interpreted as sexual when it occurs between men than between women; therefore, men avoid touching each other *to avoid appearing homosexual*. In an extension of Derlega et al.'s study, Roese, Olson, Borenstein, Martin, and Shores (1992) demonstrated that one's level of homophobia is negatively related to same-sex touch and that this is particularly true for men. Again, however, this may not apply in familial relationships, where potential sexual connotations of affectionate behavior may be less plausible. In a study of same-sex affectionate touch, Floyd (in press) demonstrated that the influence of homophobia on assessments of touch is attenuated when the touch occurs between siblings.

Both of these perspectives suggest that affection may be a salient communication function in father-son relationships because it may be considered more appropriate and less questionable than in other male-male relationships. However, despite their familial link, fathers and sons are not necessarily immune from the demands of the masculine gender role. While the familial context may attenuate the socially recognized prohibition against affectionate or emotional displays in the male-male dyad, the father-son relationship is, nevertheless, a relationship between two men. The implications for father-son affection are considered below.

The Gendered Closeness Perspective

Research has often suggested that men's relationships with each other are less intimate and less affectionate than relationships involving at least one woman. An alternative perspective, which has been called the "gendered closeness perspective" (Floyd, 1996b), the "male deficit model" (Doherty, 1991), or the "covert intimacy perspective" (Swain, 1989), posits that men's relationships are not inherently less affectionate or less intimate than women's. Rather, men communicate affection or intimacy differently than do women, usually through the sharing of activities and instrumental support (e.g., helping with a project, loaning the use of a car) rather than through direct verbal or nonverbal expressions (e.g., saying "I love you" or hugging). Swain (1989) referred to these forms of expressing intimacy as "covert" because they may not be interpreted by observers as forms of communicating intimacy, thereby protecting men from possible ridicule or questions about their sexuality that more direct affectionate expressions might invite (for further reviews, see Parks, 1995; Wood & Inman, 1993).

The gendered closeness perspective is receiving a growing amount of empirical support in the areas of intimacy and closeness. In a series of studies, Floyd (1995, 1996b; Floyd & Parks, 1995) has reported that self-disclosure and emotional expressivity are more important to the closeness and intimacy of female-female and opposite-sex relationships than male-male pairs. Men in same-sex relationships, on the other hand, indicate that sharing activities is more important to their closeness and intimacy than it is to relationships involving at least one woman. Parks and Floyd (1996) replicated these findings in their study of friendship and found that self disclosure, emotional support, affectionate expressions, and the sharing of advice were cited as referents for closeness significantly more often by women than by men. Further, in a study of adult

fraternal relationships, Floyd (1996a) found that surviving shared adversity and experiencing solidarity, as well as shared conversation, are referents for closeness between adult brothers (for additional empirical examples, see Fife, 1994; Inman, 1993; Swain, 1989). Others, including Cook (1988), Doherty (1991), Hawkins and Dollahite (1997), and Levant (1992) have suggested the utility of applying this type of non-deficit perspective to scholarly understanding of the fathering process.

The gendered closeness perspective has not yet been studied with respect to affectionate communication. However, findings from studies related to caregiving by adult children for their aging or elderly parents reveal consistent results supporting the gendered closeness perspective (Cicirelli, 1995). Adult males were found to provide stereotypically masculine types of caregiving for their elderly parents, such as performing home maintenance, bureaucratic mediation, protection, financial management, and transportation (Cicirelli, 1984), and took on fewer caregiving tasks involving intimate, personal care, and/or emotional support (Brody, 1985; Cicirelli, 1981). Furthermore, daughters, more so than sons, were viewed as the principal caregivers for their parents. Men typically abdicated the caregiving role sooner than women, purchased more caregiving services for their parents, and regarded their own work as a legitimate excuse to avoid caregiving responsibilities, presumably to avoid the intimacy and emotion more personal forms of caregiving clearly require (Cicirelli, 1995). While caregiving and the communication of affection are not necessarily the same thing, we believe the pattern demonstrated in this line of research clearly supports our position that men communicate support and affection differently than do women, even when such support is being offered for their parents.

