

The Relationship Between Father Involvement and Father-Role Confidence for Fathers of Gay Sons

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This nonexperimental quantitative study of 70 participants explored how father involvement during their gay sons' childhood and adolescence was impacted by their levels of father-role confidence (FRC) and past father involvement experiences (PFIE). As hypothesized, the results indicated that participants' past involvement with their fathers, and reported levels of father-role confidence, predicted father-gay son involvement (FGSI). Participants in this study predominately exhibited indirect, non-nurturing, or low-engagement types of father involvement activities with their gay sons rather than direct, nurturing, or high-engagement activities. Implications from the results of this study may be used to inform existing therapeutic approaches for fathers of gay sons, increase father-gay son engagement, and promote relationship reconciliation efforts between adult gay men and their fathers.

Keywords: gay sons, father involvement, parents, sexual minority, homosexuality

Introduction

Over the past two decades, social acceptance of homosexuality steadily increased in most countries (Pew Research Center, 2020). A Pew Research Center (2017) study reported that 70% of Americans believe homosexuality should be accepted compared with only 46% in 1994. Despite the increase in social acceptance of homosexuality, there is a rising trend by researchers in counseling literature to focus on parental acceptance of

their sexual minority children (Conley, 2011; D'Augelli et al., 2008; Grafsky, 2014; LaSala, 2010, 2013; Rostosky et al., 2021; Ryan et al. 2010).

Research on parental reactions to a child's "coming out" experiences has been based predominately on the child's recollections (Cramer & Roach, 1988; D'Augelli et al., 2008; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998; Willoughby et al., 2006). The seminal work by Savin-Williams (2001) documented how families negotiate

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relationships with gay and lesbian youth after their sexuality disclosures. Savin-Williams's work continues to be cited in counseling literature (e.g., Glennon, 2012; Grafsky, 2014; Horn & Wong, 2014; Shpigel et al., 2013) to inform family counseling approaches. LaSala's (2010) study on the coming out experiences of gay and lesbian youth included interviews with sexual minority youth and only some of their parents. Studies are now available that explore the parents' perspectives and the challenges they face in dealing with their sexual minority children beyond the coming out phase. For example, topics in the research include parents resolving uncomfortable memories of their sexual minority child's history (Aveline, 2006), talking about their child's sexual orientation in existing social circles (Glennon, 2012), adjusting to their new identity as parents of a sexual minority child (Goodrich, 2009; Grafsky, 2014; Lee & Lee, 2006), and finding social support options (Saltzburg, 2004, 2009). Although fathers of gay sons were among the participants in several studies (e.g., Aveline, 2006; Glennon, 2012; Goodrich, 2009; Grafsky, 2014; Lee & Lee, 2006; and Saltzburg, 2004, 2009) the father-gay son relationship was not specifically addressed.

The counseling approaches recommended for use with parents of sexual minority children are based on studies where fathers are underrepresented (LaSala, 2010, 2013; Horn & Wong, 2014, 2016). The experiences of fathers of gay sons are rarely documented in studies on parents of sexual minority children (Glennon, 2012; Jadwin-Cakmak et al., 2015). Jadwin-Cakmak et al. caution that studies on sexual minority children that oversample mothers may wrongly inform counselors to anticipate fathers' responses that are not reflective of actual societal experiences. In Grafsky's (2014) study, the two fathers who participated reported low levels of closeness

with their gay sons; however, each father indicated that they were not bothered by their son's sexual orientation disclosure. The finding in Grafsky's study contradicts the belief that fathers of gay sons would be less close after sexual orientation disclosure because they are not accepting of homosexuality or that they experience some level of homophobia (LaSala, 2010, 2013).

The available research on parents of sexual minority children does not adequately look at the unique concerns of fathers of gay sons (Gottlieb, 2000; Horn & Wong, 2014, 2016; Jadwin-Cakmak et al., 2015; LaSala, 2013). Counseling approaches specific to the fathers' needs have not been evaluated in the literature on gay sons (Horn & Wong, 2014, 2016). The therapeutic goal in family therapy case studies that include fathers of gay sons is the acceptance of the gay son's sexual orientation (Diamond & Shpigel, 2014; LaSala, 2013) without accounting for relational deficits or emotional health of their fathers. Research on factors that impede or promote father-gay son involvement is necessary to better inform existing counseling approaches with gay men and their fathers.

Background

A common theme in research on the father-gay son relationship is how the unmet need for a father is an enduring factor impacting gay men's social and emotional health (Koritar, 2013, McAndrew & Warne, 2010; Rose, 2005). In counseling literature, gay men are presented with disproportionately high incidences of having distant (Seutter & Rover, 2004) or harsh fathers (Rose, 2005; McAndrew & Warne, 2010; Koritar, 2013). Openly gay psychotherapist Rose (2005, 2007) expressed his surprise that the father wounds of his adult gay male clients represented greater therapeutic impasses than dealing with social stigma, homophobia, or

discrimination. Rose (2005) suggested that therapists avoid focusing on the father-gay son relationship because psychoanalytical theorists use it to explain male homosexuality development (Bieber et al., 1962; Isay, 1989; Nicolosi, 1991; Socarides, 1978). Rose (2005) confirms that exploring the father-gay son relationship is a therapeutic tool for addressing the presenting symptoms in gay male clients.

