

Family
communication
patterns and gender
ideologies



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Over the past four decades, a myriad of communication and psychology scholars have researched the influence of parent-child communication on children's physical and psychological wellbeing (Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992), academic achievements (Myers, Schrodt, & Rittenour, 2006), relational communication (Koenig Kellas, 2010), and social behavior (Riesch, Anderson, & Krueger, 2006). Despite the severe consequences linked to males' perpetuation of traditional masculinity values in our society (i. e., violence, drug and alcohol use, high-risk sexual behavior, and poor physical health), previous research has given limited attention to the father-son dyad and no attention to the impact of fathers' communication patterns on sons' gender ideologies. In order to fill the gap in previous research, the purpose of this study is to analyze fathers' communication patterns, through conformity and conversation orientations, and the transmission, through modeling or compensation, of gender ideologies across three generations of father-son dyads. The final objective of this study is to ascertain which gender ideologies are associated with the highest global satisfaction with life.

Literature Review

The family represents one of the most influential institutions in our society especially in regards to its influence on family members' communication (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b). There are a number of reasons for this. First, interactions with family members exist as individuals' first social interactions. It is through these initial interactions with family members that individuals learn values and norms for interacting within and outside the family (Berger & Luckman, 1966). In addition, families are characterized by their uniquely shared world views and value and belief systems through

which family members define their social environments (Riess, 1981). Thus, intentionally or unintentionally, family members communicate to and adopt from one another which communication styles, values, worldviews, and behaviors are accepted in society.

Parent-child Communication

The family's profound influence on its members' is evidenced within the enduring bond of the parent-child relationship. Few relationships in children's lives have as long of a history as the parent-child relationship as this relationship does not merely begin when the child is born, but extends back to the qualities the parents bring to the family based on their upbringing and the aspirations they formulate for their unborn children (Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Because of this history, no adult figures are as important to children as their parents; thus, children are more likely to bring their parents' genes, personalities, values, and parenting styles into adulthood compared to any other adults in their life (Rossi & Rossi). In addition, parents serve as an unwavering and unique source of support and identity for children over the lifespan, which explains why the parent-child relationship is of the utmost importance to the well-being of children (Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992). In fact, strained relationships between parents and children lead to psychological distress for adult children (Umberson, 1992). Thus, it seems apparent that without the bond of a parent in their lives, children lack substantial role models to call on for support and use as guides for navigating the social world. This highlights the need to study which norms and values transmitted from parents to children lead to the most satisfying outcomes for children.

Father-child Communication

The changing “ culture of fatherhood” (Morman & Floyd, 2002, p. 400; Daly, 1995), which is characterized by more involved, nurturing, and affectionate fathers, has altered the patterns of parent-child influence within the family (Lamb, 2010; Lamb & Lewis, 2010). Pleck (2010) describes fathers’ influence of their children in terms of two hypotheses: the essential father (i. e., “ fathers make an essential, unique, and male contribution to child development,” p. 27) and important father hypotheses (i. e., “ good fathering promotes good child outcomes,” p. 27). Although these hypotheses have not framed the current study, they have received consistent support throughout the last four decades, which demonstrates the importance and influence of father-child relationships.

Much of fathers’ influence manifests in their level of involvement and the type of play in which they engage with their children. Fathers typically specialize in boisterous, physical play (i. e., rough housing) with their children, especially sons, similar to the play children engage in with their peers (Lindsey & Mize, 2001). Because children view this play as novel and exciting, fathers fulfill an important role in their children’s, especially sons’, lives, which increases their attachment to influence over children even when a father does not spend as much time with their children as the mother (Lamb, Frodi, Hwang, & Frodi, 1983; Lindsey & Mize, 2001). Children with highly involved fathers also have high cognitive competence and empathy, fewer sex-stereotyped beliefs, and more internal locus of control, which leads to sons displaying more emotions, compassion, gender-neutral views, and prosocial behaviors (Pleck, 2010; Pruett, 1983). In addition, father

engagement has been shown to reduce the frequency of behavioral problems in boys and psychological problems in young women, and enhance cognitive development, while decreasing delinquency and economic disadvantage in low socio-economic families (Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2010).

