Good Fathering: Father and Son Perceptions of What It Means to Be a Good Father

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The present article details two exploratory studies on the nature of fatherhood and on the behavioral and psychological characteristics that define a good father. In the first study, 374 adult men who were fathers of at least one child responded to an open-ended question regarding the attributes of a good father. Inductive analyses of their responses yielded a 20-item list of referents. The second study involved 99 pairs of fathers and adolescent or young adult sons who responded to the same question. Their responses were coded along the same dimensions and were compared within dyads and with the results from the first study. Implications for future study on father-child relationships are discussed.

Keywords: fathers, sons, parenting, fatherhood

Throughout the last few decades, increasing scholarly interest in the concept of fatherhood has resulted in a vast array of rich, complex, and diverse insights into the meanings associated with the role of the father in the family. This voluminous body of knowledge paints a multifaceted portrait of fatherhood and represents a wide-ranging assortment of perspectives and philosophical approaches to the subject (for recent comprehensive reviews of the fatherhood literature, see Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000; Day & Lamb, 2004; Lamb, 2004; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Peters & Day, 2000; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002).

For example, one notable approach to creating a sense of meaning and understanding for the role of the father has been to assess fatherhood from a historical perspective, detailing how fathers and fathering have changed over the last few centuries.

Describing fatherhood as a "historically varying social construction," Marsiglio et al. (2000, p. 1175) explained what they called the "historical flexibility of fatherhood," noting that within every historical epoch a dominant belief about the role of effective fathering has existed, from father as primary moral leader in colonial times to father as primary breadwinner in the middle part of the twentieth century. Lamb (2000) also described a historical pattern of shifting beliefs concerning the principal task of the father, with main fathering responsibilities evolving from that of "moral teacher or guide" important before the Industrial Revolution to the "breadwinner" role that was dominant from the Industrial Revolution until the Great Depression. The "sex-role model" attained prominence in the 1930s and 1940s, and then the "new nurturant father" became influential in the mid-1970s. Others have also framed fatherhood from a historical perspective (e.g., Griswold, 1993; Pleck & Pleck, 1997), arguing that the meaning of fatherhood is mainly a cultural product; thus, as culture changes, so do standards for what it means to be an effective or good father (see also, Morman & Floyd, 2002).

Another very popular approach for creating and understanding the concept of effective fathering is to examine the various contexts in which fathers might operate, or what has been called "the shifting demography of fatherhood" (Marsiglio et al., 2000, p. 1181). For example, in the most recent edition of Lamb's (2004) foundational work on fathering, *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, he includes entire chapters on African American and African Caribbean fathers, Latino fathers, European Union fathers, Asian fathers (e.g., Japan, China, and Korea), farmer fathers, residential fathers in the United States, divorced fathers, fathers in "fragile families," gay fathers, and violent fathers. Others have analyzed stepfathers (Marsiglio, 2004), nonresidential fathers (Braver & O'Connell, 1998), single fathers (Heath & Orthner, 1999), teenage fathers (Marsiglio & Cohan, 1997), fathers in low-income families (Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera, & Lamb, 2004), and even men who are about to become fathers for the first time (Marsiglio, Hutchinson, & Cohan, 2000).

Other scholars have approached their analysis of the role of the father from the perspective commonly referred to as father involvement (see Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004, for a comprehensive review). For example, Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1985, 1987) argued that paternal involvement was best understood by viewing it as *accessibility* (i.e., a father's presence with and availability to his children), *engagement* (i.e., the experience of direct contact, care giving, and shared interactions between father and child), and *responsibility* (i.e., activities involving the father's direct care and/or arrangement of resources associated with taking care of his children). Further, Palkovitz (1997) identified 15 general categories of paternal involvement, while others have spent a substantial amount of work developing the best ways to measure it (see Day & Lamb, 2004, for a comprehensive review of the myriad issues surrounding methodological approaches to measuring father involvement). Closely associated with this line of work is to study the role and/or effectiveness of the father by assessing the unique contribution a father makes to the developmental processes of his children, either in addition to that of the mother (e.g., Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2004; Wood & Repetti, 2004) or in efforts at co-parenting or what has been referred to as "tag-team" parenting (Dienhart, 2001). Most of this line of father involvement/father contribution literature focuses on the quality and effectiveness of

a man's performance as father, ranging from the evaluation of unidimensional variables like financial contribution or time spent with children to assessments of a host of academic, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social outcome variables (Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002).

A fifth approach in scholarly attempts to bring meaning to the concept of fatherhood is based in assessing what is commonly referred to as the "Good Dad—Bad Dad" complex, in which fathers are dichotomously portrayed as either the reluctant, absent, dysfunctional, or violent man failing in or rejecting his duties of fathering or as the enlightened, contributing, loving, full and equal participant performing his duties as father with skill, care, and concern (Furstenberg, 1988; see also Fox & Benson, 2004, and Pleck, 2004, for reviews). Others have discussed the deficit model of fathering (Doherty, 1991), the role-inadequacy perspective (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997), or framed fathers as the family's weak link (Larson & Richards, 1994) or as the "disqualified dad" (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999). Central to this line of analysis is the basic assumption that some men are bad fathers, whereas others are good; that some men embrace fathering, while others reject it. The simultaneous framing of men as either good or bad fathers presents not only a dichotomous but also a somewhat contradictory picture of fathering in our society. At a time when arguably more focus and attention is being placed on the importance and significance of the role of the father and the positive contributions good fathers are capable of making, especially to their children's development, our society, nevertheless, is constantly reminded of the millions of children neglected, abused, and rejected by "dead-beat" dads and absent fathers.