To further explore the father-son relationship specifically in regard to the communication of affection, the present study will apply the gendered closeness perspective. If, as the perspective suggests, men look more to instrumental methods rather than to direct verbal or nonverbal expressions as referents for closeness or affection, we should find that activities are used more than verbal or nonverbal expressions to *communicate* affection. This leads to our first hypothesis:

H1: Fathers and young adult sons communicate affection more through activities than through direct verbal or nonverbal expressions.

Gender role orientation. Part of the reasoning underlying the gendered closeness perspective suggests that the expression of affection (particularly through direct verbal and nonverbal channels) is perceived as a "feminine" behavior. If true, then direct verbal and nonverbal affection should not only be curtailed in male-male relationships but it should also be related to the endorsement of gender role schemas. That is, it should be positively associated with how feminine individuals are and negatively associated with how masculine they are, regardless of biological sex.

As Kunkel and Burleson (1998) explained, both men and women are more attracted to individuals exhibiting more feminine modes of comforting and emotionally supportive behavior (i.e., communication perceived as more highly person-centered, more sensitive, and more affective). Further, it appears that both men and women are more likely to reject those individuals who engage in highly masculine forms of emotional support (i.e., communication perceived as low in person-centeredness, relatively insensitive, and ineffective). Both sexes report that they perceive highly person-centered comforting messages as feminine, express a clear and significant preference for female comfort providers, and anticipate that their female friends will be more supportive than their male friends (Kunkel, 1995). Additionally,

both men and women perceive interactions shared with females to be more intimate and meaningful than interactions with males (e.g., Reis, Senchak, & Solomon, 1985; Wheeler, Reis, & Nezelek, 1983). Finally, a growing body of research indicates that within the marital dyad, a partner's feminine qualities, especially empathy and emotional support, predict overall marital satisfaction for both sexes (Antill, 1983; Ickes, 1985; Lamke, 1989; Sprecher, Metts, Burleson, Hatfield, & Thompson, 1995).

Additionally, as a rule-governed behavior, affectionate communication should also be related to how much men believe that the communication of affection is appropriate. A reasonable assumption would be that men who endorse and/or exhibit a more highly person-centered (feminine) style of communication would also endorse the communication of affection within their relationships, or for the purpose of the current study, within the father-son dyad. On the other hand, men who, despite their gender role identity, believe it inappropriate for fathers and sons to express affection to each other (perhaps because of cultural influences or specific family rules) should report less father-son affection. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses and research question regarding father-son affection:

H2a: Direct verbal and nonverbal affection are positively related to femininity and endorsement of father-son affection, and inversely related to masculinity.

H2b: Supportive affectionate activity is positively related to endorsement of father-son affection.

RQ1: What effects, if any, do masculinity and femininity have on supportive affectionate activity?

Power. In addition to being subject to gender role and familial role influences, the father-son relationship is also a power-imbalanced union. Unlike more egalitarian familial relationships, such as siblinghood, the father-son relationship develops in a role-defined context wherein one person is the provider, the superior, the authority, and the other is the recipient, the subordinate, the dependent party. Although the relationship most likely becomes more egalitarian as sons achieve adulthood and independence, the influences of its power-imbalanced history may still be evident in relational communication patterns.

Issues associated with power, authority, dominance, and control are relevant to a gendered closeness approach to affectionate communication because they are inherent to almost every description of the traditional masculine gender role. For example, David and Brannon (1976) categorized four basic themes of masculinity, one of which they called the "Big Wheel." According to this theme, masculinity is measured by success, power, status, and the admiration of others. Several other researchers also describe power and control as a primary theme of masculinity, a theme stressing the need for men to acquire and exercise as much power as possible (Harris, 1995; Herek, 1987; Morris, 1997; O'Neil 1981; Pleck, 1987). Additionally, Thompson, Pleck, and Ferrera (1992) reviewed 17 measures of masculinity and masculine-related constructs, every one of which included items or subscales related to the themes of power, control, status, or dominance as part of an overall assessment of respondent's attitudes and beliefs about masculinity.