Although involved fathers fulfill essential and influential functions as their children's playmates and role models (Lamb, 2010), fathers also positively influence children through their communication patterns. When fathers, as compared to mothers, talk to their children, they use more directives (i. e., commands; utterances; requests for clarification; what, where, when, why questions; and references to past events), which helps children learn which types of communication and behaviors are expected in the outside world's social exchanges (Leaper, Anderson, & Sanders, 1998). In addition, sensitive fathering (i. e., responding to, talking to, supporting, teaching, and encouraging children to learn) contributes to children's socio-emotional, cognitive, and linguistic achievements (Lamb, Frodi, Hwang, & Frodi, 1983).

Father-Son Communication

Although many scholars (e. g., Brody, 2001; Rossi & Rossi, 1990) have researched the impact of parent-child relationships on the children's wellbeing, communication, and behavior, few have researched the impacts of fathers' communication on their sons. The scholars who have analyzed this unique dyad, albeit most of them psychology scholars, have discovered that the father-son relationship is responsible for many noteworthy outcomes in men's lives. For example, Vogt and Surridge (1991) claimed that " one very key element in the formation of men's relationships is the relationship <https://assignbuster.com/family-communication-patterns-and-gender-ideologies/>

between son and father...this relationship influences everything in a man's life, from the way he sees himself inside to the way he sees all other people, power, economics, politics, and even his vision of the natural world" (p. 6). In addition, positive father-son relationships have been shown to benefit sons' academic achievement (Singer & Weinstein, 2000), adult development and psychosocial adjustment (Snarey, 1993), communication behaviors (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Yerby, 1981), relational communication and success (Beatty & Dobos, 1993), emotional health (Berry, 1990), and their parenting techniques (Simons, Beaman, Conger, & Chao, 1993).

Boys with involved fathers also express more feelings of vulnerability, warmth, and fear, express fewer feelings of aggression and competitiveness, and adopt more flexible gender attitudes than boys with uninvolved fathers (Brody, 1997; 2001). In addition, when fathers assume nurturing roles, sons show more caring behaviors toward friends and siblings and are more comfortable resisting traditional masculinity norms, yet are also able to maintain a confident sense of self and strong feelings of self-acceptance (Pruett, 1989). However, it is through their relationships with their fathers that sons learn to be masculine as compared to the mother-son relationship as sons find it difficult to acquire masculine qualities from their mothers, despite the mothers' gender roles, merely because of the sex difference (Mussen & Distler, 1960).

Although father-son research is limited, the changing complexity and dynamics of families due to more involved and nurturing fathers has inspired many scholars to consider this relationship as an important contributor of sons' communication, personality, and overall wellbeing. The current study <https://assignbuster.com/family-communication-patterns-and-gender-ideologies/>

seeks to extend this research by analyzing how fathers' communication impacts sons' gender ideologies, which impact other aspects of men's lives (i. e., how they interact with their spouses, children, coworkers, etc.) and their overall satisfaction with life.

Gender Ideologies

According to Galvin, Bylund, and Brommel (2004), gender roles are recurring patterns of behavior that individuals enact based on masculine, feminine, or androgynous traits used to fulfill certain family functions. Children as young as preschoolers can differentiate between the stereotyped roles of mothers and fathers (i. e., children typically day mothers are responsible for child care and housework, while fathers are responsible for making money outside of the home to support the family; Lamb & Lewis, 2010). Through communication, families directly (i. e., specific instructions to assume a particular role instead of another) and indirectly (i. e., rewarding certain gendered behaviors over other behavior) teach children which gender roles are expected and valued in the family and society.

