

## Parental Bonding in Father-Son Relationships

Lauren B. Childers

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Dr. Janet Brown, Ph.D.  
Thesis Chair

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Dr. Clay Peters, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Dr. Will E. Honeycutt, D. MIN.  
Committee Member

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Dr. Marilyn Gadowski, Ph.D.  
Assistant Honors Director

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Date

### Abstract

The father-son relationship is an influential part of any boy's development. It is hypothesized that there is a generational difference in this relationship between the older and younger generation. The Father Form of the Parental Bonding Instrument was used to assess this hypothesis. This questionnaire utilized 25 items, separated into the care and protection scales, to categorize parenting into four quadrants: affectionate constraint, optimal parenting, affectionless control and neglectful parenting. The results were compared between two groups, one of which consisted of males ages 25 to 45, representing the older generation, and the other consisted of males ages 18 to 22, representing the younger generation. According to the data, the older generation experienced more affectionless control relationships with their fathers compared to the younger generation who experienced more optimal relationships with their fathers. These findings support the hypothesis that there is a generational difference in the father-son relationships.

### Parental Bonding: Is There A Generational Difference in the Father-Son Relationship?

The associations a person has with other people, called relationships, are a major part of every person's existence. They can significantly influence and direct the course of a person's life. Relationships occur between parents and children, friends, co-workers, and many other people. Each relationship a person is involved in has a potential impact that can be beneficial or detrimental to the development or quality of his or her life. In general, relationships between people have been a topic of great interest for psychologists because of the great effect they have on a person.

One of the most consequential relationships people have in their lives is with their families. The family is one of the most basic constructs of human relationships and has a major impact on the development of a person. The effect of familial relationships has been studied for many years in order to understand the family's significance. Parental relationships have been found to affect many different aspects of development including sexuality, gender identity and depression. In recent years, the distinct interactions between parent and child within the family have been of interest to help understand the unique contributions each individual parent has on the child.

The role a father plays in his children's lives has interested researchers increasingly as the rate of divorce and single motherhood skyrockets. The relationship between a father and his children has been found to have a major impact on a child's development, especially on a male child's development. A father's impact on his male child's development has been investigated (Mandara, Murray & Joyner, 2005; Nelson & Coyne, 2008) in the realms of mental, sexual and social developmental aspects. Knowledge of the importance of the father-son relationship has caused concern for

psychologists. With the recent breakdown of the family and the dynamic of the father-son relationship changing, there is interest in the possible generational differences between fathers and sons.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Family Relationships**

The family is an influential factor in a person's life and has been found to impact several aspects of development. A study by Green, Williams and Goodman (1985), comparing two family environments in order to identify which contributed more to masculine or atypical behaviors in male children, found that environment can potentially influence a person's sexual identity. The researchers concluded that families in which sons exhibited more feminine traits were more likely to have fathers who did not spend a substantial amount of time with their sons during the first years of their sons' lives. Also, frequent hospitalization and being called "beautiful" as an infant were characteristic of these families. This study showed the level of influence a family environment can potentially have on a person's sexual identity. It also demonstrated the importance of the father's role and presence on the development of his son in comparison with the mother's role and influence on her son's masculinity.

A later study by Roberts, Green, Williams and Goodman (1987), examined the impact of family on masculinity. Questionnaires and interviews were administered to two groups of families; one of the groups consisted of families whose sons had demonstrated feminine behavior and the other group consisted of families whose sons had not demonstrated feminine behavior. After between-group and within-group analysis of the data, the authors concluded that a father's presence in a male child's life before the

age of thirteen has a major impact on the development of masculinity. A male child was found to possess more feminine traits when he was raised without his father, in comparison to the children who had been raised with both of their parents present in their lives. The results also indicated that other factors, such as feminine appearance and illness in early life, contribute to the masculinity of male children.

