

Emotional Expression and Conflict Resolution in Males: Exploring Father- Son Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

Background: Relationships between father and son are often shaped by social norms that encourage suppressing emotions. Barriers to communication prevent emotional expression and understanding even in the presence of similar interests. In collaboration, this lack of communication makes conflicts and misunderstandings more. It is essential to identify and overcome these obstacles and investigate how similar or different they are to promote understanding within father - son and strengthen familial connections. The objective of the study was to investigate which patterns of emotional expression and conflict resolution are transmitted within father – son dynamics. The study aimed to investigate emotional expression and conflict resolution patterns in males, specifically examining how these patterns may be transferred from Generation X fathers to Gen Z sons.

Methodology: Seven father-son pairs participated in qualitative research. The data was collected using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews in a hybrid medium. Thematic analysis was used in order to perform data analysis.

Results: The findings indicated that sons had transmitted more patterns of conflict resolution when compared with emotional expression.

Conclusion: Sons were clearly undergoing a process of complete adaptation, either knowingly or unknowingly that is taking on their father's characteristics.

Keywords: emotional expression, conflict resolution, generational transfer, father-son dynamics

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INTRODUCTION

S Emotions are an inherent part of our daily lives, influencing our thoughts, actions, and relationships. Anthropologist Paul Ekman suggested that there are six primary emotions that people can experience: fear, anger, surprise, disgust, joy, and sadness. Emotional expression is the process of expressing feelings through both verbal and nonverbal behaviour [1-2]. Conflict is a natural occurrence in any relationship, stemming from differences in opinions, needs, or desires. Conflict resolution is the act of understanding and interpreting behaviours based on symbols to reach a compromise or agreement. Furthermore, youth acquire conflict resolution skills from countless cooperative experiences with their family members, who gradually encourage each other's behaviour [3]. Therefore, understanding the connection between emotional expression and conflict resolution is crucial for encouraging harmonious connections and finding constructive solutions to disputes. Fathers and sons have a complex relationship wherein both share similar areas of interest and have immense love and respect for each other but there might be communication issues compounded when both want a better father-son relationship but neither one knows quite how to go about it. The following study will dwell into the patterns of emotional expression and conflict resolutions are intentionally transferred from generation to generation or how these two generations adapt different patterns. The study examined conflict interactions among early adolescents (aged 12-15) with their siblings

and mothers in home settings. Researchers used sequential analysis. The study uncovered differences in how emotions were associated with behaviour depending on specific family relationship and role within the conflict. Within-family similarities were observed in emotional responses. Researchers [4] studied the family systems perspective to investigate patterns of schoolwork conflict resolution between Chinese adolescents and parents. The findings reveal hierarchical and enmeshed parent child relationships in China. The current study also focused on identification of parenting styles affecting the patterns of emotional expression and conflict resolution. The current study examined similarities and differences in expression of positive and negative emotions in fathers and sons. Although existing literature has been done about the connection between conflict resolution and emotional expression, there is still much to learn about the generational transmission of these patterns, especially in the father-son dynamics. Most of the existing research concentrated on understanding relationships (parent-adolescent and sibling) and a variety of environments without specifically addressing the transmission. To address this gap, the proposed study aims to investigate the patterns in which fathers and sons handle emotional expression and conflict resolution.

The objective of the current study was to –

- To investigate which patterns of emotional expression and conflict resolution transmitted from father to son.
- To investigate different patterns of emotional expression and conflict resolution in males.
- To identify the common barriers to emotional expression and conflict resolution in father and son.

METHODOLOGY

Statement of the problem

This study aims to investigate emotional expression and conflict resolution patterns that differ from generation to generation within the father-son dynamics. By delving into the subjective viewpoints and narratives of father and son.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of their relationship with each other. It also utilized explanatory research design with primary focus on understanding the similarities and differences from generation to generation.

Participants

The samples were collected through purposive sampling. The eligibility requirements for the sons were those who belonged to Generation Z 1997-2012 (11-26 years old), either pursuing or completed their graduation. Fathers who belonged to Generation X 1965-1980 (43-58 years old) and were graduates. Seven pairs of fathers and sons comprise the sample.

Tools Used

Emotional Expression: Gross and Oliver [5] developed the Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (BEQ), a self-report tool for measuring emotional expressivity. It was a 7-point Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha value was .81 and the test re- test values were .78. The scale had three dimensions.

Conflict Resolution: Questionnaire for Conflict Resolution was used [6]. It was a 5-point Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha value was .78 and split half reliability was 0.75. There were eight domains in this questionnaire.