On the other hand, gender ideologies are described as larger belief systems that influence individuals' marital and family roles, as well as fundamental decisions regarding the enactment and fairness of gendered behaviors (Colaner, 2009; Greenstein, 1996). The three primary gender ideologies that families transmit to their children include: masculinity, femininity, and androgyny. In our society, males are typically taught to assume traditional masculine roles, while females are taught to assume traditional feminine roles. Traditional masculinity is characterized by attributes such as strength, toughness, competitiveness, protectiveness, aggressiveness, decisiveness, <https://assignbuster.com/family-communication-patterns-and-gender-ideologies/>

excessive risk-taking, individualism, emotional ineptness, and courage (Scott-Samuel, Stanistreet, & Crawshaw, 2009) and requires men to position themselves above subordinate men and women (i. e., male domination over other males and females; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Emotional ineptness (Scott-Samuel, Stanistreet, and Crawshaw), a critical element of masculinity in regards to communication, can also be described as a restriction of emotions (Levant, Wimer, Williams, Smalley, & Noronha, 2009) or discomfort with disclosing feelings in discussions with others (Mahalik et al., 2003). Femininity is characterized as being physically attractive, deferential, unaggressive, nurturing, emotional, and concerned with people and relationships (Wood, 2008). As far back as the early 1970s, males and females have adopted more flexible, androgynous gender roles.

Androgynous individuals reject rigid sex roles and embody a full range of human qualities that culture would consider feminine and masculine (i. e., androgynous males and females are assertive, strong, nurturing, and sensitive; Wood).

Although men may consider portraying masculine qualities advantageous in some contexts, the perpetuation of traditional masculinity generally produces many negative consequences for the men themselves, other men and women, and society as a whole. For example, masculine males commit more aggressive, harmful, and violent acts (Brownmiller, 1975; Reidy, Shirk, Sloan, & Zeichner, 2009); possess a fear or distaste for homosexuals (Stark, 1991); report greater use of tobacco, alcohol, and illegal drugs (McCreary, Newcomb, and Sadava, 1999); engage in high-risk sexual activity (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993); experience higher levels of stress and anger (Eisler,

Skidmore, & Ward, 1988); report lower self esteem and more depression (McCreary & Sasse, 2000); and practice poor physical health care (Courtenay, 2000), compared to their less masculine counterparts. Thus, investigation of fathers' transmission of the traditional masculinity ideology to their sons is of the utmost importance as findings could lead to more men experiencing positive, healthier, and satisfying lifestyles.

Memorable Messages

Knapp, Stohl, and Rears (1981) describe memorable messages as recalled messages, often prescriptive commands, rules, proverbs, or clichés, that are passed down from respected and older others and have a lasting and significant impact on the lives of the recipient. These messages last over time because they typically involve personal information about the sender and recipient and are shared for the benefit and well-being of the recipient during a time when the recipient is in need of help or advice (Knapp, Stohl, and Rears). They are typically regarded highly by the recipient because they are personally relevant and come from someone who has higher status and is well respected (Knapp, Stohl, and Rears).

Memorable messages that are transmitted in the family from parents to children often have a lasting impact on children's behavior (Koenig Kellas, 2010) for a number of reasons. First, parents socialize their children through memorable messages about work and family (Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, & Shepherd, 2006) because children's respect for their parents' advice often leads them to apply it to their own personal and professional lives. In addition, memorable messages that reflect core values (e. g., gender ideologies) provide a link between relational development and <https://assignbuster.com/family-communication-patterns-and-gender-ideologies/>

communicative behavior (Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2001). Koenig Kellas (2010) also found that a relationship exists between the content mothers' messages and daughter's development of relationship worldviews. Based on these findings, it appears as if parents' memorable messages would also transmit gender ideologies to their children. Given the impact of fathers' communication on sons' formulation of values and beliefs, the following research questions have been forwarded to uncover the specific messages fathers' pass onto their sons related to traditional masculinity:

RQ1: What types of memorable messages are communicated from fathers to sons

regarding the traditional masculinity ideology?

RQ2: In what other ways is the traditional masculine ideology transmitted from fathers to

sons?

Family Communication Patterns

According to the general theory of family communication (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a), family communication environments can be assessed along two dimensions: conformity orientation and conversation orientation. Based on research by Chaffee, McLeod, and Atkin (1971), Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990) conceptualized these orientations as central beliefs or norms governing relational communication in families and have developed an instrument (i. e., the Revised Family Communication Patterns Instrument) to operationalize these orientations. Over 56 studies in the last 40 years

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have uncovered associations between these orientations and family members' information processing, communicative behavioral, and psychosocial outcomes (Schrodt, Witt, & Messersmith, 2008).