With respect to the communication of affection, men in positions of power within their relationships should have greater leeway than their relational partners in expressing affection. As numerous studies suggest, power affords the right not only to dictate what forms of expressing affection are acceptable but also to initiate affection with the less powerful person (Henley, 1973, 1977; Kendon & Cook, 1969; Larsen & LeRoux, 1984). Normally, fathers are acknowledged as having higher status within the father-

son dyad because of their recognized reward, punishment, legitimate, expert, and referent power. If fathers, in fact, have more power in the father-son dyad, then the result should be a difference not in the *form* of affection but in the *amount*, such that fathers are more affectionate than sons. Thus, we hypothesize:

H3: Fathers are more affectionate toward sons than are sons toward fathers.

Relational Correlates of Father-Son Affection

In addition to examining the individual-level correlates of father-son affection noted above, it is also informative to look at its relational-level correlates. A fair amount of attention has been paid in the popular press to improving relationships between men and their fathers. Writers such as Keen (1991), Bly (1990), and Lee (1987) have characterized father-adult son relationships as distant, devoid of emotional support, even brutal, leaving men wounded and emotionally crippled. Only when such relationships are improved, they suggest, can men's wounds be healed and their relational faculties restored. Unfortunately, as noted earlier, little empirical attention has been directed at identifying what predicts positive relational qualities in men's relationships with their fathers. One exception is found in a study by Beatty and Dobos (1992), who found that male undergraduates' communication satisfaction with their fathers was negatively associated with the communication apprehension they experienced in those relationships. That is, men who felt less apprehensive about expressing thoughts and feelings to their fathers were more satisfied with their father-son communication. Likewise, Buerkel (1996) reported that relational closeness between fathers and sons (as reported by sons) was positively predicted by an androgynous parenting style on the part of the father, as well as by verbal and nonverbal idiosyncratic communication in the father-son relationship.¹ Fathers whose parenting style was characterized as "technically present but functionally absent" (in which fathers are physically present in the home but do not participate in their sons' lives or offer them psychological support) were associated with less-close paternal relationships.

The present research extends these studies by examining the relationship between father-son affectionate communication and positive relational-level correlates. As noted above, the majority of research focused on the father-son relationship addresses many of the negative aspects associated with this specific dyad. A small amount of research has directed attention toward the more positive relational characteristics associated with fathers and their sons. For example, forms of affectionate communication (verbal, nonverbal, or supportive) have been found to be positively correlated with both fathers' and sons' self-reported closeness and communication satisfaction scores (Floyd & Morman, 1998).

Therefore, in light of the gendered closeness perspective, which argues men primarily show affection and closeness through supportive and instrumental activities, the current study will attempt to extend these our earlier findings. If it is the case, as our perspective predicts, that affection in father-son relationships is communicated primarily through supportive activities, then this should be the preferred mode of interaction and should be accompanied by other positive relational states, such as closeness, satisfaction, and self-disclosure. Therefore, our final hypothesis is:

H4: Fathers' and sons' supportive affectionate activity is positively related to their (a) relational closeness; (b) amount of self-disclosure; and (c) relational communication satisfaction.

Additionally, we are also interested in how the other two forms of affectionate communication affect these positive relational variables. While the gendered closeness

perspective is clear about its prediction of supportive activity as the primary communicative behavior men use to communicate affection, it is less certain about the role of direct verbal or nonverbal communication. Thus, in order to explore further the relationship between fathers' and sons' verbal and nonverbal affectionate communication and the relational aspects noted above, we offer the following research question:

RQ2: What effects, if any, do direct verbal and nonverbal affection have on relational closeness, self-disclosure, and relational communication satisfaction?