Procedure

The participants who met the sampling criteria were selected. Participants were asked to fill the questionnaires. Later, hybrid mode of interview was done where informed consent was taken. The interviews were semi-structured which addressed the research objectives. Different sets of questions were formed for fathers and sons. The interviews were conducted separately for father-son to exclude any influence or biases in the answers. With the participants consent, all interviews were recorded and later converted into transcripts.

Data Analysis

After recording, transcripts were done. Thematic analysis [7] was incorporated. Thematic coding was done using QualCoder software. Later, the codes were manually segregated into themes. Common themes were identified for both father and son. The findings were divided into five themes: a) Parental Influence, b) Barriers in expression of emotions, c) Generational Shift, d) Conflict resolution, e) Father-son dynamics.

RESULTS

Table 1: Representation of themes

Emerging Themes	Theme Clusters
1. Parental Influence	1.1 Parenting Styles 1.2 Influence of Parental Upbringing
2. Barriers in Expression of Emotions	2.1 Nuances in expression of emotions over time 2.2 Perceived communication gap
3. Generational Shift	3.1 Promoting emotional expression 3.2 Awareness about their father and son temperament
4. Conflict Resolution	4.1 Tendency towards avoidance 4.2 Positive approach to conflict resolution
5. Father – son dynamics	5.1 Supportive measures 5.2 Holistic Encouragement

Parental Influence

Father-son bond is greatly shaped by the various parenting styles. Sons can unintentionally absorb characteristics from their fathers, which can affect how they communicate and express themselves.

Sub-theme: Parenting styles

In the family setting where authoritarian parenting style is used, directives are not to be questioned or opposed even when parents don't always provide justification or reasons for their choices [8-9], the current study findings identified similar patterns. *Son 7 stated that his father wants all things to be done according to him and he doesn't give specific explanations.* Whereas for authoritative parenting style, fathers who followed this approach maintained a balance between guidance and independence. The parenting style that sufficiently balances nurturance and limit-setting is authoritative [10-12]. Liberal families, in constructing those with authoritarian parents, rarely use punishment, and they give their kids more freedom to make their own decisions in life [13]. The research also identified permissive parenting style and supported the above statement. *Father 6: "Give importance to his likes and dislikes and avoid ruling nature or protective nature."*

Sub-theme: Influence of Parental upbringing

Father-son relationships are significantly shaped by parental upbringing. In their relationship, the process of taking on the characteristics of a father becomes an important factor that affects humour, communication methods, and overall identity of sons. Parents play pivotal roles in upbringing of children [14]. The current research, fathers have transmitted positive influence from their fathers to be more emotionally available for their sons whereas sons feel that they might have adapted communication patterns from their fathers indicating positive influence of parental upbringing. Unconscious paternal influence functions as an invisible thread, sons have absorbed the communication and behavioural patterns. One example from the current research can be that *father 1 stated "he adapted a similar pattern of talking like a friend with his son."* The current findings, sons frequently found themselves adapting their father's traits ranging from temper to humour, which helped them in shaping their identity through a common set of traits and behaviours. *Son 3: "Being very short tempered is something I have got from him."* The findings also identified comprehensive adaptation, that is sons adapting not just particular characteristics but fully absorbing their father's personalities, which was represented through their humour, communication preferences, and even minute actions. *Son 3: "I have almost 90% of my slang, 90% of my jokes, 90% of my living I have adopted from him. I have also adopted 100% in copying his signatures for the check book."*

Barriers in expression of emotions

Barriers in expression of emotions act as a bridge between the communication of individuals. In this research, fathers, and sons face barriers in expression of emotions as there are perceived communication gaps as well as nuances in expression of emotions.

Sub-theme: Nuances in expression of emotions

Every individual has their own perspectives and different ways in how they perceive things or people. In the current research, father-son perceive emotional as well as conflicting situations through different lenses which make them bring different reactions and methods with respect to a specific situation. *A son stated that his father shows emotional connection with an individual who expresses their emotional/financial loss whereas the son*

doesn't express his concerns. Males tending to emphasize control and competition, and females focusing on interpersonal relations and expressiveness [15]. This study also observed different patterns of expression in father and son. *Father: "I may react in some way, but he will never do like that. We have some fighting with the third party. He always listens and then he never argues."* The father-son population in the current study had an approximate age gap of 20 years which makes them express through differing expressions of values, beliefs or communication style. *Father: "He will just finish a conversation with an individual by saying hello, how are you, that's it and compared to that I will stand and patiently talk to an individual about his life."*

Sub-theme: Perceived communication gap

As a result, there are communication gaps across generations, particularly when it comes to interpersonal communication [16]. Adapting to change is a complex and challenging process, as highlighted [17]. With respect to the present research, a son had stated that his father is facing difficulty adapting to change. *Son: "He is not much comfortable with things changing, he likes them as they were."* Based on the findings, it was observed that most males tend to keep their emotions to themselves which leads to insufficient emotional expression. *Son 5: "I will keep more in mind and not express myself", "I am a type of very emotional person, but I don't talk about them."* The fathers said that their fathers didn't even know in which standard they were studying, there was very little communication which they realized and tried to improve communication with their sons.