A sixth perspective for assessing the role of the father within the family compares and contrasts the role of the father with that of the mother, a comparison that for the most part leaves the father in a deficit situation (for in-depth analysis, see Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Raymond, 2004; Fuligni & Brooks-Gunn, 2004; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). For example, initial assessments of residential fathers in two-parent families consistently reported that men spent about 30% to 45% as much time with their children as mothers did; more recent studies show improvement, with fathers now spending 67% as much time as mothers on weekdays and 87% as much time on weekends (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001). Others have been more critical in their assessments of these father-mother comparisons, arguing that a potential rhetorical trap exists in such analysis, with motherhood always framed as the dominant, privileged, and preferred model for parenting. Referring to an "idealized motherhood template" and to the "cult of motherhood," Dienhart (2001) argues for caution in assuming that there is some type of universal motherhood experience that all mothers share and thus advises against using such a standard with which to evaluate fathers. In such biased judgments, fathers are seen as subordinate to mothers, as only helpers in the parenting process, and in effect, a "second-best substitute" for mothers (Deutsch, Servis, & Payne, 2001). Instead, these scholars call for a rejection of mother-privileged assessments of effective parenting and advocate a perspective that values both fathering and mothering for their similar *and* unique contributions to family life (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Hays, 1996).

Arguing that fatherhood has always been a social construction (Mead, 1969), a seventh developmental perspective for understanding what it means to be a father in

today's family is found by taking a sociological view of fathering. Such analysis focuses on the multilayered influences of the micro-, meso-, and macro-level activity of social life that defines and constructs meanings for the role of the father (Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). Through an understanding of such critical sociological issues as gender, race, economics, and other important social structures (e.g., religion), a sociological perspective provides a unique lens from which to view the practice of fatherhood and to appreciate the idea of father involvement "as an ongoing, negotiated process shaped by a range of socially constructed circumstances . . . that espouse varied messages about fathering" (p. 92). For example, many scholars have analyzed the influence of sociological gender and gender ideologies and their effects on fathering. Studies report that "egalitarian" fathers demonstrate greater paternal involvement than "traditional fathers" (Bulanda, 2004) and that fathers with a more feminine style of parenting raised children with higher self-esteem who endorsed a more gender-free model of family life (Deutsch et al., 2001).

A final notable perspective for achieving a meaning for effective fathering is found in what Snarney (1993) and others (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997) refer to as "generative fathering." From this perspective, effective fathering is framed by the enduring and repetitive cycle of perpetuating the next generation of fathers through the care and nurturing provided to the current generation of male children. Set against the obligatory or even socially mandated norms or expectations for today's father, the generative fathering framework emphasizes the specific type of activities fathers perform in response to the needs of their children, fathering that involves a genuine and even sacrificial sense of commitment, caring, and attention for a child's developmental processes, particularly for any biological sons who, in turn, will someday grow into fathers in their own right and thus ensure the survival of the family's bloodline and genetic material. For example, one current study reported that fathers are more likely to increase their involvement with their children (even after controlling for the effects of other family contextual factors expected to influence father involvement [e.g., maternal employment]) if they have a greater proportion of male children in the family (Wood & Repetti, 2004). Another study found that fathers were more affectionate with their biological sons as opposed to their nonbiological sons (Floyd & Morman, 2001; see also Floyd & Morman, 2005).

Without question, the scholarship on fatherhood developed over the last few decades has resulted in an abundance of complex, interwoven, and multidimensional perspectives on the role of the father, both positive and negative, within the family. We know a lot about fathers, fatherhood, and fathering. Moreover, answers to the question of good fathering remain very important for a host of psychosocial and developmental issues involving the stability of the family and raising children within the family context. The importance of the fathering role is gaining increased scholarly attention and significance, and the extant literature on the subject continues to grow and develop. Curiously, in spite of the vast individual and subgroup variations influencing conceptions of fathering behaviors (Coley, 2001; Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 2000), we, nevertheless, remain somewhat consistent in our perceptions regarding a basic operational definition for effective fathering, and we are even fairly stable across disciplines in perceptions as to what factors are acceptable for inclusion within a general model of what it means to be a good father. However, we are unaware of any

recent attempts to construct some type of quantitative tool for actually measuring good fathering, an instrument that would create not only a benchmark for a general definition of good fathering but also produce a valid methodological means of evaluating beliefs about the characteristics associated with being a good father.

We believe that a more methodologically valid, operational model of good fathering would be beneficial. With such a model in place, family therapists can begin to test basic assumptions about fathering, for example, whether a present father is always better than an absent father. Such a framework would allow social scientists to look at the benefits of specific fathering skills on children's development and predict how effective men will be at fathering within the family. Such consensus will allow for better family-oriented education, training, therapy, and intervention for fathers and their children, and it will open the door for the development of increasingly detailed, systemic, and/or process-oriented models of effective fathering behaviors. We are not arguing that there should be, or must be, a single, universal definition for what it means to be a father, but we do assert (as do others, e.g., Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 2000) that, for the sake of clarity, focus, assessment, and coherence, continued convergence toward a general understanding of what it means to be a good father is beneficial for anyone interested in the scholarship of fatherhood. This understanding will, if for no other reason, at least provide a starting position, a general reference point, or at best a deeper sensitivity concerning the meanings associated with being a good father.

The following study is therefore an attempt at an initial process of crafting a statistically valid and experientially driven model of effective fathering. Its task is to examine, in an experimentally derived and exploratory manner, what fathers themselves determine to be the important and significant characteristics of a good father at the beginning of the twenty-first century. After a brief overview of previous work focusing on related questions of good fathering, the current study and accompanying results will be presented.