Conformity Orientations. Conformity orientations are characterized as environments in which children are encouraged to overtly conform with parental authority (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). They are environments in which parents tell children what to believe and how to view the world and the child accepts the parents' views without question or argument (Ritchie, 1988). Families high in this orientation stress homogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs; avoidance of conflict; interdependence of members; and obedience to parents and other familial adults, while families low in this orientation stress heterogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs; the individuality and independence of family members; and equality of all family members (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a).

Although Koerner & Fitzpatrick (2002a) and Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990) never claim one orientation is superior, the negative outcomes associated with the conformity orientation seem to imply families would discourage high conformity orientations. For example, conformity orientations have been shown to be negatively associated with children's interpersonal skills in romantic relationships (Koesten & Anderson, 2004), parental confirmation and affection (Schrodt, Ledbetter, & Ohrt, 2007), and constructive conflict management skills (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997). Further, conformity orientations have been shown to be positively associated with aggressive behavior outside of the home, as well as between the child and other family members (McLeod, Atkin, & Chaffee, 1972), communication apprehension
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(Elwood & Schrader, 1998), conflict avoidance (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997), young adult children's perceived stress and low self-esteem (Schrodt, Ledbetter, & Ohrt, 2007), weak self-concept (Sillars, Koerner, & Fitzpatrick, 2005), and reticence (Kelly, Keaten, Finch, Duarte, Hoffman, & Michels, 2002).

A strong association appears to exist between conformity orientations and the traditional masculinity gender ideology. Conformity orientations are based on a hierarchical family structure and closed or one-way communication environments in which parents dictate children's values and beliefs, make all decisions for the family unit, and do not permit children to express their individual ideas. Instead, children are required to obey parents' orders at all costs. Similarly, traditional masculinity is built on the premise that males should dominate subordinate males and females (i. e., parents dominating children), refrain from showing emotion (i. e., children cannot express their ideas or feelings), be rational and decisive (i. e., parents have all decision-making authority), demonstrate strength and toughness (i. e., parent's physical and mental strength when demonstrating and maintaining power over children), and be competitive and aggressive (i. e., parents vying for authority with each other or other influences in children's lives, which may lead to aggressiveness to maintain their positions).

Support for the aforementioned association between conformity orientation and traditional masculinity can be seen in Colaner's (2009) and Kindlon and Thompson's (1999) studies. Colaner found that Evangelical parents who endorsed a more complementarian family gender role ideology (i. e., the man is the head of the household and holds ultimate authority in family

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matters) were more likely to report more use of conformity-oriented communication patterns in their families. Similarly, Kindlon and Thompson found that, when adolescent sons challenge their fathers' authority or position in the family, fathers are likely to react with traditional masculine responses of competition, criticism, and control. Because these reactions seem to be likely responses of high conformity orientation fathers, this finding emphasizes the relationship between conformity orientations and the traditional masculine ideology. Thus, the following hypothesis was posited:

H1: A positive relationship exists between fathers' high conformity orientations and their enforcement of the traditional masculinity ideology with their sons.

Conversation Orientations. Conversation orientations are characterized as environments in which children are encouraged to openly express autonomous opinions and ideas (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). In these environments, children are also encouraged question others' views in order to arrive at an understanding of the world through discussion and reasoning (Ritchie, 1988). Families high in this orientation frequently and spontaneously engage in unrestrained interactions with one another, discuss a wide array of topics, and make decisions as a family unit (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a). Parents who promote high conversation orientations believe open dialogue is a means for educating and socializing their children (Koerner & Fitzpatrick). Conversely, families low in this orientation interact much less frequently and only openly discuss a few topics (Koerner & Fitzpatrick).