METHOD

With few exceptions (e.g., Beatty et al., 1994), previous research on father-son relationships has relied almost exclusively on sons' reports. That is, few studies have collected data from both fathers and sons; rather, the perceptions and experiences of the sons are assumed to apply to the relationship as a whole. In practice, this can be a dubious assumption (Cicirelli, 1985). To address the limitations of this approach, the present study sampled dyads of fathers and young adult sons, collecting information from both men in each relationship.

Participants

Participants were 110 men comprising 55 pairs of fathers and adult biological sons. The fathers ranged in age from 40 to 67 with an average age of 49.92 years ($SD = 6.95$). The sons ranged in age from 16 to 32 with an average of 21.25 years ($SD = 3.60$). Nearly all (90.4%) of the fathers were married at the time of the study while the majority of the sons (86.5%) were single, having never been married (an additional 9.6% of the sons were married at the time of the study, while 3.8% were divorced).

Procedure

Undergraduate communication students at a large community college in the Midwest recruited father-young adult son dyads for the study. Male students with either a living biological father or a biological adult son had the opportunity of participating themselves; others recruited a father-son dyad to participate in the study. Participating dyads were each given a pair of questionnaires to complete, one for the father and one for the son. Instructions for the fathers' questionnaire read:

This is a study about how fathers communicate with their adult sons. You are being asked to complete this form in reference to your relationship with one of your sons. Some of the questions will focus on your perceptions of how you and your son communicate, while others will concentrate on your attitudes and what you think is important or appropriate for father-son communication. Your son is completing a similar questionnaire about his perceptions. Please do not share your answers with each other until you have fully completed and returned your questionnaires.

Instructions on the sons' questionnaires directed them to focus on their communication patterns with their fathers. Once both a father and son had completed the surveys, they were returned to the investigators via the student who recruited their participation.

Measures

The expression of *affectionate communication* was assessed using the factor-based Affectionate Communication Index (Floyd & Morman, 1998). The 19-item Likert-type instrument includes three subscales assessing the extent to which respondents commu-

nicate affection *verbally* (e.g., saying "I love you," "I like you," or "You're a good friend") (alpha = .85 for fathers and .82 for sons), *nonverbally* (e.g., hugging, holding hands, sitting close, kissing) (alpha = .68 for fathers and .72 for sons), and through *supportive activities* (e.g., helping each other with problems, sharing private information, giving compliments) (alpha = .82 for fathers and .75 for sons). The 19 items assess whether or not participants engage in certain behaviors in order to communicate affection to others. All items were presented on a seven-point scale, with "1" indicating participants *never* engage in this behavior to communicate affection and "7" indicating participants *always* use this behavior to communicate affection. (Overall alpha reliabilities for all three subscales combined were .89 for fathers and .89 for sons.)

Self-disclosure was measured using the 18-item Self-Disclosure Scale developed by Wheless and Grotz (1976). The seven-point, Likert-type, factor-based scale includes six subscales assessing intention, amount, positivity, honesty, depth, and relevance of participant's disclosures, but was used here as a unidimensional measure due to low reliabilities on some subscales and due to the lack of different hypotheses for different aspects of self-disclosure. Reliabilities for the total scale were .77 for fathers and .83 for sons.

Closeness was measured with the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale developed by Aron, Aron, and Smollan (1992). The instrument is a single-item measure consisting of seven pairs of circles that overlap to varying degrees. In each pair, one circle is designated to represent the self and the second circle represents the other person. Participants are asked to indicate the pair of circles that they believe best depicts the relationship between them. The greater the overlap between the circles in the pair selected, the closer the relationship is purported to be. The instrument has demonstrated high test-retest reliability and multiple forms of construct validity, and has been used in numerous experimental and correlational studies (Aron et al., 1992).