FATHERING IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Central to the current social transformation of fatherhood at the beginning of the twenty-first century is the notion that a "good father" should be loving, affectionate, involved, nurturing, and consistent in the raising of his children. Marsiglio, Day, and Lamb (2000) describe nurturance and provision of care, moral and ethical guidance, emotional, practical, and psychosocial support of female partners, and economic provisioning as four main avenues of influential paternal behaviors. This contemporary perspective on how to be a good father is further manifested in the plethora of current popular books on the nature of fatherhood and fathering, books designed to teach men not only *what* it means to be a good dad but also *how* to become the "new father" many men never had in their own lives. Canfield (1996) noted in his book on fathering that "the heart of a father" consists of involvement, awareness, nurturance, understanding, mentoring, and consistency. Others have discussed the skills needed for good fathering, noting the need for commitment, discipline, communication, mentoring, forgiveness, and building self-esteem (Phillips, 1992); for guidance, wisdom, knowledge, understanding, caring, love, instruction, and being a positive role model/example

(Kimmel, 1997); for open expressions of love for the mother and wife (MacArthur, 1998); for honesty, investment, openness, listening, and encouragement (Elmore, 2001); for acceptance, appreciation, affection, availability, accountability, and authority (McDowell & Day, 1991); and for spirituality, that is, developing a spiritual approach to fathering (Garbarino, 2000; Prince, 2000). The central theme of these books, and a host of others just like them, is that there is not only an expectation for what it means to be a good father but that a man can change, adapt, and become the good father mandated by the current social and cultural definition of an effective father.

However, a primary problem with these pop-psychology/self-help books and their prescriptions for effective fathering is that most of them are based on personal narratives from the authors themselves or from anecdotal accounts of men in counseling or therapy sessions with the authors. Very few of these works consist of a serious attempt to conduct a scholarly or scientifically driven study on the nature of fatherhood. One notable exception is research conducted by Ken Canfield of the National Center for Fathering. Canfield (1996) reported findings from the National Survey of Fathering Practices, a study of 2,066 fathers that was based on data collected for his dissertation (Canfield, 1995). The study instructed male participants to respond to 116 questions focusing on the importance of fathering skills, satisfaction with fathering, and satisfaction with family relationships. The men in his study reported that showing affection/affirmation was the most important fathering skill, followed by communication, role modeling, dealing with a family crisis, and involvement with discipline. The study went further and asked fathers to rate themselves on their self-perceived effectiveness in actually performing these 116 items. The data revealed gaps between what the fathers considered to be important for good fathering and their actual performance of the skill. The most frequent discrepancies between items ranked as important and the father's effectiveness in their performance were found for moral/spiritual development, freedom of expression, role modeling, involvement in education, and dealing with a family crisis. The gap between fathering beliefs and behaviors is consistent with other research that has found that these discrepancies are related to marital conflict, parental dissatisfaction, and family instability (Bowen & Orthner, 1991; Cowan & Bronstein, 1988; Rustia & Abbott, 1993).

Others have taken a more qualitative, methodological approach using in-depth interviews in their attempts to discover what men believe to be important characteristics of effective fathering. Marsiglio, Hutchinson, and Cohan (2000) describe what they call "fathering visions" (i.e., perceptions about being an ideal father, images of the good father, and fathering experiences imagined in the future). More specifically, the men in their study reported looking to their own fathers as positive or negative role models and envisioned a good father as being able to financially support his family, as spending time with and being actively involved in the lives of his children, and as being approachable, emotionally close, a friend, and a dispenser of measured discipline. In another in-depth interview study of the meaning and negotiated identity associated with being a stepfather, Marsiglio (2004) reported that 10 interrelated properties emerged as the men in his study attempted to claim their stepchildren as their own and begin fathering another man's offspring. The 10 prominent themes were timing issues, deliberateness, identity conviction, paternal role range, solo-shared identity, mindfulness, propriety work, naming, seeking public recognition, and

biological children as benchmarks for fathering stepchildren. Marsiglio called these 10 themes "sensitizing concepts" and argued for their importance in gaining a deeper understanding of the inner worlds of stepfathers.

What these studies and others like them (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Daly, 1993; Palkovitz, 2002) report is that good fathering, while diverse, complex, and complicated, does appear to have some common themes that together form a generalized conception of what it really takes to be a good father. And while there appears to be no shortage of advice or prescription concerning the role of the father in the family context, nevertheless, we still appear to have a type of convergence toward a general model of what it means to be a good father. The following study is an attempt to assess these perceptions in hopes of crafting a valid and experientially driven initial model of effective fathering.

STUDY ONE: METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Participants ($N = 374$) were adult males who were fathers of at least one child. They ranged in age from 30 to 78 years old, with a mean age of 48.46 years ($SD = 9.35$). Participants had between zero and eight sons ($M = 1.75$, $SD = 0.97$) and between zero and six daughters ($M = 1.18$, $SD = 0.99$). Most (80.3%) were married, whereas 15.7% were divorced, 3.2% were never married, and 0.8% widowed. A majority (72.4%) were Caucasian, whereas 17.3% were black/African American, 4.1% Hispanic, 2.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.4% Native American, and 4.4% of other ethnic origins.[1] At the time of the study, 19.9% had a high school education or less, 30.0% had completed some college but had no degree, 30.6% had completed an associate's or bachelor's degree, and 19.5% had achieved a graduate or professional degree. More than half (68.1%) lived in the midwestern United States, 23.4% were in the Northeast, 3.8% were in the Southwest, 3.0% in the Northwest, 1.4% in the South/Southeast, and 0.3% in Puerto Rico.

