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EXPLORING PATERNAL MATURITY IN THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN OLDER FATHERS AND ADULT CHILDREN

CHARLIE D. STELLE and

Bowling Green State University, Ohio

NANCY W. SHEEHAN

University of Connecticut, Storrs

Abstract

While research on parent-adult child relationships has expanded over the last two decades, most research has ignored the experiences of older fathers and their relationships with adult children. The present study sought to explore how midlife and older men assess the costs and rewards associated with their fatherhood experiences and how fathers' level of paternal maturity influences their perceptions of fatherhood. More specifically, the purpose of the present study was two-fold: to explore the costs and rewards of fatherhood and whether paternal maturity serves as a moderator of older men's fatherhood experiences. A purposive sample of 96 fathers (age 50–80) completed measures assessing ego development, generativity, and costs and rewards of fatherhood. The construct of paternal maturity, hypothesized to influence assessment of fatherhood experiences, was operationally defined as combining both affective (generativity) and cognitive (ego development) levels of psychological maturity. Results indicate mixed support for the influence of paternal maturity on fathers' perceptions of costs and rewards. Overall, findings note that the affective side of maturity (generativity) is more strongly associated with fathers' accounts of the costs and rewards than the cognitive side of maturity (ego development). Discussion centers on the utility of these concepts and the implications for continued research into the ongoing relationships between fathers and adult children.

The last two decades have witnessed increased recognition of the importance of fathers in the development of their children (Brooks & Gilbert, 1995; Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio, 1995). Researchers have been particularly interested in studying father involvement and the impact of father absence (Palkovitz, 2002; Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, & Margolin, 2005). However, despite growing interest in the topic of fatherhood, knowledge about midlife and older men as fathers remains limited.

Midlife and older fathers have generally been ignored because most family theory and research focuses on the early stages of the family life cycle when children are young (Cohler & Altergott, 1995). Furthermore, researchers who study parent-child relations in later life families often focus on problematic situations; such as caregiving burden, divorce, surrogate grandparents, or abuse; while ignoring many of the everyday aspects of inter-generational family life (Luescher & Pillemer, 1998; Pillemer & Lüscher, 2004). Finally, a closer look at research examining relationships between "parents" and their adult children reveals that despite the importance of gender in family relations, many researchers combine mothers and

fathers together to describe the experiences of midlife or older “parents” (Allen, Blieszner, & Roberto, 2000).

BACKGROUND

Fatherhood and the Life Course

From a life course perspective, fatherhood may be viewed as an evolving or “unfolding” role based on the shared, mutual interactions between fathers and children as they move together across time. While the father-adult child relationship reflects how fathers and children have co-constructed their relationship over time, little is known about how fathers view or negotiate their role as children navigate through adulthood (Blieszner, Mancini, & Marek, 1996; Eisenhandler, 1992).

One of the earliest studies of fathers of adult children, the Fatherhood Project, conducted by Nydegger and her colleague concluded that fatherhood was an important feature in the lives of middle age and older fathers. Furthermore, fathers who enjoyed satisfying relations with their adult children, according to Nydegger and colleagues, demonstrated both their capacity to maintain connectedness with their children and respect for their children’s autonomy. From their findings, Nydegger and colleagues proposed the construct of “paternal maturity” as capturing fathers’ ability to simultaneously balance needs for connectedness and separateness in relationships with their adult children (Nydegger, 1991; Nydegger & Mitteness, 1991).

Paternal Maturity

While the original construct of “paternal maturity” seemed to aptly convey fathers’ capacity for separateness and connectedness in their relationships with adult children, there have been no studies that have attempted to operationalize this construct. Extrapolating from Nydegger’s original work, “paternal maturity” seems to reflect a father’s ability to differentiate or separate his sense of self from his role as father and to maintain relationships (sense of connection) as children move into the world. From both individual and family developmental perspectives, achievement of paternal maturity was presumed necessary for fathers to achieve satisfying relations with their adult children.

The Fatherhood Project (Nydegger, 1991; Nydegger & Mitteness, 1991) which analyzed qualitative interviews with 267 well-educated middle-class fathers aged 45–80 years, concluded fathers and adult children share evolving and meaningful relationships and that paternal maturity as critical to midlife and older fathers’ capacity to establish mature relations with adult children (Nydegger, 1991). Paternal maturity helps fathers to reframe their experiences and redefine their relationships with adult children (Nydegger, 1991; Nydegger & Mitteness, 1996). According to Nydegger (1991), paternal maturity involves a father’s recognition of the changing needs of his children and a shift in the nature of interactions as children become adults. Ultimately, paternal maturity is based on a father’s ability to achieve a balance between personal autonomy and concern for others in his relationship with adult children (Nydegger, 1991).