Through an exhaustive search of the literature, only three studies were discovered that focused on the father-gay son relationship from the father's perspective, however, none of the studies focused specifically on father-gay son involvement. First, a qualitative study was completed by psychotherapist Gottlieb (2000) consisting of narrative accounts from 12 fathers about their gay sons. Second, a mixed-method study by Bucher (2014), using both surveys ($n = 50$) and interviews ($n = 25$), explored the relationship between homophobia and masculinity for fathers of gay sons. Third, a qualitative study by Horn and Wong (2016) of five heterosexual fathers looked at the positive experiences of fathers with gay sons. Gottlieb (2000), Bucher (2014), Horn and Wong (2016) did not specifically focus on father involvement in their studies, but they did highlight the need for counseling approaches centered on improving a father's connection with his gay son.

In making recommendations for counseling professionals, Horn and Wong (2014, 2016) acknowledged the lack of literature to support clinical approaches that address the relational needs of fathers with gay sons. Horn and Wong (2014, 2016) indicated that fathers of gay sons have unique challenges or barriers that prevent many of them from engaging with their gay sons. These barriers included the disappointment fathers feel about their gay sons not meeting their expectations of masculine norms and the concerns they experience about the health

and safety of their gay sons (Horn & Wong, 2014). Additionally, men who do not experience strong emotional connections from their fathers may have difficulties connecting emotionally with gay sons (Horn & Wong, 2014).

Theoretical Framework and Variables

To study father involvement for fathers of gay sons, two predominant theories associated with father involvement in the literature were selected: social learning theory (Bandura, 1971; Lamb & Lewis, 2013) and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977; Seigny & Loutzenhiser, 2010). According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1971), a person learns behavior through observation within a social context. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1971) guides the research design for this study. For example, a man learns how to be a father by observing his father, a family friend, or relative (Bouchard, 2012). Additionally, self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986), or the degree a person believes they will be successful in performing a behavior, is applied to fathers of gay sons as a predictor of their involvement with their gay son.

This study explores father-gay son involvement by examining fathers' recollections of past involvement with their gay sons. The rationale for selecting "father-role confidence" and "past father involvement experiences" as independent (predictor) variables for "father-gay son involvement" dependent (criterion) variable in this study, was found by reviewing existing father involvement literature (Hofferth et al., 2013; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004; Pleck, 1997). Kwok, Ling, Leung, and Li (2013) determined that the level of parenting efficacy predicted father involvement, and a lack of involvement with children was found among fathers with low parenting efficacy. Hofferth et al.'s (2012)

longitudinal study of 409 men documented that a consistent pattern of positive parenting styles was passed from father to son, confirming that a man's involvement with his father predicts his future parenting behavior. Bouchard's (2012) study indicated that fathers who demonstrated lower levels of engagement with young children had received less involvement from parents in their childhood.

Father-Gay Son Involvement

Father involvement is shown to impact the development of children, both positively and negatively, depending on the quality and amount of engagement with children (Lamb, 2000; Long et al. 2014). Fathers influence their sons in unique ways compared to daughters that determine self-esteem (Dick & Bronson, 2005), gender identity (Galenson, 2015), and masculinity (Hammer & Good, 2010). The variety of ways fathers are involved with children is shown to be both direct (e.g., engaging emotionally and spending time doing activities) and indirect (e.g., providing financially and planning for their children's futures) (Hawkins et al., 2002). The criterion variable for this study, father-gay son involvement (FGSI), was reviewed in relationship to the two predictor variables: past father involvement experiences and father-role confidence.

Past Father Involvement Experiences

For this study, the past father involvement experiences (PFIE) variable includes the participants' activities with a biological father, adoptive father, stepfather or father figure. Research suggests that the primary learning mechanism for fathering behaviors is being fathered (Forste et al., 2009), which is consistent with social learning theories (Bandura, 1971). Intergenerational transmission of parenting behaviors, both positive and negative, is well documented in existing research (e.g., Belsky

et al., 2005; Bouchard, 2012; Chen et al., 2008; Conger et al., 2003). Past father involvement experiences predicted future father-son involvement in previous research on family populations in the U.S. (Guzzo, 2011); Turkey (Ünlü-Çetin & Olgan, 2012); and a Jewish kibbutz (Gaunt & Bassi, 2012).