PROCEDURES

Undergraduate students enrolled in communication studies courses at a medium-sized university in the Midwest, a medium-sized university in the South, and a large university in the Southwest received extra course credit for recruiting fathers to participate in the study. These student recruiters were asked to find fathers (e.g., biological fathers, stepfathers, and/or adoptive fathers) who would be willing to participate in the study. They were given no specific instructions as to whom to ask, however, many students asked their own fathers to participate while others asked friends, other relatives, or work associates. The student recruiters were not provided with any formal message to present to their volunteer participants; rather, the men who agreed to participate were given a letter from the researchers explaining the nature and purposes of

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[1]These percentages sum to greater than 100 because some respondents checked more than one group.

the study, an informed consent form explaining their rights as a study participant and whom to contact in case of questions (e.g., telephone numbers of the primary researchers), a short questionnaire, and a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope. At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were asked to respond to the following question:

> Think for a few minutes about being a father. What does being a "good father" mean to you? Below, please describe your thoughts on what it means to be a good father. (You might think specifically of instances in which you felt like a particularly good father, or about men you know whom you think of as good fathers.) What does it mean to be a good father?

Participants were given a page of lined paper on which to write their responses. After completing their questionnaires, participants mailed them directly to the researchers in the envelopes provided. To ensure anonymity, participants were not asked to provide their names or any identifying information to the researchers.

Analysis

To identify the characteristics of good fatherhood, we took a grounded theory approach to analyzing participants' written descriptions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To construct an initial coding scheme, the researchers independently conducted open coding on approximately one-third of the written narratives. During this review, the researchers formulated lists of categories representing participants' ideas of what it meant to be a good father. The formulation of categories followed a linear pattern whereby new categories were added when, and only when, the existing categories were insufficient to capture the ideas being offered in a narrative.

After constructing coding schemes independently, the researchers met to combine their efforts into a single coding scheme. This process involved axial coding, an approach wherein the instances of each code are compared to define the properties and characteristics of that code. Conceptually similar categories identified by the researchers independently were combined, and categories that were identified by only one researcher were discussed until consensus was reached as to their utility. Throughout this process, the categories were continually compared and contrasted and were adjusted as necessary to accommodate discrepant cases (see Creswell, 1998). The result of this iterative process was a scheme of 20 categories representing participants' ideas about good fatherhood.

The researchers then coded approximately one-third of the written narratives (a different one-third than were used for category construction) so that inter-coder reliability could be assessed. On the basis of this coding, the researchers reconfigured two of the categories that had achieved low reliability and did a second reliability assessment. After achieving acceptable reliability estimates for all 20 categories, the researchers coded all of the remaining written narratives according to this coding scheme. Inter-coder reliabilities, based on Cohen's kappa, are reported in Table 1.

Table 1
Category Descriptions and Inter-coder Reliability Estimates

Category	Kappa	Referents
Role model	.79	Father models appropriate behavior, sets a good example
Control	.58	Provides authority, leadership, control, determines the rules
Love	.74	Loves, cares for, respects, shows approval toward child
Provider	.75	Is responsible, committed to fathering, reliable, good provider
Sacrifice	.71	Sacrifices for the benefit of his children and family
Availability	.85	Available for child, "being there," "always there"
Forgiveness	.65	Forgives child, understands child, shows empathy
Listener	.97	Good listener for children
Teacher (general)	.74	Teaches or advises about nonreligious/moral issues
Teacher (specific)	.79	Teaches or counsels on religion, values, morality
Involvement	.80	Is involved in child's life, does activities, shows interest
Protector	.65	Protects child, provides physical safety
Discipline	.87	Provides discipline, punishes children when they transgress
Support	.89	Provides emotional or relational support to children
Affection	.52	Demonstrates/communicates affection to child
Relationship with mother	.87	Maintains positive relationship with children's mother
Relinquishes control appropriately	.65	Grants children appropriate freedoms at appropriate times
Friend	.96	Is a friend, as opposed to a parental figure
Admits mistakes	1.0	Admits to child and/or others when he is wrong
Seeks child's approval	.80	Acts in such a way as to gain children's approval

RESULTS

Analyses of participants' written responses to the question of what it meant to them to be a good father produced 20 categories of responses:

1. *Role Model*—"a good father is a role model in every way to his son"
2. *Control*—"it means setting limits and boundaries for their lives"
3. *Love*—"a good father loves his son as much as he can"
4. *Provider*—"to care for your kids"
5. *Sacrifice*—"being a good father has meant self-sacrifice for the betterment of my children"

6. *Availability*—"I will always be there to help if needed"
7. *Forgiveness*—"a good father may not always agree with his son's actions but must always be willing to forgive him"
8. *Listener*—"I want to be open and listen when he needs to talk"
9. *Father as teacher (general)*—"a good father teaches his son from what he has learned"
10. *Father as teacher (specific)*—"a good father loves God and teaches his son to do the same"
11. *Involvement*—"a good father will take an active and interested role in his son's life and interests"
12. *Protector*—"a good father makes his kids and wife feel safe and protected"
13. *Discipline*—"sometimes a father needs to correct or punish his children, but it needs to be done in a loving manner, not mean, or harsh, or out of control"
14. *Emotional availability*—"a father must make sure that he expresses his feelings toward the son"
15. *Affection*—"a good father loves his son and communicates to him that he loves him, hugging, things like that"
16. *Relationship with mother*—"a good father loves his wife and teaches his children to do the same"
17. *Relinquishes control appropriately*—"a good father needs to give his son space to make his own choices"
18. *Friend*—"always be a friend he can turn to"
19. *Admits mistakes*—"sometimes you have to be willing to say to your son, I blew it. I'm sorry"
20. *Seeks son's approval*—"I want my son to be proud of me"

A list of the categories, with their corresponding reliability estimates, is provided in Table 1.

Participants mentioned between 1 and 11 categories each (M = 3.41 categories, SD = 1.82). The five most-often mentioned categories, in descending order, were: (1) love, (2) availability, (3) role model, (4) involvement, and (5) provider. The rank-ordered categories, each with their respective percentages of usage, are reported in Table 2.