Nydegger and Mitteness (1996) view mid-life as the “prime” of fatherhood characterized by both role gains and losses. Gains include adding roles of friend, companion, and counselor over time, while losses entail diminished roles of authority, provider, and teacher. Successful adaptation enables fathers and adult children to establish meaningful relationships impossible at earlier ages (Nydegger & Mitteness, 1996). Intrigued by the importance of paternal maturity, the present study set out to quantitatively explore the concept.

Fathers' Evaluation of the Relationships with Adult Children

There has been a movement in family gerontology which recognizes that family relations, particularly parent-adult child relations, are complex and characterized by both costs and rewards (Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Luescher & Pillemer, 1998; Pillemer & Lüscher, 2004). Luescher and Pillemer (1998) proposed "intergenerational ambivalence" to reflect parents' mixed feelings and motivations surrounding connectedness and separateness as children move into the adult world. Subsequent studies have sought to increase understanding of intergenerational ambivalence between parents and children (Fingerman, Chen, Hay, Cichy, & Lefkowitz, 2006; Peters, Hooker, & Zvonkovic, 2006; Pillemer & Sutor, 2002) and factors underlying ambivalence within family relationships (Fingerman, Pitzer, Lefkowitz, Birditt, & Mroczek, 2008; Pillemer & Sutor, 2002; Wilson, Shuey, & Elder, 2003). Intergenerational ambivalence serves as a framework for understanding both the positive and bothersome aspects of family relations and the importance of examining both the costs and rewards of such relationships (Luscher, 2002).

While research has examined the costs and rewards of fatherhood when children are young, few studies have explored the costs and rewards of parent-adult child relations. Sources of strain and conflict include tensions regarding lifestyle and interpersonal choices, values, inadequate communication, and problematic social interaction (Clarke, Preston, Raksin, & Bengtson, 1999; Peters et al., 2006), worry about children (Ryff, Lee, Essex, & Schmutte, 1994), unbalanced social support (Peterson & Peterson, 1988; Spitze & Logan, 1992), and children's chronic physical or mental health problems (Greenberg, 1991; Pillemer & Sutor, 1991; Sutor & Pillemer, 1987). In addition, some husbands report "costs" tied to their wives' stress involving adult children (Sutor & Pillemer, 1987). Parental rewards include enjoyable social interactions and support (Hogan, Eggebeen, & Clogg, 1993; Hoyert, 1991; Marks, 1995; Spitze & Logan, 1990) and vicarious satisfaction linked to children's success (Ryff et al., 1994). However, there is some evidence to suggest a curvilinear between children's success/adjustment and fathers' well being. When fathers perceive that their children have more success (higher well-being) than they do, their satisfaction diminishes (Ryff et al., 1994).

Operationalizing Paternal Maturity

Paternal maturity is operationally defined using two psychosocial constructs which contribute to a broader concept of maturity. While there are many different definitions of maturity, a review of the literature concluded that most definitions involve multiple individual and interpersonal characteristics. For example, Allport (1961) noted that individuals who are mature have a positive sense of self, warmth in relation to others, emotional acceptance, self-insight, and realistic perceptions of self and others. Similarly, Heath (1991) defined maturity as including an increased sense of mastery, competence, power; increased ability to create intimate relations; released energy for interests outside the self; and a heightened capacity for self-transcendence.

As proposed by Nydegger (1991), paternal maturity entails a father's recognition and acceptance of adult children's changing needs and status and ability to relate to children on a more level playing field. As previously stated, paternal maturity involves the ability to balance personal autonomy and concern for others. For the purpose of this study, we viewed paternal maturity as encompassing two psychosocial concepts: 1) a well-differentiated self and 2) positive concern for others. To operationally define these two subcomponents, we relied on Loevinger's theory of ego development (Loevinger, 1987, 1976) and the theory of generativity as proposed by (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992), respectively.