Father-Role Confidence

Father-role confidence in this study is the beliefs a man has about fatherhood, his identity as a father, and his fathering efficacy (Ohan et al., 2000). For fathers of gay sons, the impact of father-role confidence on father involvement has not been considered in the current literature. Existing research suggests that fathers of gay sons may have low fathering efficacy, meaning that they may lack the knowledge or confidence in being a father, regardless of whether their son is gay (Aveline, 2006; Gottlieb, 2000). Jacobs and Kelley (2006) found in their study of paternal involvement that "the more confident fathers felt in the parenting role, the more involved they were in their children's lives" (p. 33). Bouchard et al. (2007) found that men's perceptions of parenting competence provided motivation to participate in childcare activities, especially if they had the support of the mother. In the Kwok et al. (2013) study, fathers with high fathering self-efficacy were involved in a greater number of activities with their children than fathers with low fathering self-efficacy.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants ($n = 70$) were recruited over 18 months across the US using convenience and snowball sampling methods. As shown in Table 1, the age span of participants ranged from 40 to 79. The predominant race/ethnicity of the population was White/Caucasian (87%, $n = 61$). The race/ethnicity of the remaining participants

consisted of African American (7.1%, $n = 5$), Hispanic/Latino (4.3%, $n = 3$), and Asian American (1.4%, $n = 1$). Most of the ages of the participants' gay sons at the time of the survey ranged from age 18 to 40, with 7.1% ($n = 5$) ranging in age from 15 to 17, and 7.1% ($n = 5$) ranging from age 41 to 50. The highest number of participants ($n = 62$) reported they first learned their son was gay when he was between the ages of 18 to 25. Only six fathers (8.6%) reported that their sons were below the age of 15 when they learned he was gay. Two fathers (2.9%) reported the age when they learned their son was gay as between ages 26 to 30.

The data set for this study was obtained through an online survey, consisting of a brief demographic questionnaire and a series of pre-existing instruments representing the study variables. The demographic questionnaire was designed to collect minimal information regarding the father's age, the father's race, the current age of the gay son, and the timing of when the father learned his son was gay. The remaining portion of the survey was comprised of three different pre-existing instruments to represent the three study variables.

Table 1

Frequencies: Sample Demographics (N = 70)

Fathers of Gay Sons		n	%
Age of Father			
	40 – 49	9	13%
	50 – 59	35	50.0%
	60 – 69	21	30.0%
	70 – 79	5	7%
	Total	70	100%
Race/Ethnicity			
	White/Caucasian	61	87.1%
	African American	5	7.1%
	Hispanic/Latino	3	4.3%
	Asian American	1	1.4%
	Total	70	100%
Current Age of Gay Son			
	15 – 17	5	7.1%
	18 – 20	13	18.6%
	21 – 25	18	25.7%
	26 – 30	13	18.6%
	31 – 40	16	22.9%
	41 – 50	5	7.1%
	Total	70	100%
Age of Gay Son When Father Learned He Was Gay			
	Under 15	6	8.6%
	15 – 17	24	34.3%
	18 – 20	20	28.6%
	21 – 25	18	25.7%
	26 – 30	2	2.9%
	Total	70	100%

One interfaith nonprofit organization that provided resources and workshops focused on healing between parents and gay children, agreed to recruit participants for the study. The organization recruited participants by

advertising the online survey link in their online newsletter, making direct contacts with potential participants, and emailing survey information to their father healing weekend event attendees. For a limited time,

some participants from the recruitment site were offered a \$5.00 virtual Amazon gift card as an incentive to complete the online survey. In addition to the main recruitment site, information about the study was shared through the following methods: personal contacts, personal referrals by participants or those close to participants, social media posts, flyers, and advertisements.

Measures

Father-Gay Son Involvement (FGSI)

The Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI) (Hawkins et al., 2002) was used to measure the type of involvement participants recalled having with their gay sons from infancy through adolescence. The instrument contains 26 items in a Likert scale format, ranging from 1 = never to 7 = always. Higher scores indicate higher levels of father involvement. The IFI (Hawkins et al., 2002) was developed to expand the concept of father involvement to include multidimensional ways fathers are involved with their children. The dimensions of father involvement are measured by the nine IFI subscales: discipline and teaching responsibility, praise and affection, mother support, school encouragement, providing, attentiveness, time and talking together, reading and homework support, and development talents and future concerns.

Validity. Hawkins et al. (2002) demonstrated face validity by use of a focus group of fathers who gave their feedback about the accuracy of the items included in the IFI. Construct validity was determined by analyzing intercorrelations between items in the scale (Hawkins et al., 2002). Comparisons of the *t*-test's means from the surveys of married resident and nonresident father populations were performed to confirm construct validity (Hawkins et al., 2002).

Reliability. Internal consistency reliability testing of the IFI reported a global

Cronbach's alpha of .94, with the subscales ranging from .69 to .87 (Hawkins et al., 2002). Reliability of the IFI is demonstrated in numerous other studies, where good psychometric properties were reported when using the IFI with different populations of fathers (Bradford & Hawkins, 2006; Flouri, 2004; Fong & Lam, 2007; Kwok et al., 2013). Similar global Cronbach's alphas (.92 to .96) were reported in a recent study that used the IFI (Kwok et al., 2013). The global Cronbach's alpha for this sample is .95, and subscale alphas range from .71 to .89.

Father-Role Confidence (FRC)

The 8-item Efficacy Subscale of the Parenting Sense of Competence (PSOC) (Johnston & Mash, 1989) instrument measures a parent's perceptions or beliefs about their parenting abilities (Johnston & Mash, 1989; Ohan et al., 2000). The measuring of father-role confidence levels of the participants in this study was related only to the parenting of their gay son. The PSOC Efficacy Subscale was among the instruments positively reviewed for measuring parenting confidence (Črnčec et al., 2010).