Generational Shift

The relationship between fathers and sons has evolved over time, with a shift towards more involved and nurturing fathering styles [18].

Sub-theme: Promoting Emotional Expression.

Promoting emotional expression helps to foster the father-son dynamics. It plays a pivotal role in shaping the communication patterns and builds trust in their relationship. In the findings, fathers who adapted to change had a positive relationship with their sons. *Father 2 "My father used to speak with me and the way I speak with my kids, the generation gap, the pattern of openness, topics of discussion are more compared to what we used to do."* According to the current findings, fathers who encouraged openness, helped in creating a safe space for their sons and encouraged them to open about their feelings. *Father 1: "Then first make him feel comfortable, we will not kick you out from the home like so you can always express us. Just don't lie about anything to us."* Further the significance of good communication in relationships, as it can facilitate conflict resolution and strengthen partnerships [19]. Fathers in this study were trying to have healthy and transparent conversations with their sons. *Father 5 "I would like to interact with him without any hesitation."*

Sub-theme: Awareness about their father and son temperament

Acquiring non-judgmental awareness posture and consciously accepting the experience of ideas, emotions, and physical sensations as they arise [20]. The present study highlighted those fathers and son had acceptance towards each other's and one self's actions, emotions, strength and weakness. *Father 6 "To be honest he is my emotional support."* Based on the current study, collaborative approach referred to father-son working together to achieve a common goal. *Son 3 "I have joined my business venture, which my father runs on the same goal to achieve, and it is the goal that we should grow our business immensely."* Realization is the fact or moment of starting to understand a situation. In accordance with the present research, sons had reached the realization stage where they could understand the action of their fathers behind a situation and the consequences for it. *Son 7 "He would himself put me through tough situations which is really good."*

Conflict Resolution

The process of resolving a disagreement, argument, or other type of conflict involving two or more parties is known as conflict resolution. Not only in the father-son dynamics but in every relationship conflict resolution is an essential part to maintain a healthy relationship.

Sub-Theme: Tendency Towards Conflict Avoidance

There are more negative motives for avoiding conflict in addition to more cooperative, relational ones, and that these motives influence the behavioural techniques and outcomes of conflict avoidance [21]. The results of the current research were contradicting, majority father-son adapted similar patterns of avoidance as they focused on positive motives (saving a relationship). *Father of son 3 had responded that they say sorry regardless of whoever's fault it is, the relationship with another person is more important than conflict.* Conflicting thoughts resulted in the inability to decide what to do and what not to. Individuals had two opposing ideas strangled within themselves. *Father 2: "I have never seen him doing the same one, but I believe that he also would be doing the same or*

similar pattern of talking or pattern of behaving.” In the present study, the act of letting go was observed more in sons as compared to fathers. *Son 7 “If I tend to avoid conflict, I just. Let's go. Letting go of the main problem that's behind the conflict.”* Guilt is a complex emotion, distinct from shame, that arises from a negative evaluation of specific behaviours [22]. Sons were observed to have more guilt. *Father 2 said that when his son lost his jacket, he was more than him because it was a very good jacket.*”

Sub-theme: Positive Approach to Conflict Resolution

Researchers have emphasized the importance of collaborative conflict resolution, which involves attacking problems rather than each other. Open communication, attentive listening, and an understanding of differing viewpoints are crucial for constructive conflict resolution [23]. The findings support the studies as fathers and sons tend to adapt to calm and constructive resolution of conflicts. *Father 4 stated “whenever conflict occurs, he doesn't act; accordingly, give his son a chance to speak and after 1-2 days have a conversation about it”* and *son 4 stated that whoever has a valid point and is fruitful, we end the conflict.* The process by which people try to use higher mental functions, such as reasoning and creative thinking, to get over obstacles, carry out plans that get them from one place to another, or come to conclusions. Son who adapted positive problem solving stated *“I will be the calmest person to just show them the points that these are the points that we can speak up on.”* Spontaneous resolution might occur in various contexts, including medical conditions and conflicts. In the current research findings, a father-son duo stated that *they don't usually resolve conflicts by talking about it but it happens naturally when next morning they meet at the table for breakfast.*

Father-son dynamics

The father-son relationship is a crucial aspect of a boy's development, with the quality of communication and the father's influence playing a significant role.