Masculinity and femininity were assessed with the masculinity and femininity subscales of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974). Each subscale consists of 20 characteristics associated with its respective gender orientation and participants indicate, on seven point, Likert-type scales, the extent to which the characteristic is or is not like them. Fathers' coefficient alphas were .76 for masculinity and .76 for femininity; sons' were .73 for masculinity and .81 for femininity.

Communication satisfaction was assessed with the 19-item Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory (Hecht, 1978). Presented with seven point, Likert-type scales, the items address satisfaction with the clarity, smoothness, enjoyment, and effectiveness of a given interaction. The scale items were adapted here so as to address fathers' and sons' general patterns of communication with each other, rather than to apply to a specific conversation. Coefficient alpha was .91 for fathers and .94 for sons.

Endorsement of father-son affection was measured using three Likert-type items developed for this study. The items were: "At a certain age, men should stop hugging, kissing, and being affectionate with their male children" (reverse-scored); "It is inappropriate for two men to hug in public, even if they are father and son" (reverse-scored); and "Fathers and sons should freely express their feelings and affection for each other, even when the sons are adults." Participants responded to each statement on a seven-point scale, with higher scores indicating greater agreement. The scale score represents the mean of the three items, with higher scores suggesting endorsement of father-son affection. Coefficient alpha was .57 for fathers and .78 for sons.

TABLE 1
CORRELATIONS AND MEAN COMPARISONS OF MASCULINITY, FEMININITY, AND ENDORSEMENT
OF FATHER-SON AFFECTION

	Mean/ <i>SD</i>	Correlation	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Masculinity</i>					
Fathers	4.66/0.55	.27 (<i>p</i> = .043)	-56	54	.290
Sons	4.71/0.60				
<i>Femininity</i>					
Fathers	5.20/0.53	.44 (<i>p</i> = .001)	-81	54	.211
Sons	5.27/0.64				
<i>Endorsement of Father-Son Affection</i>					
Fathers	5.87/1.06	.38 (<i>p</i> = .003)	3.45	54	<.001
Sons	5.23/1.38				

Note. Probability values are two-tailed.

RESULTS

The first hypothesis predicted that father-son affection is communicated more through supportive activities than through direct verbal or nonverbal expressions. Mean scores for each of the three affection subscales—verbal, nonverbal, and supportive activities—were compared within groups using pairwise *t*-tests. As hypothesized, fathers' scores for supportive activity ($M = 5.47$, $SD = 1.00$) significantly exceeded their scores for verbal affection ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.25$), $t(54) = 12.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .77$, and for nonverbal affection ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.89$), $t(54) = 16.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .84$. Likewise, sons' scores for supportive activity ($M = 5.07$, $SD = 1.05$) significantly exceeded their scores for verbal affection ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.18$), $t(54) = 17.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .86$, and for nonverbal affection ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 0.81$), $t(54) = 18.74$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .87$. Hypothesis one is supported.

Hypothesis two predicted that direct verbal and nonverbal affection between fathers and sons is positively related to femininity and endorsement of father-son affection, and inversely related to masculinity. Further, research question one asked what effect, if any, do masculinity and femininity have on supportive affectionate activity. This hypothesis and research question were tested using both fathers' and sons' reports of affection, femininity, masculinity, and endorsement of father-son affection. Correlation coefficients are reported in Table 1.

As predicted, son's femininity is positively related to son's nonverbal and to father's verbal and nonverbal affectionate communication. Contrary to the prediction, father's femininity is unrelated to either verbal or nonverbal affectionate communication. As predicted, father's endorsement of father-son affection is related to son's nonverbal affectionate communication, and son's endorsement of father-son affection is related to father's verbal, father's nonverbal, son's verbal, and son's nonverbal affectionate communication. However, contrary to the prediction, father's masculinity is *positively* related to father's verbal and nonverbal affectionate communication, and son's masculinity is *positively* related to father's verbal, father's nonverbal, and son's nonverbal affectionate communication. Finally, only son's supportive affectionate communication is related to son's endorsement of father-son affection. Thus, hypothesis two is partially supported.