For exploratory purposes, we examined the relationship between the use of specific categories and fathers' demographic characteristics, including their ages, ethnicities, education levels, total number of children, and numbers of sons and daughters, specifically. Fathers' age, as represented by decade (30s, 40s, 50s, etc.), was significantly related to the use of only two categories. Older fathers were more likely than younger fathers to mention forgiveness, Cramer's V = .19, p = .02, and admitting mistakes, V = .17, p = .05, as characteristics of good fathers. Fathers' total number of children was unrelated to their use of any of the 20 categories, but their number of daughters was directly related to their likelihood of mentioning having a good relationship with their children's mother as a characteristic of good fathers, V = .26, p < .001. Fathers' number of sons was directly related to their likelihood of mentioning seeking their children's approval as a characteristic of good fathers, V = .33, p < .001. Fathers'

Table 2
Percentages of Use for Categories in Study One and Study Two (Rank Ordered)

Rank	Study One Fathers	Study Two Fathers	Study Two Sons
1	Love (36.1%)	Love (41.4%)	Love (30.3%)
2	Availability (24.0%)	Role model (40.4%)	Support (30.3%)
3	Role model (32.1%)	Availability (38.4%)	Involvement (27.3%)
4	Involvement (31.8%)	Teacher/general (27.3%)	Availability (23.2%)
5	Provider (30.2%)	Provider (26.3%)	Role model (20.2%)
6	Support (28.9%)	Listener (25.3%)	Provider (20.2%)
7	Teacher/general (25.9%)	Teacher/specific (25.3%)	Affection (18.2%)
8	Teacher/specific (19.5%)	Support (24.2%)	Teacher/general (16.2%)
9	Listener (19.0%)	Affection (19.2%)	Relinquish control (16.2%)
10	Affection (18.2%)	Involvement (16.2%)	Listener (15.2%)
11	Discipline (14.2%)	Friend (13.1%)	Friend (13.1%)
12	Control (11.2%)	Discipline (11.1%)	Teacher/specific (11.1%)
13	Relinquish control (11.2%)	Forgiveness (9.1%)	Control (9.1%)
14	Forgiveness (7.5%)	Control (8.1%)	Discipline (8.1%)
15	Friend (6.7%)	Mother* (5.1%)	Sacrifice (8.1%)
16	Mother* (4.3%)	Relinquish control (4.0%)	Forgiveness (6.1%)
17	Admits mistakes (3.7%)	Sacrifice (3.0%)	Mother* (5.1%)
18	Sacrifice (2.7%)	Admits mistakes (2.0%)	Protector (2.0%)
19	Protector (2.7%)	Protector (1.0%)	Child's approval (1.0%)
20	Child's approval (0.8%)	Child's approval (1.0%)	Admits mistakes (0%)

*Mother refers to the relationship with mother.

ethnicities, marital status, co-residential status, and education levels were unrelated to the use of any of the individual categories.

Discussion

In this first study, we simply asked fathers to respond to the question of what it means to be a good father. Many of the fathers simply wrote a one-sentence response to the question; however, many others wrote paragraphs or filled the entire page with comments, suggestions, and insights into the role of fathering. In all, 20 different categories were developed to capture the wide variety in participants' responses. The resulting category scheme takes us a step forward in developing a more consistent and stable list of effective fathering characteristics that hopefully will be useful in future research efforts on the paternal role. The categories of love, availability, and role modeling were mentioned most often by the fathers in their open-ended responses, all three of which directly address the more relational and emotional components of the fathering role and clearly provide additional support for the extant research on the changing culture of American fatherhood (e.g., Morman & Floyd, 2002).

Furthermore, we believe that one of the main limitations of the study by Canfield (1996), and other studies similar to it (e.g., Andrews, Luckey, Bolden, Fickling, & Lind, 2004), is that the fathers in his study simply responded to a predetermined list of fathering skills provided for them instead of being asked, in an open-ended fashion, what they believed to be the most important factors for effective fathering. Clearly, simply responding to a ready-made list of fathering skills is not the same as asking fathers themselves to determine what items should be on a list of fathering character-istics. The current study thus left it open for the respondents to decide what to write, how much to write, and how many suggestions they would make. And while these results are consistent with many of the suggestions for good fathering mentioned above, we believe this data set provides a more refined and ecologically valid view of fathering because the responses come not from anecdotes or pre-constructed lists by family therapists, ministers, or pop psychologists but from the fathers themselves.

We had initially intended to stop after completion of the first study and report our findings; however, one unexpected outcome of the first study gave us reason to pursue the question of good fathering even further. Of the 374 fathers who participated in study one, not a single response to our question of good fathering referenced their daughters or the father-daughter relationship; every one of the father's responses focused on raising their sons. We made no effort to recruit men who were fathers of only sons, nor did we instruct the fathers in study one to make reference only to fathering their sons (see the study instructions noted above); yet, not a single refer-ence was made to fathering daughters. Our intentions had been to craft some type of general model of fathering that would be applicable to both sons and daughters; how-ever, the results of study one provided us with a compelling reason to refine our analy-sis of good fathering. These results had raised some intriguing questions. For exam-ple, do men father their sons using different skill sets than for their daughters? Why did these men reference their sons and not their daughters when asked to describe characteristics of good fathering? Perhaps most intriguing for us, would sons agree with the reports of fathers concerning the important characteristics of raising sons?