Ego Development—Theories of ego development assume that stages or levels of ego function influence the ways individuals organize and give meaning to their world (Helson & Roberts, 1994). Ego development involves related facets such as moral development, development of cognitive complexity, and the development of capacity for interpersonal relations (Loevinger, 1987). Loevinger's theory proposed nine stages of ego development (Hy & Loevinger, 1996) ranging from the earliest preverbal stage (pre-social and symbiotic) focusing on gratification of immediate needs to the Integrated stage which is characterized by a sense of self-actualization. Each stage is categorized by distinct interrelationships among three areas: impulse control, interpersonal orientation, and conscious preoccupations (thoughts and feelings about roles, problems, and self in a social context). The Impulsive (1) stage is characteristic of individuals who focus on needs and impulses are dependent on others for physical needs, and with their understanding of others and situations based in dichotomies. Self-Protective (2) individuals view interpersonal relationships as exploitive and seek personal gratification. The Conformist (3) stage is characterized by attention to "rules," social approval, and group mentalities. The Self-Aware (4) stage is distinctive in its recognition of the difference between self and other; however, such differences often manifest themselves in self-consciousness and loneliness. The Conscientious (5) stage has a distinctive mark of self-evaluated standards and reflexivity of personal traits. The Individualistic (6) stage is representative of the individual with a greater tolerance for individuality in others and a sense of inner and outer selves for himself. The Autonomous (7) stage is primarily marked by recognition of other people's needs for autonomy and a respect for the complexity of life and interpersonal relationships. Finally, the Integrated (8) individual is described as self-actualized, striving to resolve inner conflicts and transcend the obstacles of earlier levels.

While growing evidence suggests that most adults do not achieve full ego potential; in fact, the majority operate at or below the self-aware (4) stage (Cohn, 1991; Manners & Durkin, 2000), research does link higher stages of ego function to more adaptive functioning (Manners & Durkin, 2000) and relational maturity in intimate relationships (White, Houlihan, Costos, & Speisman, 1990). While most previous literature has focused on college-age and younger samples, research with older adults has found the stages of ego development precede and constrain the corresponding stages of relationship intimacy (White et al., 1990) and are related to planning for the future (McAdams, Ruetzel, & Foley, 1986).

Generativity—Generativity, the other construct presumed to be part of paternal maturity, describes fathers' capacity for care, connection, and interpersonal concern. Beyond Erikson's (1963, 1982) description of generativity as a shift from intimacy to a concern for the next generation, McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) view generativity as a multidimensional construct involving multiple levels and modes of expression. Bringing together two sets of impulses—agentic and communal—generativity involves both creating something that lives beyond the self (agency) and caring for others and what is created (communion). More than simply caring for others, generativity encompasses a range of complex and paradoxical feelings (McAdams, 2001). According to McAdams, generativity involves: "Bringing together power and love, agency and communion, self expression and self-surrender, generativity may embody a motivational paradox, making for a wide range of complex and even contradictory expressions in any given adult life" (McAdams, 2001, p. 405). Although there are no age-graded assumptions concerning generativity, dominant Western cultural values support generativity in adulthood through roles, such as parents, teachers, and mentors (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). While generativity is expressed in many ways (e.g., work, volunteerism, etc.), for many adults parenthood represents the most common role for expressions of generativity. Limited empirical evidence has noted a link between generativity and intergenerational family involvement or satisfaction (Peterson, 2002; Pratt, Danso, Arnold, Norris & Filyer, 2001).

Research Questions—The purpose of the study was to operationally define “paternal maturity” and to explore whether it influences fathers’ evaluation of the costs and rewards of their continuing father role. The operational definition of paternal maturity employed in the present study encompasses both cognitive (ego development) and affective (generativity) components of psychosocial maturity. Evaluation of the costs and rewards of fatherhood was the dependent variable indicative of the experiences of fatherhood. Finally, the research explored whether ego development and generativity, reflecting cognitive and emotional maturity, mediate the costs and rewards of fatherhood. The specific hypotheses of the present study are:

- (H1) There will be a positive relationship between level of ego development and feelings of generativity so that higher levels of ego development are associated with increased feelings of generative concern.
- (H2) There will be a significant relationship between ego development and the costs and rewards of being an older father. More specifically, we hypothesize that fathers who demonstrate higher levels of ego development (a more highly differentiated sense of self and appreciation for individuality) will report more rewards and fewer costs related to fatherhood.
- (H3) There will be a significant relationship between feelings of generativity and the costs and rewards of being an older father. Fathers who report increased feelings of generativity are hypothesized to evaluate the experience of fatherhood more positively than fathers with lower feelings of generativity.
- (H4) Demographic characteristics and family life cycle factors will be related to ego development, generativity, and costs and rewards of fatherhood.
- (H5) Ego development and generativity, as combined indicators of paternal maturity, will significantly predict the costs and rewards of fatherhood. The hypothesized relationship between paternal maturity (higher levels of ego development and generativity) and the costs and rewards of fatherhood will demonstrate increased levels of maturity as related to higher rewards and lower costs of fatherhood.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants were recruited from the central and northeastern regions of Connecticut. Inclusion criteria included living in the community (non-institutionalized), youngest child at least 23 years of age, and 80 years of age and under. Older men were contacted through several sources, including: a local senior center, several Veterans of Foreign Wars posts, an Army/Navy social club, over 55 bowling leagues, local churches and synagogues, and retiree groups. In addition, some participants provided the names of other men to be contacted. Older men were solicited and screened for eligibility and willingness to participate in the study. Fathers who agreed to participate received a packet including a cover letter describing the purpose of the study, the survey protocol, and a self-addressed-stamped envelope to mail back the questionnaire. Of 207 surveys distributed, 130 were returned (63% return rate). However, 34 of the 130 were not usable either due to incomplete responses ($N = 26$) or respondent’s age (8 respondents over 80). The final sample consisted of 96 older fathers.

Measures

Parental Comparison Level Index (PCLI)—Costs and rewards of fatherhood are the primary outcome variables and were assessed using the Parental Comparison Level Index

(PCLI). The PCLI is a validated measure consisting of two scales: costs (18 items) and rewards (19 items) of parenthood (Waldron-Hennessy & Sabatelli, 1997). For the present study, “father” was substituted for “parent” where appropriate. For each item, fathers rate their experiences in comparison to what they expected using a 7-point scale from 1 (*worse than I expected*) to 7 (*better than I expected*). Items include “the happiness I experience being a father,” “the sense of meaning/purpose I derive,” and “the limitation on my freedom I experience.” The measure yields separate scores for costs (CFS) and rewards (RFS). Items on the CFS are reverse coded so that high scores reflect high costs. Possible scores range from 18 to 126 (CFS) and 19 to 133 (RFS). Item to scale correlations ranged from .56 to .82 for rewards and .38 to .79 for costs. Missing data were handled through item mean substitution when participants completed at least 15 items for each scale. The development of the PCLI yielded high internal consistency for rewards (.95) and costs (.92) (Waldron-Hennessy & Sabatelli, 1997) and the present study reported $\alpha = .95$ for both costs and rewards.

Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT)—Loevinger’s (1998) Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT), Form 81 for men, assessed level of ego development. The test consists of 18 sentence completion items. Items include: “Men are lucky because they ...,” “My main problem is ...,” “A man should always... .” Following the recommended coding procedures, each completed sentence stem was coded with a number reflecting the corresponding level of ego development. Responses yielded both a combined ego score (sum total of responses to each item calculated using the item-sum rules) and overall ego level (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). A co-rater was trained separately using the training protocols and exercises developed by Hy and Loevinger (1996) and a random sample of 10 cases from each of the 18 items was scored by the co-rater to examine coding reliability. The rates of agreement ranged from 70%–100% on individual items and the total sample agreement was 89%.

Previous research has demonstrated validity with multiple samples (Hy & Loevinger, 1996), strong interpreter reliability (.90) and internal consistency ($\alpha = .90$) (Loevinger, 1998). Construct validity has been well established with personality measures, such as cognitive style and interpersonal style (Lorr & Manning, 1978; McCrae & Costa, 1980; Novy, 1993; Novy et al., 1994). A recent critical review found substantial empirical support for the concept of ego development and the WUSCT (Manners & Durkin, 2001).

Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS)—The LGS, a 20-item measure of generative concern that has been well validated with adults (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992), assessed the affective component of paternal maturity. Using a 4-point scale, respondents rate the extent that each item applies to them (0 = *never applies to me* to 3 = *statement applies to me very often*). Negatively worded items are reversed scored. Items include: “I try to pass along the knowledge I have gained through my experiences,” “I try to be creative in most things that I do,” “I think that I will be remembered for a long time after I die.” Development of the measure evidenced construct validity with other measures of generativity (Hawley, 1986; Ochse & Plug, 1986), test-retest reliability ($r = .73$), and high internal consistency ($\alpha = .83$). Reliability for the present study was $\alpha = .82$.