A strong association appears to exist between conversation orientations and the androgyny gender ideology. Conversation orientations are based on a less hierarchical family structure and two-way communication environments in which there is open and frequent communication between adults and children, who are created as equal family members with valuable ideas. Similarly, androgyny is based on a rejection of strict masculine and feminine roles and encourages individuals to take on a blend of both gendered behaviors and ideologies (i. e., both males and female children are encouraged to express feelings and ideas and participate in a wide range of family decisions and activities). Again, support for the aforementioned association was demonstrated in Colaner's (2009) study, in which Evangelical parents who endorsed a more egalitarian family gender role ideology (i. e., men and women are equal in family interactions and decisions) were more likely to report greater use of conversation-oriented communication patterns in their families.

Given the conceptualization of the conversation orientation and the androgynous gender ideology discussed previously and the findings of Colaner (2009), it appears as if a strong association exists between high conversation orientation fathers and their influence on their sons to hold androgynous values; thus, the following hypothesis was posited:

H2: A positive relationship exists between fathers' high conversation orientations and their enforcement of the androgyny gender ideology with their sons.

Modeling and Compensation Hypotheses

Parents tend to repeat and strengthen child-rearing patterns with which they are most familiar, such as those their own parents used when raising them (Peretti & Statum, 1984). Van Ijzendoorn (1992) has labeled this process of purposively or unintentionally psychologically repeating or transmitting parenting attitudes and behaviors to future generations as intergenerational transmission.

Evidence of intergenerational transmission has been demonstrated in a multitude of parent-child studies. Moen, Erickson, and Dempster-McClain (1997) found that mothers who held traditional (or egalitarian) gender role attitudes in the 1950s were likely to have adult daughters in the late 1980s with more traditional (or egalitarian) attitudes. Similarly, fathers' constructive parenting of sons in the sons' late childhood predicted sons' constructive parenting of their own children in their children's early and middle childhood (Kerr, Capaldi, Pears, & Owen, 2009). Particularly relevant to the current study are Campbell and Gilmore (1997) findings that intergenerational similarities in parenting styles are stronger between fathers and sons, compared to mothers and daughters, for authoritarian and, albeit to a lesser extent, permissive parenting, which suggests fathers have greater influence over sons' future child-rearing attitudes and techniques.

Two intergenerational transmission perspectives that have received considerable attention from researchers interested in the father-son relationship include the modeling and compensation hypotheses (Floyd & Morman, 2000; Beaton, Doherty, & Rueter, 2003). The modeling hypothesis argues that individuals replicate the parenting styles they received in their

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families of origin, while the compensation hypothesis argues that, when individuals are exposed to negative parental behaviors in their families of origin, they attempt to compensate for those patterns by taking a more positive role in raising their children (Floyd & Morman). Fathers seem to both model their positive family of origin experiences and compensate for their negative family of origin experiences (Beaton, Doherty, & Rueter).

Two of the first scholars to research the modeling and compensation hypotheses, Floyd and Morman (2000), predicted that a curvilinear relationship would exist between the level of affection men received from their fathers and the level of affection they give their sons. However, their findings revealed that fathers were more likely to be affectionate with their sons even when their fathers had been unaffectionate with them, which demonstrates the strength of the modeling hypothesis. Based on the influential nature of the father-son relationship, and Floyd and Morman's discovery that modeling occurs more often than compensation, the following hypothesis was posited:

H3: Men will be more likely to model, as compared to compensate, their fathers' conformity or conversation orientations with their own sons.

The strength of the modeling and compensation hypotheses rests on the level of identification (i. e., the extent to which individuals feel positively toward the source of a particular behavior) between parents and children. According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1961), children are socialized through the identification process by imitating parents' attitudes and patterns of behavior, although parents may never directly attempt to teach

these attitudes or behaviors other than by rewarding and punishing instrumental responses. Children engage in identification for two reasons. First, children perceive adults as capable of controlling their environments; thus, they think engaging in identification will give them feelings of power or mastery over their own environments (Kagan, 1958). Second, children believe that responding as the adults' attitudes and behaviors expect, will lead to receiving love and affection from the adult, which are primary needs for which all human beings long (Kagan).