Finally, family relationships can be correlated with scores of depression and self-concept in adolescents. Lau and Kwok (2000) researched the influence of the family environment on adolescents' self-concept and rates of depression in Hong Kong. In the study, family environment was determined by personal growth, relationship, and system maintenance according to the Family Environment Scale. They concluded that better personal growth, relationship and system maintenance scores were associated with lower depression scores and higher self-concept scores. Specifically, boys' self-concept could be predicted by the system maintenance score of the family environment. These findings have been duplicated by several other researchers (Hay & Ashman, 2003; Takeuchi, Miyaoka, Tomoda, Liu & Kitamura, 2010).

### **Parental Relationships**

**Cognitive Development.** Parental influence can extend to the peer relationships experienced by their children. A study conducted by Rah and Parke (2008) investigated the connections between peer acceptance, children's social information processing and their parent's interaction styles. A child's social information processing was found to have fewer negative strategies with the increased amount of positive interactions with their parents and peer acceptance was consequently connected with the negative or positive aspects of the child's social information processes. Based on the observed

connections, the authors concluded that a child's experience with his or her parents effect the social information processing and thus peer acceptance and relationships of that child.

Geddes (2008) explored the emotional and education aspects of development with regard to the influence a father has on them. Previous research had indicated closeness and involvement with the father resulted in improved educational outcomes, higher self-esteem and better psychological adjustment. This study found that children with present fathers were more empathic to others and felt as if they had some amount of control over their own lives. Children with present fathers also tended to do better in school and have more motivation. When compared with children whose fathers were absent, the opposite was found to be true. They were reported to experience distress, anger and self-doubt. There were some children who blamed themselves for their fathers' absence. The absence of fathers also impacted children's peer relationships and even bullying. Many aspects of a child's development are supported by the presence of a father and weakened by the absence of the father.

Relationships between parents and their children can also affect the perspective a child has on the roles of each gender. Fischer's (2007) review hypothesized that gender roles cause people to perceive the world through their specific gender's cognitive lens. If a person does not meet the internalized gender role, it can cause gender-role stress and conflict, called gender-role strain. The goal of Fischer's (2007) study was to replicate the findings of earlier studies, which indicated a relationship between men's experienced gender-role strain and the quality of their parental relationships. Control for personality factors found that gender-role strain decreased in males when the quality of parental

relationships increased. These findings indicate the importance of quality parental relationships in the development and maintenance of gender-roles in males.

Mental health is another aspect of mental development that parental relationships have an impact on. Dwairy (2010) investigated the influence of parents on mental health and disorders and found that of the three parenting styles defined in the literature, authoritarian and permissive styles had negative effects on a child's psychological adjustment, while the authoritative style was associated with improved mental health. In another theory, parental acceptance or rejection and parental control, ranging from permissive to strict, were rated on a continuum. Paternal rejection was found to be related with many mental problems in children including conduct problems, depression and low self-esteem. With regards to parental control, it was found that a balance was needed between too much control which could cause depression and stifle psychological development and control of behavior which reduced conduct disorders. The effect of inconsistency in parenting styles as a factor in children mental disorders indicated that there was an association between parental inconsistency and psychological disorders, especially in cultures with an emphasis on the collective. All of these studies provide evidence for the impact and importance of parental relationships on the mental development of children.

**Social Development.** Many social theorists propose that children learn how to act in a social situation and develop socially because of the socialization they get from their parents. This socialization comes from observing and participating in social situations in the home with their parents. In a study conducted by Feldman, Masalha, and Derdikman-Eiron (2010), sets of parents from two different cultures, Israeli and Palestinian, were



observed to ascertain the methods of conflict resolution used by each couple. The Israeli and Palestinian couples had two different methods of conflict resolution. The participants' children's method of conflict resolution was then observed and the researchers found that both the Israeli and Palestinian children dealt with conflict between their peers in the same manner as their parents.

The aggressive behavior of the children while in child care was also studied. Marital hostility not only predicted aggressive behavior in the child but also had an effect on behavioral problems and social development. Another predictor of child aggression was the relationship the parents had with each other. If the parents were not supporting each other in their roles as parents, then aggressive behavior was more likely to occur. The significance of parental relationships can be observed in several other areas of social development as well.