Demographic and Role-Related Factors—Selected demographic, biographical, and family life cycle variables were also assessed. Demographic data included age, ethnicity, education, occupation, religion, and level of family income. Biographical and family life cycle variables included age at birth of first child, duration of fatherhood, marital status, living arrangement, grandfather status. Characteristics of children were also assessed (number, ages, gender composition, educational accomplishments).

RESULTS

The sample of 96 midlife and older fathers was relatively homogeneous. All were Caucasian. The majority were married (89%) and fairly well educated. Table 1 presents the profile of the participants.

Costs and Rewards of Being an Older Father of Adult Children

Overall, fathers reported the most rewarding fatherhood experiences for the following items: “the pleasure I receive from doing things for my children” ($M = 6.11$), “the amount of pleasure I receive helping my children’s development” ($M = 6.03$), and “the enjoyment I receive from contact with my children” ($M = 6.00$). Mean total score for the Rewards of Fatherhood Scale (RFS) was 108.98 ($SD = 15.74$) out of a possible 133 points. Reward scores ranged from 65–133. Alternately, the most negatively rated “cost” items are: “the amount of worry or stress that I experience” ($M = 4.60$), “the tension that having children adds to the household” ($M = 4.61$), and “the degree to which being a father ties me down” ($M = 4.76$). It should be noted that all costs items were rated as an average of “about what I expect” (4) or higher. Ratings on the costs subscale are reverse scored for the purpose of analysis so that higher scores reflect higher levels of costs. The CFS totals ranged from 18–71 ($M = 52.59$, $SD = 16.20$) within a possible range of 18–126.

In comparison to a previous study examining the costs and rewards of pre-empty nest fathers (Waldron-Hennessey & Sabatelli, 1997), the overall total costs reported by fathers in the present study were similar to the previously reported perceptions of rewards for pre-empty nest fathers, 108.98 and 105.23, respectively; however, the average cost score ($M = 52.59$) for participants was almost two standard deviations below previously reported costs for empty nest fathers.

Ego Development

Table 2 presents the distribution of ego levels among the participants based on the scoring system of Hy & Loevinger, (1996). For the entire sample, the median ego score was 90.99 ($SD = 7.64$; range 77 to 115). The Conformist, Self-Aware, Conscientious, Individualistic, and Autonomous levels are represented. Conformists (8%) are characterized by attention to “rules,” social approval, and group mentalities. The Self-Aware level (43%) is distinctive in its recognition of the difference between self and other; however, such differences often manifest themselves in self-consciousness and loneliness. The Conscientious level (38%) is characterized by self-evaluated standards and reflexivity of personal traits. Fathers at the Individualistic level (9%) are characterized by greater tolerance for individuality in others and a sense of inner and outer selves. The highest ego level represented in the sample, Autonomous (2%), is primarily marked by the recognition of others’ needs for autonomy and a respect for the complexity of life and interpersonal relationships. The distribution of item sum ego scores was similar to that reported by Vaillant and McCullough (1987) and with no fathers scoring below the self-protective level or at the integrated level.

Generativity

The Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS) yields scores for individual scale items, totals on each subscale (Feelings of Generativity (FOGS) and Lack of Generativity (LOGS) and a total generativity score. Of the generative concern items (FOGS), the highest rated items were “trying to pass along knowledge” ($M = 2.38$), and “I feel as though I make a difference to many people” ($M = 2.03$). The mean total FOGS score was 24.16 points ($SD = 6.97$) out of possible 42. Scores on the FOGS ranged from 11 to 40. Scores on the Lack of Generativity Scale (LOGS) ranged from 0 to 10 ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 2.48$) out of a possible 18. LOGS items with the lowest scores include: I believe that society cannot be responsible for providing

shelter" ($M = 1.03$), "I do not feel that other people need me" ($M = .96$), and "I feel that I have done nothing that will survive after I die" ($M = .96$) reflect that some participants feel very little generativity toward others and future generations. The scores on the FOGS and LOGS are skewed toward father's reports of generativity with overall higher scores on the Feelings of Generativity Scale (FOGS) and low scores on the Lack of Generativity Scale (LOGS).