This last question is relevant for a number of reasons. First, research has consis-tently reported that various problems are associated with single-source reporting bias, a common methodological concern surrounding much research on the family (Coley, 2001). Studies have found that different family members will provide different reac-tions to, or perceptions of, various issues surrounding family life; thus, it is important to include multiple family voices to avoid privileging one member's perception over another. For example, studies consistently indicate that mothers and fathers report significantly different levels of paternal involvement with their children (Seltzer, 1991). Another study found that adolescents rated the strength of their family units significantly lower than either their mother or father. Specifically, fathers differed from their adolescent children in perceptions of commitment to the family, spending time together, and the effective handling and solving of family conflict and crisis (Greeff & Roux, 1999). Furthermore, Kindlon and Thompson (1999) report that fathers and sons differed in their interpretation and evaluation of the same, shared experience nearly 50% of the time. Overall, adolescents have been found to be gener-ally less positive regarding perceptions of their families than their parents (Schumm, Barnes, Bollman, Jurich, & Milliken, 1985) and typically call into question their par-

ent's actions (Erikson, 1977). Other studies have reported similar discrepancies between the perceptions of different family members concerning issues of paternal acceptance, rejection, and discipline (Tein, Roosa, & Michaels, 1994), parent-child closeness (Paulson, Hill, & Holmbeck, 1991), and the harshness of parental discipline (Simons, Whitbeck, Melby, & Wu, 1995). In addition, there are differences in father's versus mother's reports of paternal contributions to child care (Coltrane, 1996) and even in reports of child support payments made by divorced fathers to their ex-wives (Braver & O'Connell, 1998). This level of discrepancy between reports of various family members has led to calls for those interested in family research to obtain data from more than one family member (Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 2000).

Second, as discussed above, fathers influence a host of psychosocial and developmental issues relating to their children and make important and significant contributions that in many ways affect the future trajectories of their lives. More specifically, a growing body of literature argues that the lasting effects of fathering within the father-son relationship are particularly pertinent because, as Wood and Repetti (2004) found, fathers are more likely to increase their involvement with their children if they have more boys in the family. Furthermore, fathers tend to parent more like their fathers than like their mothers (Losh-Hesselbart, 1987), and after a divorce, fathers and sons are more likely to maintain contact than fathers and daughters (Amato & Keith, 1991). In fact, research has found that men often link their perceptions of future fathering expectations with positive or negative experiences associated with their own fathers (Marsiglio, Hutchinson, & Cohen, 2000).

For many men, the relationship experienced within the father-son dyad is one of profound and long-lasting significance. For fathers, the paternal experience associated with raising a son has been found to influence the emotional health of the father (Berry, 1990), his adult development, and his psychosocial adjustment (Snarney, 1993). Men who made fathering a high priority have been found to be more successful and more satisfied in midlife than men who were less involved with their children (Lamb, 2004). The father-son relationship has been found to be a significant predictor of a son's future communication behaviors (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Yerby, 1981; Fink, 1993), relational success and communication with a spouse (Beatty & Dobos, 1993; Berry, 1990), academic achievement (Singer & Weinstein, 2000), educational attainment (Harris, Furstenberg, & Marmer, 1998), income level (Duncan, Hill, & Yeung, 1996), parenting style (Simons, Beaman, Conger, & Chao, 1993; Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Wu, 1991), potential for delinquent behavior and adolescent drinking (Barnes & Farrell, 1992; Simons, Johnson, & Conger, 1994), overall emotional health (Berry, 1990), and healthy attitudes toward sexuality (Fisher, 1987). The detrimental effects on sons growing up without their fathers' influence are also well established. Sons who grow up without a father are less likely to graduate from high school and more likely to be unemployed (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994), are five times more likely to be poor and 10 times more likely to be extremely poor (Nelson, 1995), and are more likely to engage in criminal behavior, become sexually active at an early age, and fail in their own marital relationships (Glenn & Kramer, 1987; Lykken, 1997; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994) compared to sons raised with a father.

Finally, we believe it is important to include the perspective of sons within the question of good fathering because, as Cabrera et al. (2000) noted, "there is little

research on how role models, . . . the articulation of ideas and values by adults, or formal instruction shape what fatherhood means to boys as they move toward adulthood" (p. 131). Boys and adolescent young men develop their attitudes and beliefs concerning fatherhood over the course of many years. The generative cycle of boys becoming fathers to boys who will most likely also become fathers involves a complex set of developmental processes that influence and inspire meanings for the future practice of fatherhood. Hofferth (1999) has reported that men whose fathers were involved in raising them are more involved with raising their own children, taking more responsibility for them, showing more warmth, and more closely monitoring their behaviors and activities. Insight into the development of attitudes and beliefs about fathering during adolescence may generate particularly useful frames of reference concerning the development of fatherhood practices later on. Furthermore, because fathering tends to involve repetitive patterns of behavior within the family context, "examining aspects of action patterns that seem connected to generative fathering earlier in life . . . would be informative" (Cabrera et al., 2000, p. 131). Finally, as Marsiglio and Cohan (2000) argue, fathering is a co-constructed, socially negotiated, socially engaged activity; there is no father without the child.

Therefore, due to the significant effect fathers have on the development of their sons' lives and the likelihood that sons will one day become fathers themselves, we felt it was important to expand the first study to include responses from sons to provide a more complete, balanced, and useful insight into the concept of good fathering, particularly the effective fathering of sons. For the purposes of the second study, we replicated the methodological approach of study one, with the exception that the same open-ended question on good fathering was posed both to fathers and to their adolescent or adult sons. The second study and its findings are detailed below.