Additionally, results indicate that father's supportive affectionate communication is positively related to father's masculinity, father's femininity, son's masculinity, and son's femininity. Son's supportive affectionate communication is positively related to son's femininity.

TABLE 2
CORRELATIONS AND MEAN COMPARISONS OF FATHERS' AND SONS' VERBAL, NONVERBAL,
AND SUPPORTIVE AFFECTION

	Mean/ <i>SD</i>	Correlation	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
<i>Verbal Affection</i>						
Fathers	3.43/1.25	.32 (<i>p</i> = .022)	4.47	54	<.001	.28
Sons	2.55/1.18					
<i>Nonverbal Affection</i>						
Fathers	3.26/0.89	.55 (<i>p</i> < .001)	4.53	54	<.001	.29
Sons	2.75/0.81					
<i>Supportive Affection</i>						
Fathers	5.47/1.00	.63 (<i>p</i> < .001)	3.30	54	.002	.18
Sons	5.07/1.05					

Note. Probability values are two-tailed for correlations and one-tailed for mean comparisons.

The third hypothesis predicted that fathers would report being more affectionate than would sons. Pairwise comparisons were conducted separately for each of the three affection subscales—verbal, nonverbal, and support. Means, correlations, and *t*-tests are reported in Table 2. As expected, fathers' scores significantly exceeded sons' on all three factors. Moreover, fathers' and sons' scores were positively related to each other on each factor. Hypothesis three is supported.

The fourth hypothesis predicted positive associations between supportive activity and the relational-level characteristics of closeness, self-disclosure, and communication satisfaction. The second research question asked what effects, if any, do direct verbal and nonverbal affection have on these relational variables. Again, this prediction and question were tested using both fathers' and sons' reports of affection, closeness, disclosure, and communication satisfaction. As shown in Table 3, the hypothesis is supported, with positive correlations between fathers' and sons' supportive activity and their self-reported closeness, disclosure, and communication satisfaction. In answer to the research question, fathers' nonverbal affection is significantly associated with fathers' and sons' closeness, disclosure, and communication satisfaction, while their verbal affection is related to fathers' and sons' accounts of closeness and sons' self-disclosure. Finally, sons' verbal affection is related to all of the relational variables except fathers' closeness, and their nonverbal affection is related to all of the variables except fathers' closeness and sons' communication satisfaction.

For exploratory purposes, we compared the magnitude of the correlation coefficients obtained for supportive affection with those obtained for verbal and nonverbal affection. Only two such comparisons achieved significance: fathers' supportive affection was more strongly correlated with their own communication satisfaction and their sons' closeness than was fathers' verbal affection. These comparisons were hampered by the small sample size; indeed, the size of the differences between several of the coefficients would be sufficient to achieve significance with a larger sample, and we invite such comparisons in future studies.

DISCUSSION

The present study was designed to explicate the individual and relational correlates of affectionate communication in the relationships of fathers and young adult sons. While much research on father-son dynamics has focused on the negative aspects of the relationship, we chose to focus on a more positive aspect of this unique dyad, the communication of affection. Drawing on the gendered closeness perspective, we

TABLE 3
CORRELATIONS AMONG FATHERS' AND SONS' AFFECTION, CLOSENESS, COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION,
AND SELF-DISCLOSURE

	Fnonv	Fsupp	Fverb	Snonv	Ssupp	Sverb
Fathers' closeness	.42*	.54***	.42*	.24	.42**	.23
Sons' closeness	.43*	.63*** _a	.34* _b	.42*	.58***	.51***
Fathers' comm satisfaction	.34*	.52*** _a	.18 _b	.30*	.48***	.35*
Sons' comm satisfaction	.31*	.53***	.24	.21	.29*	.30*
Fathers' self-disclosure	.39*	.53***	.22	.43*	.63***	.43*
Sons' self-disclosure	.43*	.43**	.36*	.46***	.55***	.47***