Bivariate and Multivariate Results

The interrelationship among the components of "paternal maturity" and the other variables was investigated through correlation and regression analyses. The correlation matrix (Table 3) demonstrates support for H1 with a moderately strong relationship between higher levels of ego development (EGO) and feelings of generativity (FOGS) ($r(95) = .33, p < .001$) and a negative relationship between ego level and lack of generativity (LOGS) ($r(95) = -.24, p < .05$). There is partial support for H2 examining the relationship between ego development and the rewards of fatherhood (RFS) ($r(96) = -.06, p = .568$) and the costs of fatherhood (CFS) ($r(91) = -.24, p < .05$). These results suggest that higher ego level scores are related to fewer reported costs, but not rewards, of fatherhood. Hypothesis 3 (H3) received mixed support for the feelings of generativity (FOGS) and lack of generativity (LOGS) and costs and rewards. Specifically, feelings of generativity (FOGS) were significantly related to increased rewards of fatherhood ($r(95) = .26, p < .01$) and lower costs of fatherhood ($r(90) = -.39, p < .000$). The total score on the LOGS (lack of generativity) was not related to rewards ($r(95) = -.089, p = .394$), but was significantly related to the costs of fatherhood ($r(90) = .25, p < .05$). These results indicate that fathers who express lower levels of generativity (LOGS) report higher costs.

Demographic and Role-Related Factors—The relationships among fatherhood variables, family life cycle factors, and demographic characteristics and the major conceptual variables of ego development, generativity, and the costs and rewards of fatherhood (H4) were examined through a series of analyses of variance and *t*-tests. The analysis included dimensions related to the fatherhood experiences of midlife and older fathers (age when a man became a father, the duration of fatherhood and the characteristics of the adult children), family life cycle factors (marital status, co-residence with adult children and grandfatherhood) and demographic characteristics (age, ethnicity, educational attainment, occupation, religion, and level of family income). Of these variables, only religion and educational attainment had a significant influence on any of the major conceptual variables.

Religious affiliation was collapsed to compare Catholic and Protestant fathers. The ANOVA for feelings of generativity was significant ($F(1, 76) = 6.492, p < .05$) with Catholic fathers scoring significantly higher on the FOGS than Protestant fathers. In this way, religious orientation explains 8% of the variance of generativity, as reflected by an η^2 of .079. The mean rewards of fatherhood also varied significantly according to religious orientation ($F(1, 77) = 13.873, p < .000$). There is a very strong effect size, as assessed by an η^2 of .153, of religious orientation on the rewards of fatherhood with Catholic fathers reporting significantly more rewards ($M = 113.99$) compared to Protestant fathers ($M = 101.85$). The mean costs of fatherhood also varied significantly according to religious orientation ($F(1, 73) = 5.706, p < .05$) with a medium effect size ($\eta^2 = .072$) of religious orientation demonstrating Catholic fathers reporting significantly fewer costs than Protestant fathers.

The item sums for ego development differed significantly according to educational level ($F(4, 91) = 2.613, p < .05$) with medium to strong effect ($\eta^2 = .103$) of education on ego development. Scheffe post hocs indicated the difference lies between fathers who have

completed college ($N = 30$, $M = 94.10$) and those fathers who had just finished a high school education ($N = 18$, $M = 87.39$) with higher levels of education associated with higher levels of ego development. The remaining variables from the three domains evidenced no consistent pattern of influence on either the independent or dependent variables. This finding is explained by the relatively homogenous and small sample. For example, differences between married and widowed fathers had to be excluded because of small sub-sample sizes and lack of confidence in results and limited effect size.

Paternal Maturity and the Experience of Older Fathers—Hypothesis 5 received mixed support for the degree to which ego development and generativity predict the costs and rewards of fatherhood. The results of one way ANOVA demonstrate that ego level significantly predicted the costs of fatherhood, $t(1, 89) = -2.315$, $p < .05$, but not the rewards of fatherhood, $t(4, 91) = -.573$, $p > .05$. Feelings of generativity significantly predicted both the rewards of fatherhood, $t(1, 93) = 2.620$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .069$, and the costs of fatherhood, $t(1, 88) = -4.026$, $p < .000$, $R^2 = .156$. Lack of generativity significantly predicted the costs, $t(1, 88) = 2.406$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .062$, but not the rewards of fatherhood, $t(1, 93) = -.857$, $p > .05$. Overall, these analyses provide mixed support for the variables of paternal maturity and the relationships with the experience of older fathers.