When an individual view another person favorably or considers him/herself to be similar to that person, a greater chance of modeling exists; however, if an individual does not identify with that person, they are more likely to compensate for the other's behavior by performing the opposite behavior (Bandura, 1961). Sons reported greater authoritarian attitudes as compared to their fathers' authoritarian attitudes when they identify with their fathers (Peretti & Statum, 1984). If sons' level of identification with father determines whether they transmit authoritarian attitudes to future generations, it would seem likely that sons who identify with their fathers would also transmit, or model, their fathers' conformity orientations to future generations, as well. Thus, the following hypotheses were forwarded:

H4: Sons who identify with their fathers will be more likely to model their fathers'

conformity or conversation orientations with their own sons compared to sons who

do not identify with their fathers.

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H5: Sons who do not identify with their fathers will be more likely to compensate for

their father's conformity or conversation orientations and enforce the opposite

orientation with their own sons.

Although Morman and Floyd (2002) describe the father-son relationship as the most socially significant same-sex relationship in men's lives, they recognize that this relationship is often fraught with conflict, competition, aggression, and emotional distance due to societal pressures placed on men to assume traditional masculine roles. In addition, as previously discussed, the perpetuation of the traditional masculine ideology leads to a myriad of negative consequences for the men, women, and society. Thus, the following hypothesis has been forwarded:

H6: A negative relationship exists between sons' enforcement of the traditional

masculine ideology and sons' global satisfaction with life.

The changing "culture of fatherhood" (Morman & Floyd, 2002, p. 400; Daly, 1995) suggests that today's fathers are more nurturing and loving with and more involved in raising their children. In addition, Morman and Floyd found that fathers reported more closeness, relational satisfaction, and affection communication with their sons than with their fathers. This suggests that sons would be more likely to adopt more flexible gender ideologies

compared to their fathers; thus, the following hypothesis was posited:

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H7: Sons' will report more androgyny gender ideologies than they report for their fathers.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Approximately 200 participants will be recruited through convenience and network sampling in undergraduate, introductory communication classes at a large mid-Atlantic university, social networking sites, and family and friends referrals.

Participants will include second generation fathers who are at least 18-years-old, have raised (or are currently raising) at least one biological, step-, or adopted son over the age of seven (i. e., the third generation male), and can report on his and his father's (i. e., the first generation male) communication styles and gender ideologies. The age of the third generation son is important as, according to Brody and Shaffer (1982), children over the age of seven are able to internalize discipline they receive from their parents; thus, it is presumed that the communication styles and gender ideologies of the second generation fathers will be most salient if they believe their sons are capable of internalizing the messages they communicate.

After obtaining human subjects approval, the researchers will ask the instructors of the communication classes to explain to both male and female undergraduate students the purpose of the current study, participant criteria, and instructions for obtaining their fathers' email addresses.

Approximately a week later, when the researchers visit the classroom for recruitment, they will distribute a sign-up sheet on which the students can

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write their qualified fathers' names and email addresses, as well as their own names and email addresses. Following data collection, the students' and fathers' names will not be connected to one another; the researchers are merely collecting that information in order to assign extra credit to the student or follow-up with the student should the father fail to respond.

Each qualified father will receive an email explaining the purpose of the study, instructions for participation, and a link to access an online questionnaire that will assess their fathers' and their own communication of gender ideologies to their sons. Participants will be instructed to think about their oldest sons when completing the questionnaire. Although this selection procedure may create bias as some fathers may be more stringent on their transmission of masculinity values to their first born son in efforts to preserve family legacies, this decision was made in order to standardize the participants responses. Before beginning the questionnaire, participants will be asked several demographic questions (see Appendix E).

Instrumentation

Gender ideologies. The Male Role Norms Inventory-Revised (MRNI-R; see Appendix A; Levant, Smalley, Aupont, House, Richmond, & Noronha, 2007) includes 53 items designed to measure individuals' traditional masculinity ideology on a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Examples of the MRNI-R's questions include: " boys should be encouraged to find a means of demonstrating physical prowess," " a man should never admit when others hurt his feelings," and " a man must be able to make his own way in the world." The MRNI-R (2