A child's educational success or failure has been associated with the quality of parental and marital relationships. There is evidence that children who have experienced divorce are more likely to struggle with completing school. Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, Hair, Day, Moore and Kaye (2009) hypothesized that adolescents would have a greater chance of graduating from high school and progressing on to postsecondary education if their parents had strong marital and parental relationships. A longitudinal study was used to assess the impact of the quality of marital and parental relationships, which was determined by a previous study, on academic development. The marital and parental relationships of parents were found to contribute to the accomplishment of at least one of the educational outcomes, especially enrollment in postsecondary education. It seems

that students are impacted in their educational endeavors by the quality of marital and parental relationships at home.

The absence of parental relationships can also have an effect on children and adolescents. It is common for juvenile delinquency to be associated with parental divorce. Burt, Barnes, McGue and Iacono (2008) supported this conclusion of parental divorce and adolescent delinquency by providing evidence against a genetic explanation for adolescent delinquency after the divorce of parents. They accomplished this by involving both biological and adoptive families and observing the behavior of the children after the divorce. If the divorce happened during the children's lifetime and delinquency occurred subsequent to the divorce and persisted across biological and adoptive children, then it can be concluded that there is an environmental, not genetic, association between parental divorce and juvenile delinquency. This was the case in the study; therefore, the authors found support for their hypothesis. The relationship between bad parental relationships and a child's behavior provided evidence for the influence of parents on their children's lives.

**Sexual Development.** Research has also been conducted on parenting and how it may contribute to a child's sexual orientation. Cameron and Cameron (1996) found that a parent's sexual orientation does have an effect on the orientation of a child, but recent studies have found the opposite. A survey was administered to adults who had been raised by a homosexual parent to determine if a parent's sexual orientation influences a child's sexual orientation. Children are affected by their parent's homosexuality or heterosexuality; however, a major limitation to this study is the small sample size that was used.

Fulcher, Sutfin, and Patterson (2008) administered several surveys to over 50 families, half of which had heterosexual parents and the other half which had homosexual parents. The surveys consisted of measures of a child's understanding of gender stereotypes, occupational goals, parental attitudes of the child's gender development and parental sharing of childcare. All of these tests were used to assess a child's gender development in relation to their parent's sexual orientation. Results indicated that a child's development was not generally affected by the parental sexual orientation. Patterson (2006) reported similar findings with regards to parental influence on a child's development.

In a recent study, Alanko et al. (2009) hypothesized that both childhood gender atypical behavior and homosexual orientation were related to negative parental relationships. Their sample was matched pairs of homosexual and heterosexual males and females. Three instruments were utilized to measure current sexual orientation, childhood sexual identity, and parenting styles. The data were analyzed and compared between homosexual and heterosexual participants based on gender. The paternal relationship was different in atypical males compared to typical males. They also found that, contrary to previous study, homosexual men reported warmer relationships with fathers and mothers compared to heterosexual men and heterosexual men reported more parental coldness than homosexual men. Finally, both male and female homosexuals claimed to experience more maternal control than either heterosexual males or females.

There is a discrepancy between the earlier and later studies of parental relationships and homosexuality. Parental influence is still being observed and studied to determine its exact effect on sexual identity. More specifically, the relationship between

father and son may be significant in the son's sexual identity formation. Bos, Sandfort, de Bruyn and Hakvoort (2008), found that people who experienced same-sex attraction were less satisfied with their relationships with their fathers compared to those people who do not experience same-sex attraction.

### **Father-Son Relationship**

**Cognitive Development.** Psychologists have even been able to determine the specific influence fathers have on their sons' mental development. Reeb and Conger (2009) found that adolescent depressive symptoms were related to paternal depressive symptoms. These results were found after controlling for maternal depression, gender, family history, and previous symptoms of depression in the adolescent. In an earlier study, Enns, Cox and Larsen (2000), administered the Parental Bonding Instrument and the Beck Depression Inventory to outpatients diagnosed with depression. They were studying a correlation between depression and parental bonding in adults. Men whose fathers scored high in overprotection were significantly related with depression. The severity of the symptoms of depression was connected with the parental bonding experienced by patients when they were children.