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the ability of the independent variables of ego development, generativity, and lack of generativity to predict the overall rewards and costs of being an older father (H5). The results of these analysis are presented in Table 4 and indicate that the models were significant and accounted for 9% and 17% of the variance of the costs ($F = 3.14$; $R^2 = .09$, $p < .05$) and rewards of fatherhood ($F = 6.02$; $R^2 = .17$, $p < .001$). Further analysis indicates feelings of generativity was the only significant predictor of the three predictors for both the rewards ($\beta = .313$, $p < .01$) and costs ($\beta = -.325$, $p < .01$) of fatherhood. Overall, these results indicate that while ego development, lack of generativity, and feelings of generativity are all related to the costs and rewards, the ability to understand these experiences is significantly predicted by older fathers' feelings of generativity.

DISCUSSION

Demographic changes allow for relationships between fathers and their adult children to span an unprecedented number of years, yet we know relatively little about this stage of the family life cycle. The present study sought to operationally define paternal maturity and examine the paradoxical nature of parent-child bonds through investigating both the costs and rewards of fatherhood. The attempt to operationally define paternal maturity using ego development and generativity to help understand differences in how fathers assess the costs and rewards of fatherhood was partially successful. Level of ego development was related to feelings of generativity (H1), lack of generativity (H1), and the costs, but not rewards, of fatherhood (H2). Feelings of generativity were related to increased rewards and fewer costs (H3) while lack of generativity was related to the costs, but not rewards, of fatherhood (H3). Overall, the measure of generative feelings (FOGS) seemed to be most consistently related to the ways older fathers experienced the costs and rewards of parenting. There was some variability in these findings with religious affiliation influencing feelings of generativity and the rewards of fatherhood (H4) with Catholic fathers reporting higher levels of both generativity and rewards of fatherhood. In addition, increased educational attainment was associated with higher levels of ego development (H4). Lastly, analysis of the operationalization of paternal maturity demonstrated that feelings of generativity remained the only significant predictor of the costs and rewards of fatherhood (H5).

Based on the current findings regarding ego development, we might speculate that older men operating at high levels of ego development might view their relationships with adult children from a more individuated or autonomous perspective and feel less responsible for ensuring the same outcomes for all their children. In contrast, respondents with higher scores on the LOGS (lack of generative concern) viewed their fatherhood experiences through a more negative light resulting in perceptions of greater costs.

Since older men's experiences with fatherhood are influenced by more than just their view of their self and their self in the world, the present study explored a variety of other factors that might influence these experiences. Fathers' chronological age was unrelated to any dependent variable. In contrast, previous research has observed a link between chronological age and ego development (Cohn, 1991; Hansell, Ronchi, Sparacino, & Strodbeck, 1985; McAdams et al., 1986) and generativity (McAdams, de St. Aubin, & Logan, 1993). The lack of association between chronological age and dependent variables may be simply due to the fact that chronological age is such a poor proxy for developmental change or the limited range of chronological ages. Previous research noting a link between chronological age and ego development and generativity typically included a much younger group of adults.

Since fathers in the present study ranged in age from 52 to 80, it seems plausible that variations in levels of generativity and ego development may be unrelated to chronological age for these older men. Similar to the findings of Waldron-Hennessey and Sabatelli (1997), father's chronological age was unrelated to either costs or rewards. Future research needs to do a better job delineating other life course variables that may be related to differences in how parents assess costs and rewards. Since most participants in the present study occupied relatively stable periods in their family life, chronological age may be less salient to examining the costs and rewards of parenthood.

Other significant factors influencing the measures of maturity and costs and rewards were education and religious affiliation. The link between ego development and education is consistent with previous research (Helson & Roberts, 1994; Labouvie-Vief & Diehl, 1998) suggesting that higher levels of formal education are related to higher levels of ego development. The finding from the present study that Catholic fathers identified more rewards and fewer costs in comparison to Protestant fathers raises several unanswered questions suitable for future research. Is there something qualitatively different about the expectations, orientation, and evaluation of Catholic and Protestant men toward their fatherhood role?

Finally, our findings suggest that assessing the costs and rewards of fatherhood may be a helpful way of exploring the concept of intergenerational ambivalence (Luescher & Pillemer, 1998). Most fathers reported viewing their experiences with their adult children as quite rewarding, yet at the same time, acknowledged the costs associated with their role. A closer look at how men evaluate the costs and rewards may provide insight into intriguing differences in how fathers construct and enact the role of father. Some fathers may emphasize the more positive aspects of their role and minimize the costs. Others appear to primarily emphasize the costs of fatherhood, while others report few costs and few rewards suggesting a potentially detached approach to their role. Such differences may be a way of capturing differences in the nature of intergenerational ambivalence.