Validity. Researchers' testing of the PSOC have provided evidence of internal consistency, divergent, and convergent validity through factor analysis and partial correlation testing (Ohan et al., 2000). Problems of internal validity remain with the instrument's Satisfaction subscale, which is often used separately from the Efficacy subscale (Črnčec et al., 2010; Kwok et al., 2013). Stronger psychometric properties are associated with the Efficacy subscale than with the Satisfaction subscale (Ohan et al., 2000).

Past Father Involvement Experiences (PFIE)

To measure participants' retrospective involvement with their fathers during

childhood and adolescence, the 64-item Fatherhood Scale (FS) (Dick, 2004) was selected. The FS was designed to measure adult men's positive and negative memories of activities, direct or indirect, their fathers did with them or for them. Participants who were not raised by a father, stepfather, or adoptive father were instructed not to complete this portion of the survey. The FS consists of the following nine subscales: positive engagement, positive emotional responsiveness, negative engagement, moral father role, good provider role, gender role model, androgynous role, accessible father, and the responsible father. A total score above 256 indicates a positively engaged father, and a total score lower than 128 would indicate a negatively engaged father (Dick, 2004). The FS has been used along with the IFI (Hawkins et al., 2002) in researching the intergenerational transmission of father involvement in large populations of fathers (e.g., Ünlü-Çetin & Olgan, 2012).

Validity. Content or face validity was determined by reviews from psychology experts in fatherhood research who confirmed the accuracy of the content or recommended changes to wording more consistent with real experiences in father-child relationships (Dick, 2004). Construct validity is confirmed through theoretically based correlations reflected in the instrument items and subscales (Corchran & Fischer, 2013).

Reliability. The FS subscales are significantly intercorrelated and have substantial construct validity with an overall Cronbach's alpha of .98, and the subscale alphas ranged from .80 to .96 (Dick, 2004). The reliability of the FS was demonstrated in subsequent research (e.g., Dick & Bronson, 2005; Rizvi, 2015; Ünlü-Çetin & Olgan, 2012), where the psychometric properties were consistent with the original tests. The global Cronbach's alpha for this sample is .87, and subscales ranged from the lowest at

.69 (Negative Paternal Engagement) to the highest at .93 (Positive Paternal Emotional Responsiveness).

Hypotheses

A series of three hypotheses were used to answer the primary research question: What relationship do father-role confidence and past father involvement experiences have with father-gay son involvement? The first research question (RQ) served to determine a statistically significant relationship between the predictor variables. The second and third research questions consider each predictor variable's relationship with the criterion variable.

RQ1: Is there a statistically significant relationship between father-role confidence and past father involvement experiences for fathers of gay sons?

H1₀: There is no statistically significant relationship between father-role confidence and past father involvement experiences for fathers of gay sons.

H1_a: There is a statistically significant relationship between father-role confidence and past father involvement experiences for fathers of gay sons.

RQ2: Do past father involvement experiences predict father-gay son involvement?

H2₀: Past father involvement experiences do not predict father-gay son involvement.

H2_a: Past father involvement experiences do predict father-gay son involvement.

RQ3: Does father-role confidence predict father-gay son involvement?

H3₀: Father-role confidence does not predict father-gay son involvement.

H3_a: Father-role confidence does predict father-gay son involvement.

Data Analysis

The data analysis phase had several steps that were prioritized both by the research questions and theoretical principles. First, the raw survey dataset was imported into an Excel file to enable scoring and formatting of the dataset. Next, the Excel file was imported into IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 23, for analysis. The following steps were performed in SPSS: (a) demographic data (e.g., age, race, etc.) categorical analysis, (b) tests for frequencies and descriptive statistics on all survey instrument responses, (c) computation of variables, (d) computation of Cronbach's alphas for all survey instruments and subscales, (e) Pearson's r correlation tests for variables and subscales, (f) graphical and plot tests were performed to verify statistical assumptions, (g) hypothesis testing with

ANOVA, and (h) multiple linear regression analysis.

Results

The descriptive statistic results for the criterion variable and predictor variables are found in Table 2. The instrument scores per variable are listed by means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum scores for the overall instrument, and scores individually by subscale. The Cronbach's Alpha for each instrument and subscale, demonstrating reliability for the population in this study, is listed in Table 2. The Pearson r correlation test for the IFI, PSOC-Efficacy, and FS subscales are found in Table 3.