STUDY TWO: METHOD

Participants

Participants ($N = 198$) were 99 pairs of fathers and sons (a completely different data set than in study one). The fathers ranged in age from 30 to 87 years old ($M = 50.04$, $SD = 8.48$), and the sons ranged in age from 12 to 59 years ($M = 22.32$, $SD = 6.62$). The fathers had between one and five sons ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.96$) and between zero and six daughters ($M = 1.04$, $SD = 0.96$). Nearly half of the pairs ($n = 49$) consisted of a father and a biological son; 36 pairs consisted of a father and a stepson, and 14 pairs consisted of a father and an adopted son. Most of the fathers (91.8%) were married, and most of the sons (79.6%) were single (never married). A majority of fathers and sons (78.7%) were Caucasian, whereas 15.3% were black/African American, 3.7% Hispanic, 3.6% Native American, 2.0% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2.0% of other ethnic origins.[2] At the time of the study, 11.2% of fathers and 29.5% of sons had a high school education or less, 23.4% of fathers and 35.8% of sons had completed some

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[2]In some dyads, the father and son were of different ethnic origins. These percentages reflect the combined averages for fathers and sons.

college but had no degree, 36.8% of fathers and 29.5% of sons had completed an associate's or bachelor's degree, and 28.6% of fathers and 5.2% of sons had achieved a graduate or professional degree. The greatest percentages of fathers (47.4%) and sons (38.8%) lived in the southwestern United States, whereas 27.8% of fathers and 24.5% of sons lived in the Midwest, 14.4% of fathers and 23.5% of sons lived in the South/Southeast, 8.2% of fathers and 7.1% of sons lived in the Northeast, and 2.1% of fathers and 6.1% of sons lived in the Northwest.

PROCEDURE

Participants were recruited in the same manner as in study one, except that all fathers had to have at least one adolescent or adult son who was also willing to participate. Fathers and sons in each pair independently completed the questionnaire and returned it anonymously to the researchers in the postage-paid envelopes provided. In both fathers' and sons' versions of the questionnaire, participants were asked exactly the same question as in study one, except that the sentence, "You might think specifically of instances in which you felt like a particularly good father," was omitted from the sons' questionnaires. The written narratives were coded by the researchers using the coding scheme produced in the first study, and the results were paired for the father and son within each dyad.

RESULTS

Fathers mentioned between one and seven categories each ($M = 3.63$ categories, $SD = 1.67$). Sons also mentioned between one and seven categories each but used fewer categories, on average, than their fathers did ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.59$), $t(98) = 3.64$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .13$. Overall, the main outcome of study two is one of similarity; fathers and sons are fairly consistent in their assessments of what makes a good father, in effect agreeing on three of the top five characteristics and on nine of the top 10 items mentioned as essential for good fathering (see Table 2). However, some interesting differences did emerge.

Using the z-test for proportional differences, we compared fathers and sons for their likelihood of mentioning each of the 20 categories. Results revealed six significant differences. Fathers were more likely than sons to mention being a role model, $z = 3.37$, $p < .01$; being available, $z = 2.82$, $p < .01$; forgiving children, $z = 3.84$, $p < .01$; being a good listener, $z = 2.02$, $p < .05$; and being a teacher (in the specific sense of teaching about morals and values), $z = 2.84$, $p < .01$. Sons were more likely than fathers to mention relinquishing control as a mark of good fatherhood, $z = 3.05$, $p < .01$.

The rank-ordered categories for fathers and sons, each with their respective percentages of usage, are reported in Table 2. The rank orderings produced by fathers in study one, fathers in study two, and sons in study two were compared with the Friedman analysis of variance, which demonstrated a significant difference for the three groups, $\chi_r^2(19) = 52.65$, $p < .001$. Further tests established that the rank orderings were significantly different for fathers in study one and fathers in study two,

$\chi_r^2(19) = 36.63$, $p = .009$; for fathers in study one and sons in study two, $\chi_r^2(19) = 36.15$, $p = .01$; and for fathers and sons in study two, $\chi_r^2(19) = 34.69$, $p = .015$.[3]

Fathers' use of individual categories was again compared to fathers' ages (as grouped by decade), ethnicities, marital status, co-residential status, education levels, total number of children, and numbers of sons and daughters. Only two comparisons were significant: fathers were more likely to mention forgiveness as a trademark of good fatherhood if they had a greater number of children, $V = .44$, $p = .007$, and if they had a greater number of sons, specifically, $V = .37$, $p = .02$. Sons' use of individual categories was also compared to their age groups (teens, 20s, 30s, etc.), ethnicities, and education levels. Older sons were more likely than younger sons to mention that a good father is a good listener, $V = .34$, $p = .009$. A near-significant relationship also emerged between sons' age and their likelihood of mentioning the relinquishment of paternal control as a characteristic of good fatherhood, $V = .27$, $p = .06$. Sons' ethnicities, marital status, and education levels were unrelated to the use of any of the categories.

DISCUSSION

In the second study, we again posed the question of what it means to be a good father but to intact father-son dyads rather than to individual fathers. This replication and extension allowed us to examine potential differences in the perspectives of sons and fathers and to compare our results to those of the first study. Our exploratory analyses revealed some interesting patterns. For one, although study one fathers and study two fathers differed significantly from each other in the overall rank orderings of their category use, the top three most frequently mentioned characteristics of good fatherhood were the same for both groups: love, availability, and being a good role model. In fact, love was the most often mentioned aspect of good fatherhood for all three groups (including study two sons).

When we compared fathers and sons in the second study of their use of each individual category, the pattern that emerged was one in which fathers emphasized their nurturing role and sons emphasized the importance of fathers granting autonomy. Specifically, fathers were more likely than sons to name characteristics such as being a good role model, being available, and being a listener and teacher, whereas sons were more likely than fathers to identify the appropriate relinquishing of paternal control as a mark of a good father. These patterns would seem to fit the different developmental motivations and demands that fathers and sons face. Perhaps even more noteworthy, however, is that fathers and sons did not differ from each other in their likelihood of identifying any of the other characteristics on the list. This suggests

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[3]Fathers in the two studies differed from each other on two demographic variables. First, fathers in study two were slightly better educated, having a median education level corresponding to a baccalaureate degree, whereas the fathers in study one had a median education level corresponding to an associate's degree, $\chi^2(8) = 16.03$, $p = .04$. Second, fathers in study two were slightly more likely to be married (91.8%) than were fathers in study one (80.5%), $\chi^2(3) = 8.20$, $p = .04$. These demographic differences may have contributed to the difference in the rank ordering of the two groups' good fatherhood categories.

that, despite some differences in perspective, the fathers and sons had relatively strong agreement as to the nature of good fatherhood.