Parental control is another factor in the mental development of a male child. Dwairy and Achoui (2010) defined parental control as several behaviors used by parents to over-control and over-regulate a child's activities, influence their child's thoughts and feelings and stifle independence. This excessive control can cause depression and anxiety in a child who feels helpless and unable to control his life. According to Dwairy and Achoui (2010), in western culture, mothers were more controlling of sons than fathers were. However, a father's control was found to be more detrimental than a

mother's and was correlated with psychological disorders. The reason a father's control was more detrimental was that it was intensified when a child was disobedient. Another hypothesis for the relationship between a father's control and psychological disorders in his child, is the view of parental control. If control is seen as a negative aspect of a relationship, then it will cause more stress but if control is seen as a positive aspect, it could help prevent some disorders. This study provides evidence for the claim that fathers can influence the mental development of their child, even through a thing as simple as control.

Paternal relationships have also been investigated for their role in antisocial personalities and characteristics. Pfiffner, McBurnett and Rathouz (2001), compared families with and without fathers to determine the effect a father has on the antisocial qualities present in each family member. The type of father for every family was placed on a continuum of *In Home*, *Trackable Out-of-Home* and *Untrackable*. The antisocial characteristics tended to increase as the fathers became further removed from the families. Child antisocial characteristics did not decrease even with the presence of a stepfather to replace the absent father. This indicates that a father's presence has a unique impact on his children's personalities, which may not be duplicated by any other man.

In a study involving child molesters, evidence for the importance of the father-son relationship was investigated. Bogaerts, Vanheule, and Declercq (2005) compared a group of participants who had personality disorders, such as schizoid and antisocial personality disorders, and a group who did not have personality disorders. The results of this comparison indicated that the parenting role of a father is important and decisive.

According to the personality-disordered group, fathers were found to allow more independence and were more uncaring when compared with the non-personality disordered group.

A couple of conclusions were drawn from these results. The first was that fathers who allow a child to have autonomy need to know that if a certain level of autonomy is exceeded, problems can ensue. If there is too much control in the relationship then it can be classified as overprotection but too little control can be classified as neglect..

Bogaerts et. al. (2005) stated that a sensitive parent is characterized by the warmth of the interactions with the child and also the ability to understand the needs of the child but still give them autonomy. Another conclusion drawn for these results was the importance of the relationship between a father and his child. A father's relationship influenced the development of personality disorders in children.

The influence a father can have on his son's mental development is also seen in how the son conducts himself. Harper and McLanahan (2004) executed a study that explored the relationship between youth incarceration and absent fathers. They found that male adolescents who lived in a home without a father had elevated risks for incarceration when compared with male adolescents who did live with their fathers. Several other factors such as poverty and teen motherhood were controlled but did not account for the elevated level of incarceration in father-absent homes. Another interesting finding of this study involved the influence of a stepparent on the incarceration rate. The researchers found that incarceration rates not only increased but were at their highest in homes with a stepparent. This indicates the importance of the presence of a child's biological father instead of a stepparent.

In a previous study, Mackey and Mackey (2003), produced similar results regarding father absence and violent young men. Father absence was a much stronger predictor of violence in young men than poverty. Any attitude which promotes a maximization of the time a father has with his young son should result in less violent behaviors by the son once he has reached adulthood. The longer a father is present in his son's life, the less violent the son is likely to be. These studies provide evidence for the importance of the father-son relationship in many aspects of development.