Sub-theme: Supportive measures

The father-son relationship involves transparent and honest communication. It helps in resolving a conflict and being emotionally available. The quality of the father-son relationship is influenced by the father's pleasure in parenting, which can moderate the association between sensitivity and attachment security [24]. The current findings supported this statement as father-son have evolved themselves by being more comfortable with each other. *Father 2: “Like we are like two friends, very much comfortable with them talking to each other.”* Fathers may have a tendency where they compare their habits or behaviours by reminiscing from the past with their sons. It can also lead to them encouraging their sons in their journey. *Father 3: “According to his age there should be a speediness or curiosity which he has and which I also had so it is a very good thing.”* By facilitating communication, respect can play a significant role in interpersonal and intergroup relationships. The current study supported this aspect as even though they talk to their father like a friend, they still respect aiding in communication. *Son 5 “I will always keep his thoughts and, you know, his opinions above mine on that topic.”*

Sub-theme: Holistic Encouragement

Holistic refers to dealing with or treating the whole of something or someone and not just a part [25]. Holistic encouragement in father-dynamics meant shaping, learning and recognizing each other's strength and helping them grow. From a young age, sons look up to their fathers as their role models. They might possess tendencies to be like him, to sit, walk or talk like him. This tendency helped them consciously or unconsciously learn things from their fathers by observing or through verbal form of discussion. *Son: “How would I get financially more stable in my life, how would I handle situations more comfortably, how would I maintain my relationship with friends? How do I still stay in contact with, uh, with the friends that he met 30 years ago, and I still met 30 days ago.”* Positive relationship between father and son significantly helped in the son's career choice. A father who is encouraging and supportive sets a good example, he encouraged his kid to pursue his interests and emphasized the value of hard work. *Son 3 stated that his father's influence on him pursuing engineering was beneficial to him.*

DISCUSSION

The questionnaire findings revealed that the 4 out of 7 sons who scored high on positive expressivity had fathers who also had high scores in the same domain. During interviews both had positive emotions but differences in how they express it. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express their ideas, values, and thoughts freely, without predefined options. Fathers belonging to authoritative parenting styles expressed positive emotions which supported the statement that research consistently shows that the authoritative parenting style is associated with positive expression of emotions in children [26]. Sons also

possessed a tendency of adapting one of their father's traits to a comprehensive adaptation which indicated generational transmission. It was also observed that sons worry more as compared to fathers. Generation gap addressed the different perspectives and different patterns of expression which concludes that experience, society, lifestyle, different roles, play a role in emotional expression. Research on the generation gap in father-son relationships had revealed a complex interplay of communication patterns, gender ideologies, and role expectations [27]. The present study revealed that father-son tend to keep things to themselves and have insufficient emotional expression. It also revealed that aspects of emotional expression and conflict resolution abilities is one of the significant outcomes of generational transfer. Because of their fathers, sons typically have better ways of communicating and conflict resolution. Research suggests that the quality of communication between fathers and sons can significantly impact the son's development and behaviour [18]. The use of conflict resolution techniques, ranging from positive approaches to conflict avoidance, represented a pivotal theme in maintaining a healthy relationship. On the conflict resolution questionnaire, 5 out of 7 pairs scored high on note needs, not wants, which indicated that they prioritized mutual needs over individual desires in relationships. Questionnaire findings supported the interview. The concept of holistic encouragement reflected positive actions and father's influence on career decisions, creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and development.

CONCLUSION

The study highlighted the significant influence of generational transfer on father-son relationships byways in which characteristics, modes of communication, and emotional expressions are passed down across the generations. Sons were clearly undergoing a process of complete adaptation, either knowingly or unknowingly taking on their father's characteristics of conflict resolution that is 5 out of 7 sons adhered to pattern of conflict resolution; on the other hand, 4 out of 7 sons have adapted the lesser patterns of emotional expression from their fathers. These interactions highlighted the importance of fathers being intentional mentors who not only imparted genetic qualities but also created an atmosphere that promoted their sons' holistic growth.

The results had several consequences for comprehending and improving father-son relationships. Understanding the influence of parenting styles offered a chance to adapt constructive parenting techniques. To promote understanding, fathers and sons must be aware of and be flexible when it comes to addressing generational communication barriers. Interventions can be module for both fathers and sons to enhance their emotional expressions and manage better conflict resolution patterns.

Although the study recognized a generational shift, it did not thoroughly examine the ways in which wider generational shift throughout time may impact father-son interactions, so missing the chance to examine the effects of changing social, economic, and technological advantages. Finally, the study presented an optimistic picture by focusing mostly on the positive aspects of generational transfer and allowing little room for exploring any difficulties within father-son interactions. Future research could be a longitudinal study tracking father-son dynamics over an extended period.

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