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. Great intro

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,” he wants to be towards their own kids (Long et al. 2014: 132) major unappealing to completely streamline writing. 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 young 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 practices of one generation may be uncool for unappealing to the next, those practices of violence remain ingrained in the identity of the generation of young men who 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. 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 wondering “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 not the norm for all men interviewed, emotions were rarely conveyed between fathers and sons with words. Time spent with fathers equated to love and caring in the eyes of the men interviewed; meanwhile, kind words were rare due to masculine norms and the culture of fatherhood. Therefore, quality time (it his phrase is a bit idiomatic.... what exactly do you mean?) or a lack thereof could bolster or destroy a father-son relationship. The amount of quality time spent together, in many cases, was often reliant on similarities in personality between father and son. If, for example, both men enjoyed fishing and

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 76% 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

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

Yes No