**Social Development.** The impact a father has on the social development of his children has been researched extensively because of the rise of absent fathers in the culture today. In a study on the effects divorce had on college-aged students, Nielsen (1999) reviewed the literature and found that even while parents are married sons generally have more social, emotional and psychological problems compared to daughters. However, "many of these problems are related to the son and mother being too dependent on and involved with one another and the son and father being too uninvolved" (¶ 10). Also, these problems tended to become worse after a divorce and separation from the father. These may be reasons for social immaturity and other problems in males whose parents are divorced and whose father is not the primary caregiver. These findings indicate the importance of a father figure on the social development of his children.

A father's influence does not diminish as a child becomes older, as evidenced in the following study. Mandara and Murray (2006) assessed the occurrence of adolescent drug use in relation to father absence. They administered a questionnaire to measure several aspects of the participants' lives including the absence of fathers, socioeconomic

status, adolescent drug use, and friends' drug use. Gender was the main factor that determined the effect of father absence on drug use. A father's absence did not have an influence on female drug use, but it did influence and was a strong predictor of males' drug use. The effect of father absence was so strong for males that once it was controlled, the other factors studied did not have a large unique effect. There was a perceived gender difference in the drug use of adolescents with absent fathers that was not present in the father-present adolescents who had an equally low usage rate. When father-absent males were compared with father-absent females and father-present adolescents, father-absent males were found to be more likely to use drugs. The amount and combination of drugs used was also affected by the presence or absence of a father in this study. All of these results point to the importance of the father-son relationship in the social choices made by adolescents.

Dick (2004) investigated the childhood relationship males had with their fathers as a predictor of violence in the son's future romantic relationships. Participants were asked to complete several questionnaires used to assess self-esteem, conflict tactics and basic demographic information. The Fatherhood Scale was also used to measure the perceived father-child relationship. This scale is based on the historical roles of a father, self-psychology and paternal involvement. Participants were placed into violent or non-violent categories on the basis of any self-reported acts of physical abuse against an intimate partner. Results indicated that only negative paternal involvement was significantly different between the groups. The researchers found several factors that were characteristic of violent men, which included the likelihood of an absent father and



negative paternal relationships. The quality of the father-son relationship can affect a son's romantic relationships in the future.

Parents teach their children how to act in social situations. If a father and son have a negative relationship, it is likely that the son will have negative relationships with those around him. Basic functioning in relationships is learned from the relationships a child has with his or her parents and if those relationships are positive then peer relationships are likely to be positive as well. Children's psychological adjustment is also related to parental acceptance or rejection. If a child perceives from a parent that he or she is not wanted, hostility and aggression can arise within the child (Nelson & Coyne 2008).

Nelson and Coyne (2008) conducted a study on the intent attributions of children and their association with paternal and maternal parenting practices. They hypothesized that hostile intent attributions would be positively correlated with negative forms of parenting such as parental control and also that there would be a negative association between hostile intent attributions and paternal warmth. The authors measured intent attributions through the use of two questions involving different scenarios. Parental warmth and responsiveness and corporal punishment and parental control were the dimensions used to determine parenting.

Fathers seem to play a role in many aspects of development in their children, particularly in their sons. Maternal relationships were not found to be statistically significant in the study; however, paternal relationships were shown to be influential. Emotional distress and hostile intents were found to be relieved when fathers were characterized as warm and responsive to their children. The opposite was true when

children felt rejection from their father and aggressive responses abounded when relating to both parents and peers. As Dick (2004) hypothesized, parental control was associated strongly with aversive parenting, which has been found to contribute to negative child outcomes. Nelson et. al. (2008) suggested that a boy may not be able to control himself when provoked or see a situation from a different perspective if his father constantly manipulates his son's sense of psychological autonomy. Aversive parenting can have a negative effect on boys' emotional development.

The quality of the father-son relationship can influence how boys act and view the world, which in turn affects everything about them. Parental influences were not only extremely strong for paternal influence but almost to the point of being exclusive. This result implies that parent-child relationships need to be assessed based on the gender of both individuals.

