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Humorous communication, verbal aggressiveness, and father-son relational satisfaction

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Abstract: This study examines the role of humor orientation and reported humorous communication behaviors during father-son conflict in predicting relational satisfaction. In addition, the main effect and interaction effect (with humor orientation) of verbal aggressiveness on relational satisfaction is investigated. A survey of adult father-son pairs pinpoints an interesting network of findings linking general humor orientations, verbal aggressiveness, reported use of humorous messages during conflict, and relational satisfaction within the father-son relationship. Key findings include: Sons’ relational satisfaction is predicted by lower fathers’ verbal aggressiveness for those with fathers who report a very high humor orientation. On the other hand, fathers’ relational satisfaction is predicted by lower levels of sons’ humor orientation, and not by verbal aggressiveness. Further, sons’ relational satisfaction is negatively related to the reported use of all types of humorous messages in a father-son conflict event.

Keywords: humor orientation, father-son conflict, relational satisfaction, verbal aggressiveness

1 Introduction

The role of humorous communication in personal relationships has been studied only in recent years, following decades of greater attention on the use of humor in the workplace, in the classroom, and in general as a self-presentation style (Martin 2007). The use of humor in family relationships has been studied only occasionally, with decidedly mixed findings.

The relationship between a father and son is one of the most significant same-sex relationships formed in a man’s lifetime (Floyd and Morman 2003). A core

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dyadic unit within family communication research, the father–son relationship has been the focus of study on critical relational exchange characteristics including verbal and physical aggression, and relational satisfaction (e.g., Beatty et al. 1996; Beatty and Dobos 1992; Roberto et al. 2007, 2009). The role of verbal aggressiveness in the prediction of relational satisfaction has been well-studied and serves as a starting base for this study. The role of aggressiveness in this same-sex parent-child relationship is of particular relevance, given the strong potential socializing impact of fathers’ communicative behaviors on sons (Beatty et al. 1994). Whether humorous communication serves as a positive influence on relational satisfaction, and whether humorous tendencies and verbal aggressiveness interact in the prediction of relational satisfaction, has not yet been investigated. This gap will be the main focus of study here.

1.1 Humor

Humor has been studied across disciplines and in a variety of contexts, stemming from several key theoretical arenas (Martin 2007). Some of the early humor scholarship originated with the work of Freud (1928), who defined humor as a situation that would normally elicit negative emotions, but the presence of amusing or incongruous elements provides an altered perspective and helps the individual avoid negative emotions. Other theoretical foundations of humor within psychology include alternative incongruity theories (Eysenck 1942; Koestler 1964; Piddington 1963) and superiority/disparagement theories (e.g., Gruner 1997).

In the communication discipline, humor has been studied as a coping strategy from an interpersonal communication perspective, in particular, taking a humor orientation approach (Booth-Butterfield et al. 2007; Miczo 2004) and sense of humor (i.e., what individuals perceive as funny) has been studied as relevant to popular media preferences and uses and gratifications, applying a multi-part humor appreciation model (Lieberman et al. 2009; Neuendorf and Skalski 2000; Neuendorf et al. 2004). For the purposes of this study, humor will be examined in two ways: (a) as an interpersonal communication predispositional trait from the humor orientation perspective (see next section), and, (b) from a senses of humor perspective that focuses on the execution of specific types of humorous messages.

1.1.1 Humor orientation

Humor orientation is the ability of individuals to frequently and successfully enact the use of humorous communication. Individuals high in humor
orientation employ humor as a significant part of their social style (Prasinos and Tittler 1981: 296). Those with a high humor orientation use diverse humor strategies across a number of contexts, whereas those with a low humor orientation avoid the use of humor and do not employ laughter in their interactions (Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield 1991). Humor orientation has been studied within friendships (Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006; Wanzer et al. 1996), in the health industry (Wanzer et al. 2005), in student/teacher relationships (Booth-Butterfield et al. 2007), and within family and romantic relationships (Honeycutt and Brown 1998).

Previous research shows that humor orientation is related to various communication traits and behaviors and has important implications for personal and relational well-being. Among nurses, humor orientation was found to be positively related to communication competence (Wanzer et al. 2005), and nurses with higher humor orientation were more emotionally expressive, thereby better able to cope with job hassles and job-related stressors (Wanzer et al. 2005). However, humor orientation has somewhat different implications within the family context (Harzold and Sparks 2006; Honeycutt and Brown 1998). For example, Prasinos and Tittler (1981) found that high humor oriented adolescents (as determined by peer nomination) reported less family cohesion, more family conflict, and more distance in their relationships with their fathers than their low humor oriented counterparts.

There are indications that humor orientation has positive effects on relational satisfaction, while verbal aggression has negative effects. We know that individuals who are high in verbal aggression are not as well liked in their relationships and that the inverse is true for those with a high humor orientation (Wanzer et al. 1996). While an individual’s humor orientation is often seen as a positive trait within the family (Wanzer et al. 1996), verbal aggression is typically seen as a negative one (e.g., Vissing and Baily 1996). Further, there is evidence that males use humor and verbal aggression differently when with other males than they do in the presence of females (Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006). Examining the relationship between humor orientation and verbal aggressiveness within conflict in the father–son relationship and its impact on relational satisfaction may provide insight on communication dynamics for this important relational dyad.