Our findings are limited due to several factors including research design, sampling, and sampling characteristics. The self-selection bias of fathers who were willing to participate may depict a certain type of respondent not representative of all midlife and older fathers. The generalizability of the results is also limited by the use of a purposive sample. The size of the sample also limited the possibilities for analysis. Though most analysis demonstrated

adequate cell sizes and power, in some cases the sample size of cells within cross-tab analysis or ANOVA was too small for full confidence in the results. More critically, the sample size was too small to take full advantage of more advanced analytical tools such as structural equation modeling. Lastly, while the PCLI performed well in the present study, the measure may not capture the full range of costs and rewards when children are adults. The development and extension of our knowledge of older men's lives and how to appropriately assess, measure, and appreciate older men's relationships is the goal of this study and future research.

From a developmental perspective, future research should explore the impact of past and present experiences on how fathers perceive their role. Notably, family of origin experiences will influence expectations concerning fatherhood. In addition, both normative and idiosyncratic family and individual transitions for fathers and children are likely to influence fathers' perceptions of the role. Future research needs to explore the collective impact of all father-child dyads on men's assessment of their father role since parents seem increasingly comfortable in naming their "favorite" child. In other words, how does a strained relationship with one adult child influence a father's overall assessment of parenthood? Or, how does the transformation of a previously strained relationship between a father and a child influence his overall assessments of costs and rewards? Or how does a father distinguish the costs and rewards associated with his "favorite" child versus all other children? Moreover, while most fathers seem to be positive about their experiences, researchers need to consider fathers whose overall assessments reflect considerable disappointment and high costs.

As fathers and children share relations that span an unprecedented number of years, it is critically important to understand how fathers experience their role and how this role may differ both with different children, but also across time. While taking into account the variance in older men's lives, we suggest that there is much more to understand regarding men's experiences of fatherhood in later life and their relationships with their adult children. Despite mixed support from this study, paternal maturity remains a critical concept influencing how older men perceive and integrate the affective and cognitive components of the fatherhood experience in later life.

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Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Older Fathers ($N = 96$)

Variables	Percent			
Marital status				
Married	89%			
Widowers	7			
Divorced	4			
Educational attainment				
Less than high school	3			
High school	18			
Some college	22			
College graduate	31			
Advanced degree	25			
Religious affiliation				
Roman Catholic	48			
Protestant	39			
Other, including none	13			
Family income				
\$10,000–\$24,999	3			
\$25,000–\$39,999	19			
\$40,000–\$59,999	21			
\$60,000–\$79,999	16			
\$100,000+	10			
Nature of fatherhood				
Biological	91			
Adopted	4			
Stepchildren	3			
Co-resident adult children	Yes – 14%			
Grandparenthood	Yes – 79%			
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Age of father	67.4	7.23		52–80
Age became father	26.4	3.99		19–46
Duration of fatherhood	41.1	7.61		25–57
Number of children	3.1	1.35		1–8
Ages of adult children ($N = 282$)	38.8	7.20		23–57

Table 2

Items Sums, Corresponding Ego Level, and Sample Distribution

Items sums	Ego level	Percent distribution in sample
36–67	Impulsive	
68–75	Self-protective	
76–81	Conformist	8%
82–90	Self-aware	43%
91–100	Conscientious	38%
101–108	Individualistic	9%
109–118	Autonomous	2%
119+	Integrated	

Source: Item sums taken from Hy and Loevinger, 1996.

Table 3

Correlation Matrix for Ego Level, Generativity, and Costs and Rewards

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Sums of Ego Development (EGO)	—				
2. Feelings of Generativity (FOGS)	.33 ***	—			
3. Lack of Generativity (LOGS)	-.24 *	-.38 ***	—		
4. Rewards of Fatherhood (RFS)	-.06	.26 **	-.09	—	
5. Costs of Fatherhood (CFS)	-.23 *	-.39 ***	.25 *	-.54 ***	—

* $p > .05$;** $p < .01$;*** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Results of Multiple Regression Separated by Costs and Rewards of Fatherhood

Variable	Rewards of fatherhood			Costs of fatherhood		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
Ego Level	-.35	.22	-.17	-.19	.22	-.09
Feelings of Generativity	.71	.25	.31**	.74	.25	-.33**
Lack of Generativity	-.07	.69	-.01	.61	.69	.10
R^2		.09			.17	
F		3.14*			6.02***	

* $p < .05$;** $p < .01$;*** $p < .001$.