**Sexual Development.** There are many aspects involved in relationships, including presence, attachment, and affection. These aspects have been researched to determine if the state of a male's relationship with his father contributes to homosexuality. The effect of the presence or absence of a father in a son's life has been researched extensively. Green, Williams and Goodman (1985) found that boys who were described as having more feminine traits spent less time with their fathers in their first year and were least likely to be living with their father by the time they were five, compared to boys who were described as more masculine. Other studies (Kagel & Schilling, 1985; McCord, McCord & Thurber, 1962) have indicated that a boy's gender identity and possibly sexual orientation are affected by the absence or presence of his

father in the household. These studies converge and present evidence for the importance of the father-son relationship in a young boy's life.

In a study conducted by Mandara, Murray and Joyner (2005), masculinity was shown to be affected by fathers. The authors administered tests for self-esteem, gender role development and family functioning to 106 15-year old African American boys and girls. Boys with absent fathers were found to be less masculine compared to boys with present fathers. More traditional roles for both boys and girls were evident in homes with present fathers. This study supports the influence a father has on a child's gender identity development and perceptions of masculinity.

Affection has also been considered an important component in a father-son relationship and has been found to aid in determining the quality of the relationship. Affection is the method that humans use to convey a relationship and love; therefore, affection can be a major indication of the quality of a relationship. Multiple studies (Floyd & Morman, 1998; Floyd & Morman, 2000; Floyd, Sargent, & Di Corcia, 2004), have been conducted to assess affection in human relationships, including the father-son relationship. Using the Affectionate Communication Index, psychologists have been able to measure affection within relationships. Males who are homosexuals tend to be neglected emotionally by their fathers and receive less affection than their heterosexual counterparts.

Attachment is another important component in relationships that is starting to be explored by psychologists. The closeness in a father and son relationship may be a contributor to homosexuality. According to Lung and Shu (2007), paternal attachment and a few other factors, such as introversion and neurotic characteristics, were prominent

in the development of homosexuality in males. The protection style of paternal attachment, defined by the Parental Bonding Instrument, was a major contributor. An earlier study conducted by Bernstein (1997) suggested that maternal attachment affected homosexual identity development in a positive manner, in contrast to paternal attachment, which caused a decline in homosexual development. The results indicated that a person with a higher level of paternal attachment was less likely to have an attraction for the same sex. Attachment is a concept that needs to be researched further to understand fully the impact it may have on same-sex attraction in males.

In summary, the literature indicates the importance of the father-son relationship and the need to maintain quality relationships in order to sustain healthy development in a child. The purpose of this current study was to assess any generational differences in parental bonding in the father-son relationship of the young and older generation. There are too many factors involved in a relationship to evaluate thoroughly each aspect individually. Therefore, the father-son relationship was assessed by measuring parental bonding in the context of care and protection. It was hypothesized that a generational difference between the older and younger generation in father-son relationships did exist. It was also hypothesized that the relationship between fathers and males who are 25 to 45 years of age was not characterized with affection or closeness compared to males who are 18 to 22 years of age.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants consisted of 40 male individuals between the ages of 18 and 45. They were categorized into two groups; the first group was composed of 20 males who

were aged 25 to 45 years old and were acquired through solicitation. The second group consisted of 20 males, ages 18 to 22 that were acquired from a general psychology class at a mid-sized Evangelical university. Participants varied in socioeconomic statuses, education levels and race. The sample was a convenience sample based on the willingness of individuals to participate in the study.

### **Instrument**

A paper and pencil questionnaire was created and administered to both groups. It consisted of the Father Form of the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI), as well as a filter question. The last question was a question used to determine if the father was present in the son's life. Only participants whose fathers were physically present were included in the study.

The PBI is an instrument that assesses parenting styles from the perspective of a young child by requiring the adult participants to answer based on their first 16 years of life (Appendix). The parenting styles were measured using *care* and *protection* or *control* scales. There is an individual form for each parent that must be completed separately; however, for the purpose of this study only the Father form was included. Each form consisted of 25 items which were rated on a Likert Scale ranging from *very like*, *moderately like*, *moderately unlike* and *very unlike*. Thirteen of the 25 items were part of the protection scale and the remaining 12 were from the care scale. Scores for each scale were determined by the answers given to the corresponding questions and then combined to produce a final care and protection score.