Table 2

<i>Descriptive Statistics for Variable Instruments and Subscales</i>				
Instruments and Subscales	<i>M (SD)</i>	Min	Max	Alpha
Father-Gay Son Involvement (IFI, $n = 70$)	152.08 (20.64)	71	182	.95
IFI Providing	13.60 (1.36)	4	14	.89
IFI School Encouragement	18.91 (2.56)	7	21	.77
IFI Praise/Affection	18.49 (2.66)	11	21	.73
IFI Developing Talents/Future Concerns	17.97 (3.08)	8	21	.73
IFI Mother Support	17.69 (3.38)	7	21	.88
IFI Attentiveness	17.21 (2.81)	6	21	.73
IFI Discipline/Teaching	17.06 (3.12)	10	21	.77
IFI Time/Talking Together	15.61 (3.28)	9	21	.75
IFI Reading/Homework Support	15.49 (3.76)	3	21	.83
Father-Role Confidence (PSOC-Efficacy, $n = 70$)	34.04 (7.93)	17	48	.84
Past Father Involvement Experience (FS, $n = 60$)	215.52 (38.07)	135	303	.96
FS Good Provider Role	19.00 (2.59)	10	20	.77
FS Negative Paternal Engagement	47.05 (5.55)	21	54	.78
FS Moral Father Role	16.63 (4.90)	7	25	.78
FS Positive Emotional Responsiveness	41.15 (10.84)	20	60	.93
FS Positive Engagement	15.70 (4.53)	8	25	.88
FS Gender Role Model	17.52 (5.19)	7	27	.78
FS Androgynous Role	20.20 (4.93)	12	32	.69
FS Accessible Father	11.67 (3.91)	5	20	.80
FS Responsible Paternal Engagement	22.67 (8.15)	8	40	.90

Table 3

IFI, FS, PSOC Subscale Correlations

Subscales	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. IFI Discipline	--	.65**	.69**	.13	.53**	.47**	.35**	.49**	.53**	.34**	.28*	.22	.27*	.24	.27*	.17	.19	.04	.42**
2. IFI School	--	--	.71**	.51**	.60**	.65**	.62**	.68**	.68**	.31*	.25	.20	.29*	.37**	.28*	.29*	.15	.16	.43**
3. IFI Mother Support	--	--	--	.40**	.49**	.62**	.51**	.60**	.63**	.44**	.40**	.24	.37**	.40**	.44**	.39**	.27*	.26*	.50**
4. IFI Providing	--	--	--	--	.19	.22	.43**	.34**	.49**	.17	.04	.01	.12	.25	.06	.22	.02	.28*	.09
5. IFI Time/Talking	--	--	--	--	--	.74**	.67**	.77**	.68**	.53**	.49**	.56**	.55**	.54**	.46**	.20	.26*	-.01	.67**
6. IFI Praise/ Affection	--	--	--	--	--	--	.55**	.69**	.60**	.38**	.37**	.36**	.35**	.44**	.42**	.27*	.12	.16	.47**
7. IFI Talent/Future	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.66**	.70**	.40**	.32*	.34**	.34**	.44**	.34**	.30*	.20	.23	.46**
8. IFI Reading	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.70**	.48**	.37**	.41**	.38**	.39**	.31*	.21	.14	.12	.48**
9. IFI Attentiveness	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.37**	.26*	.30*	.34**	.34**	.25	.29*	.08	.15	.56**
10. FSRPE.	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.75**	.80**	.72**	.70**	.68**	.40**	.43**	.11	.54**
11. FSAF	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.79**	.70**	.78**	.81**	.37**	.34**	.06	.46**
12. FSPE.	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.75**	.78**	.69**	.32*	.30*	.10	.47**
13. FSAR	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.78**	.72**	.23	.25	.10	.55**
14. FSPPER	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.80**	.35**	.28*	.26*	.43**
15. FSGRM	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.49**	.35**	.08	.47**
16. FSMFR	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.38**	.03	.42**
17. FSGPR	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.05	.38**
18. FSNPE	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.05
19. PSOC Efficacy	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Note. * $p < .05$, two-tailed. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed. FSRPE = Fatherhood Scale Responsible Paternal Engagement, FSAF = Fatherhood Scale Accessible Father, FSPE = Fatherhood Scale Positive Engagement, FSAR = Fatherhood Scale Androgynous Role, FSPPER = Fatherhood Scale Positive Paternal Engagement Responsiveness, FSGRM = Fatherhood Scale Gender Role Model, FSMFR = Fatherhood Scale Moral Father Role, FSGPR = Good Provider Role, FSNPE = Fatherhood Scale Negative Paternal Engagement

Father-Gay Son Involvement (FGSI) Variable

The maximum score for the IFI (Hawkins et al., 2002) was 186, which means that a father responded “always” to the frequency he spent in the fathering activities listed in the instrument. The IFI subscales are listed individually to indicate the multiple ways fathers recalled being involved with their gay sons in this study. The mean score was 152 for the fathers in this study ($n = 70$), with the highest scores for the “providing” subscale ($M = 13.60, SD = 1.36$). The lowest scores for the “time and talking together” subscale ($M = 15.61, SD = 3.28$) and “reading/homework support” subscale ($M = 15.49, SD = 3.76$).

Past Father Involvement Experiences (PFIE) Variable

In Table 2, the nine FS (Dick, 2004) scales were listed individually to show the

types of involvement each study participant recalled having with his father. Total instrument scores between 128 and 256 are linked to low to moderate levels of positive paternal engagement. Of the participants in this study, only seven participants (10%) scored above 256. The mean score for the population in this study was 215 ($n = 60$). In the FS scoring, 10 participants could not complete the questionnaire because they did not have a father or father figure.