One important point to keep in mind is that, although we asked our question of fathers and sons in intact dyads, the question was not about what makes the specific father in each dyad a good one. That is, the question was not about any specific father but rather about what makes fathers, in general, good at fatherhood. This point is important because it clarifies how these data must be interpreted. Sons who mentioned love and availability as aspects of good fatherhood, for instance, were not reporting that *their fathers* were loving and available, only that these are desirable characteristics for a father to have.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Much has been written about the tenuous position of the father in the American family. One routinely hears of the problem of absent fathers and "deadbeat dads" (Corneau, 1991). Others deride fathers for not sharing domestic duties more equitably with mothers (Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1995) or for not being as involved with their children as they should be (see Palkovitz, 1997). Some have even gone so far as to argue that men are biologically predisposed to fail at fatherhood (Blankenhorn, 1995). Despite pleas to temper such "deficit perspectives" (e.g., Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997), the prevailing view of fatherhood in both the academic and popular literatures is mixed at best. Our interest in the present project, however, was not to focus on these parenting challenges but rather to examine what it is that makes men *good fathers*. This is a simple question, although it has some important and complex implications once answered. Through two inductive studies, we assembled a list of referents that characterizes our respondents' conceptions of what it means to be a good father. Importantly, use of the referents was unrelated to participants' ethnic backgrounds, marital status, co-residential status, or levels of education, and was only slightly related to participants' ages or numbers of children. These analyses do not guarantee the ability to generalize to other populations, of course, but they bolster the case for it.

This project makes a number of contributions to the extant research on fathering and the role of the father within the family context, particularly for the father-son relationship. First, this study reports that fathers and sons are remarkably similar in their assessments of what makes a good father, in effect agreeing on three of the top five characteristics and nine of the top 10 items mentioned as essential for good fathering. Second, these two studies move us not only toward a better understanding of the characteristics of good fathering but also help to continue the development of a consistent and stable list of factors central to the concept and thus further advance the process of crafting a model of good fathering. Third, such a list becomes the initial topos for the potential development of a new research tool, a quantitative survey instrument that will be useful to those interested in research on effective fathering. Finally, many of the top 10 items mentioned by both fathers and sons are associated with the more relational and emotional components of good fathering (e.g., love, availability, listening, affection, involvement, support, role model) and, therefore, provide additional support for the argument that the culture and assessment of quality fathering behaviors in

the early part of the twenty-first century continue to evolve from the distant, provider-disciplinarian role of previous decades to the more engaged, involved, and emotionally expressive father of today.

As noted above, one of the most interesting and unexpected outcomes of the first study is that, when asked about the characteristics of good fathering, the fathers referenced parenting only their sons and not their daughters. And, while we made no attempt to direct or guide the fathers in our study to focus only on their sons or on their perceived closest relationship with one of their children, other studies have, in fact, found that the mother-daughter relationship is perceived to be much closer than the father-daughter relationship. For example, Nielsen (2001) reported that 70% of the women she surveyed said their relationship with their mother is better and closer than with their father; 85% said they know their mother much better than their father; and 80% said the one thing they most wanted to change is to have more emotional intimacy with their father. Furthermore, she also noted that 90% of the women in her study claimed to be too afraid, uneasy, or tense to even talk to their fathers about topics other than "superficial" issues like school or money. Nielsen argues that most academic research on the family privileges father-son and mother-daughter relationships and tends to downplay or ignore the father-daughter dyad. Therefore, if the father-daughter relationship is as distant and emotionally void as some claim it to be, perhaps fathers simply were subconsciously responding to the parenting relationship in which they felt a stronger sense of efficacy, value, and positive influence (i.e., where he felt he performed best as a good father). Regardless, replication and further extension of this intriguing finding are clearly warranted.

One limitation of the current study is the use of college students to recruit the father and son participants. This limited the diversity of the research participants to only men in the social networks of college students, and thus the findings of the study are potentially not fully representative of the overall population of fathers and adult sons. As such, the present results are only a first step toward a more scholarly understanding of the nature of good fatherhood in general and effective fathering of sons more specifically. Our intention is to build upon this initial process by creating interval-level measures for each of the referents and collecting additional data from a wider pool of fathers to validate the scales. Interval-level data will allow us to assess the orthogonality of the categories and to determine if a simpler structure underlies them. By attempting to quantify the concept of good fathering, we can also address some important questions that have thus far received little direct empirical attention.

For example, what factors predict how good a father a man will be? Second, do all men become better at fathering over time? If so, what are the turning points, and how rapid is the improvement, on average? If not, what discriminates between those whose fathering abilities improve, decline, or maintain? Third, how do children benefit from good fathering? Specifically, is it always better for children to have a father in their lives than to have an absent father, or is an absent father preferable to a bad father? Fourth, is effective fathering the same for men who raise sons versus daughters; how is fathering a son similar or different than fathering a daughter? Finally, is good fathering the same as good mothering, or are there qualitative and/or quantitative differences between the two? How much of each is unique to fathers and mothers, and how much is part of a collective concept of "good parenting?" These are issues

that await empirical attention, and further development and refinement of our model of good fatherhood will help make such efforts possible.

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