Notes. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. $df = 53$. Probability values are one-tailed for correlations with supportive affection and two-tailed for correlations with verbal and nonverbal affection. Fnonv = fathers' nonverbal affection; Fsupp = fathers' supportive affection; Fverb = fathers' verbal affection; Snonv = sons' nonverbal affection; Ssupp = sons' supportive affection; Sverb = sons' verbal affection. Coefficients in the same row with different subscripts differ significantly from each other, per z -test.

advanced several predictions about how affection is communicated in paternal relationships and what relational-level variables it is associated with. Substantial support for the predictions was obtained.

Besides being a parental bond, the father-son union is also a relationship between two men. Thus, it is subject to the influences of the masculine gender role, which has been shown to curtail the expression of affection in other relationships. Indeed, compared to female-female or opposite-sex relationships, male-male pairs are consistently reported as being the least affectionate, least intimate, and least close. Recent perspectives have questioned this finding, however, suggesting that men may simply express their closeness or affection to each other differently than female-female or female-male pairs do. Specifically, the gendered closeness perspective predicts that shared activities, rather than direct verbal or nonverbal expressions, are the primary vehicles for expressing closeness, affection, and intimacy in male-male relationships. This study has found significant support for the application of this perspective to the father-son relationship.

Specifically, we found that both fathers and sons communicated affection more through supportive activities than through verbal or nonverbal affectionate expressions. According to the gendered closeness perspective, activities allow for affection or intimacy to be expressed "covertly," in ways that would not necessarily be perceived by others as being affectionate. As such, this should shield men from the suspicions about their sexuality that direct verbal or nonverbal expressions (e.g., saying "I love you") might engender. Although their familial relationship should make fathers and sons less subject to the influence of homophobia than non-kin male-male relationships, as Floyd (in press) found in his experiment on affectionate touch, it may not shield them from it entirely. For the first time in any father-son study we are aware of, substantial support has been generated for the gendered closeness perspective as applied to this unique male-male relationship.

One common explanation for observed sex differences in affection is that expressing affection is a stereotypically feminine behavior. We thus expected affectionate communication to be positively related to how feminine men see themselves as being and negatively related to how masculine men believe they are. We also anticipated a positive association between affection and one's belief that expressing affection is an appropriate behavior for fathers and sons. As hypothesized, sons' femininity and their endorsement of father-son affection positively predicted their affection level on almost every level. The gender-role finding suggests that commonly observed sex differences

in affectionate behavior might partially be a function of one's gender role identification (thus, the sex difference might reverse with highly feminine men and highly masculine women). Future research stratifying samples on gender role identity and sex might address such a possibility.

Contrary to our prediction, however, fathers' affection was positively related to their masculinity. This finding is puzzling, given the common characterization of affectionate communication as stereotypically feminine behavior. As such, we can only speculate at its meaning. One possible interpretation follows the reasoning leading to our third hypothesis, that masculinity is related to hierarchy, power, and/or control, characteristics that are usually associated with most every description attempting to differentiate between masculinity and femininity (e.g., Thompson et al., 1992). One apparent byproduct of being the more powerful person in a relationship is the ability to initiate affectionate behaviors. Research on touch, for instance, has found that superiors are granted greater leeway in touching subordinates than subordinates are in touching superiors (see Derlega et al., 1989). Furthermore, Richmond and McCroskey (1990) discussed masculinity and femininity in terms of communicative style, with masculine speech conceptualized as being more assertive and feminine speech as being more responsive. Again, because of their assumed power position, masculine fathers may be using a more assertive (masculine) form of communication with their sons and this is partially manifested in being more affectionate with them. The more masculine a father perceives himself to be, the more important power most likely will be to him and thus, he may exercise his "right" to be affectionate with his son more so than a father who is less masculine. Of course, this is only one interpretation. Clearly, this finding should be replicated before additional conclusions are drawn.

