Group 4: Masculinity and Fatherhood

Fatherhood, as a role and as an identity, is one that has presented itself in various, mutable forms throughout history. Each father’s experience exists within a context of the traditional ideal of fatherhood found in his culture, whatever that may be, but the various ways that men confront the limitations and obligations are as diverse as they are deeply personal. The connection fatherhood has had, throughout all cultures, to what it means to be a man is essential to understanding the relationships fathers develop with their families and the world around them. The role of hegemonic masculinity in fatherhood, personal development of identity, and emotional connection between father and child are common themes we saw throughout all of the readings.

Many fathers and sons have struggled with traditional norms of hegemonic masculinity. For example, as Jacob Bucher showed in “But He Can’t Be Gay”: The Relationship Between Masculinity and Homophobia in Father-Son Relationships,” add link to annotation a man’s value for masculinity awkward, rework is a huge major predictor for homophobia. Of men who highly value masculinity, 86% of fathers of gay sons rated high on the homophobic index, compared to 49% among fathers who do not value masculinity strongly. “Is that a bit confusing... can you streamline this sentence?” (Bucher 2014:229).

Interestingly, men were less likely to be homophobic when their sons were characterized as masculine, a fact reminiscent of Bridges & Pascoe (2016: 416) when they described that homophobia has less to do with one’s sexuality than with their lack of masculinity. 88% of fathers of masculine gay sons accept them and 46% of them feel comfortable disclosing their son’s sexuality to others. compared to 75% and 12%, respectively, for fathers of feminine gay sons (Bucher 2014:229). Themes of hegemonic masculinity also showed up in Bucher’s qualitative research; many men expressed being unable to see their sons as men because the pursuit of women is deeply ingrained in the definition of masculinity (Bucher 2014:232).

Similarly, in “Narratives of young South African fathers: redefining masculinity through fatherhood,” add link A.M. Enderstein and F. Boonzaier explore a confrontation between different constructions of hegemonic masculinity for young fathers in South Africa, who often act outside of the traditional gender roles their fathers might. Despite this, they see their role as a provider as an important part of fathering, especially if they already come from impoverished backgrounds (Enderstein and Boonzaier 2015:521). Inhabiting this role puts them in an essential position in the family and it forms an essential part of their understanding of their masculinity, as one father puts it: “if you are the guy you look after the family” (Enderstein and Boonzaier 2015:521). They will divert any spare resources to the child, and if they are unable to provide it makes them less likely to maintain a connection to their child. They are also more likely to pursue education and higher paying work in order to become more successful providers.

Meanwhile, to the men interviewed in “Memorable Experiences between Fathers and Sons: Stories That Shape a Son’s Identity and Perspective of His Father” add link by Edgar C.J. Long, Jessica N. Fish, Apryl Scheffer, and Brianna Hanert, hegemonic masculinity is simultaneously developing also important for fathers in the U.S. The men relate their own practices as fathers to the norms of family dynamics and fatherhood they experienced while growing up. The idea of a father being stoic or tough has not been completely abandoned by these men, but they mentioned associated the idea of father-son being idea that the father should be the sole provider and the practice of corporal punishment as conceptions of with the previous generation and found it compelling in the South African context (Long et al. 2014:129). streamlining writing: While the study certainly gives hope that not all negative hegemonic troupes are taken up by sons of bad fathers, the damaging effects of hegemonic masculinity have undoubtedly taken a toll on the identity of these men themselves, making them see themselves even today as stoic protectors for their own children (Long et. al 2014: 128).

Another theme we found throughout the three readings was the father-child relationship as a vehicle through which one renegotiates men renegotiate their masculinity and as a method of developing developing one’s identity. Enderstein and Boonzaier highlight the redefining of identity young South African fathers perform. Young fathers who accept their paternal role face being ostracized from their religious communities and friend groups, and are forced to depart early from traditional markers of masculinity like substance abuse, frivolous spending, and sexual promiscuity (Enderstein and Boonzaier 2015: 519-520). In lieu of these markers of masculinity, young fathers often shape their new identities around being good fathers. They find their new masculinity by valorizing the father-provider role, a traditionally hegemonic one, but also by stepping into more modern masculine identities like that of the “peace loving, democratic, tolerant and respectful” man (Enderstein and Boonzaier 2015: 523). These new identities form a complex, sometimes contradictory, understandings of fatherhood.