Father-Role Confidence (FRC) Variable

The mean score for father-role confidence measured by PSOC Efficacy Subscale (Johnston & Mash, 1989) was 34.04 ($SD = 7.39$). As shown in Table 2, the lowest score was 17 and the highest score was 48, which was the maximum possible score. The ranges of father-role confidence scores are depicted in more detail in Table 4.

Table 4

Father-Role Confidence Scores

	Score Range	<i>N</i>	%	Cumulative %
Low	17–32	26	37%	37%
Moderate	33–40	27	38%	75%
Moderate-High	41–45	11	17%	92%
High	46–48	6	8%	100%

Note: Father-Role Confidence scores measured by the PSOC Efficacy subscale

Hypothesis Testing

Prior to testing the hypotheses, a series of underlying assumptions should be confirmed through statistical checks (Hair et al., 2010). The variables were checked for the following conditions: normality, linearity, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, and the presence of outliers. The tests performed included the use of histograms, residual scatter plots, normal p-p plots, and residual

scores for Cook’s distance $< .5$ for outlier inclusion decisions. After it was determined the statistical assumptions had been met, the statistical testing of the hypotheses was undertaken.

Hypothesis One

The relationship between the FRC and PFIE variables was determined through statistical tests in SPSS. The PSOC efficacy

subscale, used to measure the FRC variable, was moderately, positively, and significantly correlated with the FS subscales, used to measure the PFIE variable, except for the negative paternal engagement subscale (see Table 2). The Pearson r correlation results for the PFIE and FRC variables were positive and significant at .559 ($p < .01$). As Table 5

shows, the PFIE variable was found to be a significant contributor to the FRC variable ($F(1, 58) = 26.33, p < .000$). The null hypothesis was rejected with a confidence interval alpha of 95%. Additionally, the regression analysis results confirm that PFIE predicts FRC, with 31.2% of the variance in the FRC variable explained by the PFIE variable.

Table 5

Regression Analysis Summary for PFIE Predicting FRC

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	9.386	4.878					.059
PFIE	.114	.022	.559	.312	26.33	1, 58	.000

Dependent Variable: Father-Role Confidence (Constant)

Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis, that the PFIE variable would predict the FGSI variable, was confirmed through step one of the two-step multiple regression analyses performed in SPSS as shown in Table 6. The PFIE variable accounted for 27.7% of the variance in FGSI scores. Total scores for the PFIE variable were entered as an independent or predictor variable in Step One. The PFIE variable was found to have a statistically significant relationship with the FGSI variable through the ANOVA test results ($F(1, 58) = 22.186, p < .000$). The null

hypothesis was rejected at an alpha level of 95%. In Step One of Table 6, the PFIE variable was shown to be a statistically significant predictor of the FGSI variable ($\beta = .526, t = 4.710, p = .001$). This result is expected based on Bandura’s (1962, 1971) social learning theory; however, other circumstances known to impact father involvement, such as being a residential father versus a non-residential father, the marital relationship, the father’s employment, or whether the father suffered from mental and physical illness (Pleck, 1997), were not measured.

Table 6

Two-Step Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting Father-Gay Son Involvement

Step and Predictor Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	R^2	ΔR^2	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>
Step One:							
PFIE	.285	.061	.526	.277	.277	.000	4.710
Step Two:							
PFIE	.149	.066	.275	.277	.277	.028	2.253
FRC	1.189	.323	.449	.415	.139	.001	3.677

Hypothesis Three

In Step Two of the multiple regression analysis, the hypothesis for question three was confirmed, with the FRC variable ($\beta = .449, p < .001$) accounting for an additional 13.9% of the variance in the FGSI variable. At an alpha level of 95%, the ANOVA test confirmed the rejection of the null hypothesis. A statistically significant relationship was confirmed between the predictor variables and the criterion variable, FGSI ($F(2,57) = 20.245, p < .000$).

The combined PFIE and FRC predictor variables accounted for 41.5% of the variance of the FGSI variable. This means that participants' interactions with their gay sons were significantly influenced both by their past experiences being fathered and their level of confidence as a father. The finding that the FRC variable had a stronger beta weight than the PFIE variable as an influence on the FGSI variable was not expected, based on the theoretical framework.

Discussion

The father-gay son involvement is best understood by reviewing the nine IFI subscales. The five subscales measuring indirect father involvement (providing, praise and affection, developing talents and future concerns, school encouragement, and mother support) are comprised of activities that do not require the physical presence of the father. For example, praise and affection is a measure of verbal comments (e.g., praising your child for being good or doing the right thing, telling your child you love them) and not a measure of physical affection between a father and his child. The four subscales measuring indirect father involvement (discipline and teaching responsibility, time and talking together, reading and homework support) are comprised of activities requiring the physical presence and time investment of the father with the child.

This population scored highest for indirect involvement subscales, such as the "providing" subscale ($M = 13.60, SD = 1.36$). The highest score means that 83% ($n = 58$) of the participants responded that they recalled "always" providing financially for their gay son. The providing subscale was followed in order by the other four indirect, less physical engagement subscales where fathers responded that they recalled "always" performing these activities: school encouragement 34% ($n = 24$), praise and affection 33% ($n = 23$), mother support 31% ($n = 22$), and developing talents and future concerns 29% ($n = 20$).