Having collected data from both fathers and sons, we were also able to examine the relational-level correlates of father-son affection. As predicted by the gendered closeness perspective, fathers' and sons' supportive affection was positively associated with the level of closeness, self-disclosure, and communication satisfaction characterizing these relationships. Fathers' and sons' direct verbal and nonverbal affection were also related to several of these variables, in response to the second research question. Importantly, however, supportive activity accounted for an average of 30.5%, and for as much as 41%, of the variance in the relational-level characteristics. By comparison, direct verbal and nonverbal affection accounted for an average of 11.9% of the variance. These findings support the prediction of the gendered closeness perspective by suggesting that supportive activity is more important to the closeness of these male-male relationships than are their verbal or nonverbal affection levels.

These findings can be of use to those interested in improving the quality of relationships between fathers and their young adult sons, at least with respect to their communication patterns. They comport with what Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) advocated as a non-deficit approach to understanding fatherhood, which gives attention to the positive aspects of men's relationships with their children. This is important because it illustrates the individual and relational benefits that can be derived from positive father-son interaction, both for men and their young adult sons. Of course, affection is likely not the only communication behavior associated with closeness, self-disclosure, and satisfaction, nor are these likely to be the only variables associated with affection. But in contrast to the plethora of studies reporting on the dysfunctional nature of the father-son relationship, the present findings do suggest that, as a communication behavior, the expression of affection between fathers and sons is linearly related to several positive relational variables.

By collecting data from both men in each father-son dyad, we were able to address the limitations posed by earlier studies that have relied on the reports of one person to represent the relationship. In so doing, we were able to examine how each man's affectionate behaviors were influenced not only by his own characteristics but also by those of his father or son. Of course, this study is not without its own limitations. For one, we did not include respondents' ethnicity as a variable, although ethnic and cultural differences may influence not only the expression of affection itself but also the nature of father-son relationships in general. An additional limitation is that we sampled only biological paternal relationships. While we imposed this limitation intentionally to reduce error variance, we recognize that these findings may not generalize to fathers' relationships with stepsons or adopted sons. Also, due to the ever-evolving nature of gender roles, the use of a more current gender role orientation scale (e.g., Richmond & McCroskey, 1990) might have provided the study with a more current conception of gender roles in the late 20th Century.

Finally, the age range of our sample of sons may raise concern, given that men's patterns of relating to their fathers are likely to change through the life course. Thus, what is characteristic of college-aged sons may not be characteristic of sons in their 40's who may be fathers themselves. To address this potential limitation, we correlated sons' age with every dependent variable used in the current study. Every single coefficient was nonsignificant, indicating that variation in sons' age did not account for appreciable variance in any of the measures of interest. Future research can help identify those relational communication patterns in father-son relationships that do vary as a function of sons' age, by comparing sons within different age groups.

Despite these limitations, however, the present study has elucidated an important but rarely examined facet of the father-son relationship. It would be informative in future studies to compare levels and forms of affectionate communication in father-son relationships to other male-male relationships inside and outside the family. Over time, these types of comparisons can help flesh out the unique effects of kinship and dyadic sex composition on the expression of affection. For example, future research efforts might be directed at comparing differences in affectionate communication within the father-son and father-daughter dyad, yet another understudied familiar relational union. Furthermore, comparisons of affectionate communication between brother-brother and father-son dyads also should provide additional insight into the nexus between family and social gender expectations. Finally, research into the nature of the grandfather-father-son triad would also generate additional information about the role of affectionate communication within the extended family structure. These studies and the others mentioned above would provide researchers in family communication with a more complete understanding of this important and understudied relationship.

ENDNOTE

¹Buerkel also found, surprisingly, that closeness is predicted by an "absent" paternal parenting style, such that sons feel closer to fathers who are physically and emotionally distant from their sons.

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