Good point

Sons also redefine their masculinity based on experiences with their fathers. Long et. al (2014) discusses at length the impact of a son’s experiences with his father on the formation of his identity and how he sees himself as a father later in life. Indeed, it seems as though the masculinity of father and son are tied to one another, and that while the fatherhood fathering practices of one generation may be unstable for unappealing to the next, those practices of violence remain ingrained. The identity of the parent interviewed who had internalized the negative experiences with their father expressed that they knew exactly how they didn’t want to be towards their own kids (Long et. al 2014: 132) sentence is too long and complex. Many of these men expressed that they wanted to be more loving and involved in the lives of their children. Sadly, the study showed that many men have what Long et. al. (2014: 136) call a “father wound,” or an experience with one’s father that caused devastation, grief, or horror (Long et al. 2014: 136).

While the study does not indicate that this is normative, it does indicate that father-son relationships have the capability of affecting men not only as fathers but as individuals.

Likewise, fathers often must reassess their own masculinity when their sons come out as gay. Edley (2017:109) shows how children are often seen as a parent’s legacy (2017:109), therefore, many fathers view their sons as extensions of their own masculinity. Many heterosexual fathers expressed being “ashamed and embarrassed” and feeling “where they went wrong” (Bucher 2014:232) upon their son’s coming out. Many felt that their son’s homosexuality reflected negatively on themselves (Bucher 2014:232). Although 82% of fathers accepted their gay sons’ sexualities, only 30% felt comfortable telling others (Bucher 2014:228). As noted above, these statistics change if the gay sons are masculine because they are more likely to align with the heterosexual father’s definition of acceptable male behavior (Bucher 2014:229).

The emotional aspects of fatherhood reveal complicated father-child dynamics in all three articles. In the Long et. al. study, one interviewee admitted that his father was so emotionally distant that it was “27 years before [he] verbally said that he loved me” (Long et. al 2014: 129). While this extreme case was one of the few, it exemplifies the needs of fathers to connect with their children. In many cases, fathers who expressed dissatisfaction with their son’s sexuality, they still loved him and supported him. For example, one father said, “ I don’t get it, I don’t like it, I won’t like it. But I still love him” (Bucher 2014:232). This sentiment is expressed in the statistics, as well. 88% of fathers spoke about, respectfully, unconditional love and still loving their sons; and 78% said that they still claim their sons (Bucher 2014:231). This demonstrates the emotional connection between fathers and sons that may overpower disagreements about the men’s respective definitions of masculinity.

Despite hallmarks of homophobia across many father-son pairs, one recurring theme in the qualitative evidence was the concept of unconditional love. Even among fathers who expressed dissatisfaction with their son’s sexuality, they still loved him and supported him. For example, one father said, “I don’t get it, I don’t like it, I won’t like it. But I still love him” (Bucher 2014:232). This sentiment is expressed in the statistics, as well. 88% of fathers spoke about, respectively, unconditional love and still loving their sons; and 78% said that they still claim their sons (Bucher 2014:231). This demonstrates the emotional connection between fathers and sons that may overpower disagreements about the men’s respective definitions of masculinity.
In the interviews conducted with young South African fathers, interviewees place extreme importance on the emotional intimacy they feel with their children. Like the fathers interviewed by Long et. al. (2014), they often desire a closer, healthier relationship with their children than they had with their fathers. With few exceptions, these fathers take part in caring behaviors like feeding, cleaning, and other traditionally feminine parenting jobs. One father’s emotionally charged language explains why that is. As he says “I can’t even explain how it is... I love that girl very much, I love her a lot. I would give anything, anything just to be with her.”

For them, the emotional connection is worth overcoming the struggles of being young fathers. All of these articles indicate how men navigate modern-day fatherhood. They must cope with changing norms of hegemonic masculinity that formerly would not allow them to be caregivers for their children or to be accepting of their son’s differing masculinities. Great work, see rubric below.

Works Cited:

Edley, Nigel

Enderstein, A. M. and F. Boonzaier

Long, Edgar C. J., Jessica N. Fish, Apryl Scheffler and Brianna Hanert
2014 Memorable Experiences between Fathers and Sons: Stories That Shape a Son’s Identity and Perspective of His Father. Journal of Men’s Studies 22(2):122-139.

Bucher, Jacob

Approximately 500 students per student. Yes No

Identifies important themes in the three readings Excellent good adequate needs work

Connect important themes to other course content. Excellent good adequate needs work

Writing style Excellent good adequate needs work