The lowest level of father involvement the participants recalled having with their gay sons was in direct physical engagement activities, such as the reading and homework support subscale ($M = 15.49, SD = 3.76$) and the time and talking together subscale ($M = 15.61, SD = 3.28$). The time and talking together subscale included items like "I was a pal or friend to my son" or "I spent time just talking with my son when he wanted to talk about something." The reading and homework support subscale included items such as "I read to my son" and "I helped my son with homework." Only eight fathers (11%) had the highest score (21/21) for time and talking together subscale, meaning that they recalled "always" engaging in the behaviors. Six fathers (8%) had the highest score (21/21) for the reading and homework support subscale.

Regarding the participants' high scores in the IFI (Hawkins et al., 2002) providing subscale, there are some limitations in making a unique interpretation for fathers of gay sons. Financial provision is the primary father involvement activity with other father populations as well (e.g., Kwok et al., 2013; Ünlü-Çetin & Olgan, 2012). The IFI (Hawkins et al.) providing subscale in this study was not significantly correlated with the PSOC efficacy subscale (Johnston &

Mash, 1989) or FS (Dick, 2004) scores. The participants in this study were not asked about their relationship with the gay sons' mothers nor if they were residential or non-residential fathers. The participants' higher levels of indirect, non-physically engaged father involvement in this study may be indicative of being a non-residential father, however, that information was not included in the demographic data collected. Financial provision may be imposed in the form of court-ordered child support, making this form of indirect father involvement unrelated to the FRC or PFIE variables by maternal relationship barriers (Fagan & Barnett, 2003).

Father-role confidence can be influenced by other factors not measured in this study, such as marital satisfaction (Kwok et al., 2013; Murdock, 2013; Sevigny & Loutzenhiser, 2010; Sevigny et al., 2016). The results should be interpreted with caution since the moderation is slight, but research indicates that a positive relationship with the child's mother as a co-parent improves parenting self-efficacy (Murdock, 2013; Sevigny et al., 2016) and acts as a buffer for transmission of negative generational parenting in men (Lunkenheimer et al., 2006). Research indicates that the behavioral outcomes of children are a predictor of parenting self-efficacy for mothers, but not fathers (Murdock, 2013; Sevigny et al., 2016), which is an important factor to consider when interpreting the results of this study. According to Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, even with parenting instruction or a desire not to repeat negative parenting behavior, men must have obstacle-free opportunities to perform successfully and established coping skills when met with adversity to engage with their children confidently (Schofield et al., 2014).

The indication that parenting efficacy is predicted by past experiences with a man's father is consistent with Bandura's (1982)

self-efficacy theory; however, this theoretical application is not consistently considered when recommending counseling interventions with fathers of gay sons. One reason for this overlooked consideration for fathers of gay sons is that research into fathers' parenting self-efficacy separate from mothers' parenting self-efficacy is relatively a new area of study (Sevigny et al., 2016). Another strong predictor of men's parenting self-efficacy is his co-parenting marital relationship with the child's mother, which may buffer the negative impact of a man's lack of experiences with his father (Sevigny et al., 2016).

A high percentage (89%) of the participants did not have a highly involved nurturing father of their own. In comparison, only 16% of the participants (fathers of heterosexual children) in the Long et al. (2014) study reported not having a close relationship with their fathers. The results of this study are mirrored in Gottlieb's (2000) qualitative work on fathers of gay sons, where the fathers without nurturing fathers struggled to connect with their gay sons. Gottlieb observed from his research that fathers of gay sons who grew up without an involved nurturing father were likely to play the breadwinner role as their primary father involvement when becoming a parent themselves.

Participants' overall scores on involvement with their gay sons were higher if they reported having a nurturing, highly involved father of their own. Other parenting research shows that only certain types of father involvement, direct physical engagement, promote feelings of father-child connection (Finley & Swartz, 2004). Previous studies on father involvement indicate that the strongest predictor of father-child connectedness is regular participation with the child in recreational activities or play (Brotherson et al., Goodsell et al., 2011). Participants with low PFIE scores, also

scored lower in regular participation with the direct physical engagement activities on the IFI (Hawkins et al., 2002) subscales, indicating a weak father-gay son connection for the participants in this study.

The FS (Dick, 2004) scores were consistent with the IFI (Hawkins et al. 2002) scores, where only 11% of participants reported having a nurturing relationship with their fathers. The smaller percentage of fathers that were involved in direct ways with their gay sons had the highest PCOS efficacy subscale scores and the highest FS subscale scores. These results do not imply that having a gay son represents causation for low father-role confidence, rather the father's confidence as a parent was influenced by past experiences with his father and not by having a son who eventually identified as gay.

Limitations

The limitations are discussed in terms of what could be improved to enhance the study's results if a similar study is conducted in the future. The limitations of this study include the scope of inquiry, the instruments used, the online data collection process, and sample size. Certain inquiries not included in this study, or delimiters, are discussed in terms of how their inclusion could improve or expand upon the results of this study.