The care scale consists of questions such as “spoke to me in a warm and friendly voice” and “enjoyed talking things over with me.” These questions deal specifically with

parental warmth and how a parent expressed their concern for their child, compared to rejection and indifference. However, the questions from the protection scale focus on how a parent tried to control their child's behavior and foster dependency instead of autonomy. Questions from the protection scale included "liked me to make my own decisions" and "gave me as much freedom as I wanted."

A parent can be categorized into any of four types of parenting based on their care and control scores. If parents score high in protection and care they fall into the category of *affectionate constraint* and parents who score high in protection and low in care are categorized as *affectionate control*. The *optimal parenting* category is characterized by low protection and high care, while *neglectful parenting* is low protection and low care. These categories determine the type of relationship a child has with their parent.

The reliability and validity of the PBI has been studied extensively in multiple studies (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979; Wilhelm & Parker, 1990). Reverse coding of half of the items for each subscale made the measure more reliable. This instrument will be used to assess the attachment styles between father and son in both groups of participants.

### **Procedure**

This study is a quantitative study, utilizing survey research. After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University, participants were gathered from two populations. The first group was composed of 20 individuals who were asked to participate in the study randomly. Participants for the second group were acquired from a lower-level psychology class after the researcher obtained permission from the professor to present the questionnaire to students. Although no identifying

information was acquired, the researcher did come in contact with these participants; however, contact was minimal and consisted only of handing the survey to the participants and collecting them. The informed consent forms and questionnaires were gathered by the researcher once they were completed.

### **Results**

The first group, representing the 25 to 45 year old males, had a variety of the types of parenting listed in the PBI. Forty percent, or eight participants, of the first group indicated that their fathers fell into the optimal parenting quadrant, while 15%, or three people, had fathers who were categorized as affectionate constraint parenting. The neglectful parenting quadrant consisted of 20%, or four participants, and the remaining five participants, 25%, populated the affectionless control quadrant. All of the questionnaires given to the first group were able to be used for analysis. This means that of the surveys used, 100% of all the fathers in the first group were present in their sons' lives. The sample means were based on the 20 questionnaires. The mean care score was  $\bar{X} = 23.2$  and the mean protection score was  $\bar{X} = 12.5$ .

Only 19 of the 20 questionnaires from the second group were used because one participant indicated his father was not present. The second group consisted of nine participants with fathers in the optimal parenting quadrant and three participants with fathers in the affectionate constraint quadrant, 47% and 16% respectively. Four, or 21%, of the participants had affectionless control scores and the remaining three, or 16%, of participants were characterized with a parental bonding score that fell in the neglectful parenting quadrant.

After the data from the second group was collected, it was analyzed based on the percentage of participants whose fathers were present and absent. Ninety-five percent of the fathers from the second group were present for at least the first 16 years of their sons' lives. The sample means for both the care and protection scales of the second group were determined based on the 19 questionnaires whose fathers were present. The mean care score was  $\bar{X} = 24.42$  and the mean protection score was  $\bar{X} = 10.84$ .

### Discussion

The findings indicate that participants in the first group were not as close to their fathers as the second group. Both groups received similar mean care and protection scores; however, the small difference between the scores placed the first and second groups in separate quadrants. The cut-off scores for the Father Form of the Parental Bonding Instrument are designated as 24 for the care score and 12.5 for the protection score. Scores that are at or above those numbers are considered high and scores that are below those numbers are considered low. According to the sample means of the first group, they have a low care score and a high protection score, which corresponded to the *affectionless control* quadrant. However, the sample means for the second group indicated a high protection score and a low protection score, which corresponded to the *optimal parenting* quadrant.

According to Enns, et. al. (2000), parental warmth and interest is reflected in the PBI's care scores, contrasting rejection and indifference. This means that the first group's low care score could be associated with a father-son relationship that was characterized with occasional feelings of rejection or indifference from the father. On the other hand, the second group's high care score means the sons have experienced warmth



and interest from their fathers. Enns, et. al. (2000) also described the protection score as a measure of parental over-control and a refusal of independence rather than an encouragement of autonomy. This portrays the first group's fathers as somewhat controlling figures, while the second group's fathers encouraged independence and autonomy in their sons.

The second group varied consistently in the parenting quadrants that were present. All four parenting styles were represented in the second group; however, the majority of fathers in the second group were characterized by *optimal parenting* with high scores in care and low scores in protection. The first group was characterized by the opposite results of low scores in care and both high and low scores of protection. Based on the results, there may be a generational difference in the parental bonding of father-son relationships between the older and younger generation. It is difficult to be certain of a generation difference when the care and protection scores were both extremely similar.

There are several limitations to the current study that could restrict its external validity. The small sample size reduced the amount of similarity to the population. However, the large amount of diversity in the group increased the representativeness of the sample size. Another limitation is the religious affiliation of the sample. Religious families are generally known for their quality family relationships, which could have caused the participant to answer in a way that they felt was appropriate with their religious beliefs instead of answering truthfully. In future studies, a larger, non-religious sample size should be evaluated to increase the external validity.

The use of college-aged males for the second group was also a sampling limitation. The comparison of college students in the second group and males with a

wide range of ages for the first group might not have been an accurate comparison. A future study might benefit by matching participants in both groups. Participants could be matched according to many factors including age and race. This might increase the internal validity of a future study.

Another limitation to the current study is determining whether protection or care has the most influence on the quality of the relationship. If the major factor is care and the level of protection can vary without affecting how a person views the closeness of the relationship then researchers would be able to understand what aspects create close relationships. Also, this study excludes other important relationships that could be studied for generational differences. The mother-son relationship, which can be imperative in the development of a child, was not investigated in the current study. Future studies should include the investigation of the influence of the mother-son relationship.

A suggestion for future research on father-son relationships and parental bonding is the inclusion of a few questions on family structure in the questionnaire. The questionnaire could even be augmented with free-response questions regarding participants' perceptions of their relationship with their parents. It would also be interesting to assess other aspects of relationships such as affection and communication in future studies. This would give researchers a better understanding of the different dynamics that create quality relationships between parents and children.

Finally, a study investigating the relationship between parental bonding in the father-son relationship and the sexual development of the son would be insightful. This could be done by switching the first group of males in the current study with a group of males who have experienced same-sex attraction. The results could be compared to

determine if there was a difference between the two groups. A significant difference in the scores of both of the groups could indicate that the father-son relationship plays a role in the development of homosexuality in male children.

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## Appendix

## The Parental Bonding Instrument: Father Form

*This questionnaire lists various attitudes and behaviours of parents. As you remember your FATHER in your first 16 years would you place a tick in the most appropriate box next to each question.*

**Very like Moderately like Moderately unlike Very unlike**

1. Spoke to me in a warm and friendly voice
2. Did not help me as much as I needed
3. Let me do those things I liked doing
4. Seemed emotionally cold to me
5. Appeared to understand my problems and worries
6. Was affectionate to me
7. Liked me to make my own decisions
8. Did not want me to grow up
9. Tried to control everything I did
10. Invaded my privacy
11. Enjoyed talking things over with me
12. Frequently smiled at me
13. Tended to baby me
14. Did not seem to understand what I needed or wanted
15. Let me decide things for myself
16. Made me feel I wasn't wanted
17. Could make me feel better when I was upset
18. Did not talk with me very much

19. Tried to make me feel dependent of her/him
20. Felt I could not look after myself unless she/he was around
21. Gave me as much freedom as I wanted
22. Let me go out as often as I wanted
23. Was overprotective of me
24. Did not praise me
25. Let me dress in any way I pleased