Scope of inquiry. This study was limited by means of the topic selected, which was English-speaking fathers of gay sons living in the U.S. Other cultures may experience fathering a gay son differently or need adjustments to the language of the instruments used. There may be a population of fathers of gay sons living in the U.S. who do not speak English, that could have been included in this study.

Instrumentation. To measure levels of father involvement with a gay son, father-role confidence, and own father's involvement, the data collected was limited by the choices offered on the IFI (Hawkins et al., 2002), the

FS (Dick, 2004), and the PSOC Efficacy subscale (Johnston & Mash, 1998). The order and number of instruments may have been a limitation. The order of instruments included in the survey was considered carefully to promote completion. Completion of the IFI first would allow participants to think about numerous positive ways they contributed to their sons' lives prior to asking about their thoughts or beliefs about fatherhood in the PSOC Efficacy subscale. The FS instrument, which was inserted as the final instrument, could only be completed by participants who were raised by a father.

Data collection limitations. The data collection process was challenging because of the hard-to-reach population. Random sampling is not a reasonable option for such a specifically defined and hidden population like fathers of gay sons. Snowball sampling—or using others to recruit known fathers of gay sons—worked better than advertising. The challenges of using an online survey include having limited control over the identity of the participant taking the online survey recruited through snowball sampling.

Sample limitations. The original goal of this study was to obtain a sample size of at least 96 to obtain optimal statistical power determined by the Raosoft calculator. While the sample size of this study on fathers of gay sons is considered large compared to previous studies, it was still too small to conduct group comparisons within the sample. With a larger sample size, the participants who did not indicate having a father-figure raise them ($n = 10$) could have been compared to those that did ($n = 60$).

Future Research

What was not covered by the scope of this study was the father's relationship with the gay son's mother and the current health of the father-gay son relationship. Future studies could expand the collection of demographic

information on fathers of gay sons because they may play a role in father involvement. For example, no information was collected as to the religious affiliations, the level of education, the employment status, or the marital status of the fathers in this study. Previous studies on father involvement have included these demographic variables such as age and marital satisfaction as factors that impact father involvement (Kwok et al., 2013).

Researchers could examine more details of the father-gay son relationship related to father involvement. What is also not known in this study is how learning of the son's sexual orientation impacted father involvement for younger gay sons still living in the home with the father. Future research could include either a qualitative or quantitative element to explore the current health of the father-gay son relationship and whether counseling approaches with fathers of gay sons improve the future health of the relationship from both the father and gay son's perspectives.

Conclusions

Correlational research is suitable to inform counseling interventions when combined with experimental research literature of clinical interventions and their outcomes with specific populations (Thompson et al., 2005). Conclusions from this study raise three areas of concern in counseling practice. First, the father-gay son relationship was explored from the father's perspective instead of the son's expands the understanding of the relational deficits of gay men's fathers. Based on the literature reviewed on fathers of gay sons and the results of this study, counselors may need to consider the wounds and relational deficits fathers have (Miller, 2010) when including fathers in interventions focused on the gay son's healing. The fathers with their own father wounds possibly lack

the relationship skills necessary to father their sons in nurturing ways. Fathers may have challenges with being emotionally available to their gay sons, based on the lack of their own father's involvement or not having close non-sexual relationships with other men themselves (Horn & Wong, 2016).

Second, there is a connection between low father-role confidence and the types of father involvement activities men perform. The social learning (Bandura, 1962, 1971) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1983, 1986) theoretical framework is confirmed in the results of this study. The results indicate that fathers' involvement with their gay sons may be limited due to low father-role confidence and not having learned positive fathering behavior from their family of origin. Based on the results of this study, fathers may need help improving their relationship with their sons because they have neither learned positive fathering skills nor possessed the confidence as fathers to connect with their sons on an emotional level. As both Gottlieb (2000) and Bucher (2014) indicated, fathers of gay sons often have unresolved mental health issues and relational wounds to confront before working on the relationship with their gay son.

Third, relational deficits in the fathers-gay son relationship may have more to do with a lack of involvement men have with their fathers than with the sexual orientation of their sons. According to social learning theory, new behaviors can be learned, but behavioral reinforcement through social support must exist for lasting behavioral changes to occur (Bouchard, 2012). Fathers of gay sons will benefit from developing relationships with other fathers in social organizations where they could learn through modeling the behavior of fathers who experience close father-son relationships. Counseling sessions heavily concentrated on the therapist providing psychoeducational information about accepting a gay son are

unlikely to promote changes in the father's behaviors, attitudes, or relational skills if social supports are missing.

Counselors ought not dismiss fathers' expressions of regret over their parenting choices with their gay sons but use these expressions of regret as motivation to improve relationships with their gay sons. Fathers of gay sons could benefit from knowing what types of involvement are perceived as nurturing by their gay sons. By exploring the father's relational deficits from not having a nurturing relationship with another man, fathers may be encouraged to adopt more nurturing approaches when parenting their children. Adopting a problem-solving approach that is tailored to the father's relational history promotes a therapeutic alliance and helps prevent early termination of the counseling process.

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