### 1.1.2 Humorous messages

Humor orientation, as a communication trait possessed by the individual (Wanzer et al. 1995), is a generalized proclivity to utilize humor during social interactions, without regard to type of humor. Thus, regarding the generation of specific
humorous messages, an alternative model is employed here. Previous work (Neuendorf et al. 2004) has specified a four-part model of humor perception, which has been verified as a useful typology and validated against both joking behavior and relevant mediated communication choices, as well as attitudinal indicators such as quality of life and socio-political opinions (Lieberman et al. 2009; Neuendorf et al. 2014). This model identifies four broad mechanisms of humor—ways in which we might find something funny. Each of these four emerges from a body of work that identifies the underlying assumptions of the particular approach to humor, and also provides a reasonable amount of empirical support for its existence (Martin 2007). While most scholars privilege one particular mechanism, our view is that multiple independent mechanisms exist; these are conceptually mutually exclusive, but may be experienced simultaneously.

The first of the four independent mechanisms is disparagement. As far back as Aristotle (McKeon 1941), laughter is seen as originating in malice. Seventeenth-century British philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1651/1981) reinforced the notion of humor being derived from a sense of superiority over others, and Freud (1928) recognized the aggressive basis in many jokes. Later, the superiority mechanism was validated in work by the theoretic examinations of Gruner (1978) and the quantitative research of Zillmann and Bryant (1974, 1980; Zillmann and Cantor 1972) and LaFave (LaFave et al. 1976). Attempts to generate a superiority mechanism in response to potentially humorous stimuli include putdown humor, satire, sarcasm, and self-deprecation.

The second humor mechanism is incongruity, the juxtaposition of inconsistent or incongruous elements. Dating at least back to German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (Martin 2007), this notion was further elaborated by Arthur Koestler (1964). His concept of bisociation is an attempt to explain the mental processes involved in the humorous resolution of incongruous stimuli, as well as the process of artistic creativity and scientific discovery. These approaches indicate that humor is experienced when two disparate perspectives are simultaneously experienced; the joy of humor derives from the “solving” of the incongruous puzzle. Contemporary empirical support for this mechanism of humor includes a series of studies by Shultz and colleagues (e.g., Shultz and Horibe 1974) and others (Perlmutter 2002; Vaid et al. 2003; Veale 2004). Particular types of humor intended to generate an incongruity mechanism response include wordplay (e.g., puns), “pure” incongruity, absurdity, and sight gags.

A third mechanism is arousal-based humor. Although early attempts to explicate this mechanism emphasized the humorous response as a method of relieving pent-up psychological strain or tension (e.g., the works of philosophers Immanuel Kant and Herbert Spencer; Spencer 1860), a later articulation by psychologist Daniel Berlyne (1972) posited two arousal-related processes—arousal
boost and arousal jag. The arousal boost mechanism operates when a pleasurable increase in generalized arousal results from a humorous stimulus. The arousal jag mechanism comes into play when arousal passes an optimal level, and a punchline or other resolution successfully reduces arousal to a pleasurable level once again. Arousal-provoking humor may be manifested in a variety of ways, such as slapstick, dark humor, sick humor, and sexual or naughty humor.

Although less often acknowledged as an independent dimension of humor, a fourth mechanism, social currency humor, has been studied as a means of building and maintaining relationships (e.g., Chapman 1983; Fine 1983; LeMasters 1975). Social currency humor may be experienced as the pleasure derived from playful interaction (Apter 1982), the establishment of a functional social hierarchy (Fry 1963), or the achievement of a sense of group belonging or understanding (Dundes 1987; Pollio 1983). Particular behaviors meant to invoke this mechanism include joking to fit in, joking around socially, inside jokes, and parody (relying on a shared view of a known form, such as a film genre).

The current study examines these four senses of humor vis-à-vis reports of the execution and reception of humorous messages during conflict interactions between father and son.

1.2 Verbal aggression

Verbal aggression is defined as the “exchange of messages between two people where at least one of the people is attacking the self concept of the other person in order to inflict psychological pain” (Infante and Wigley 1986: 67). Rancer and Avtgis (2006) summarize five possible explanations offered by prior scholarship (e.g., Infante and Rancer 1996) for the development of verbal aggressiveness: Disdain, social learning, psychopathology, argumentative skill deficiency, and genetics (i.e., predispositional traits). Specifically, trait verbal aggressiveness is defined as the enduring predisposition of an individual during conflict to verbally attack another person’s self-concept in order to inflict psychological pain (Infante and Wigley 1986). Verbal aggressive messages (the behavioral manifestation of verbal aggressiveness) are presented in the forms of character attacks, competence attacks, insults, maledictions, teasing, ridicule, profanity, and nonverbal emblems (Infante et al. 1990, 1992).

1.2.1 Verbal aggression in the father–son relationship

Verbal aggression has been found to have important implications for relational status and functions in the sibling relationship (e.g., Myers and Bryant 2008), in
romantic relationships (Olson 2002; Sutter and Martin 1998), in marriage (Infante et al. 1990), between parents and children (Palazzolo et al. 2010; Roberto et al. 2006, 2007, 2009), and specifically between fathers and sons (Beatty et al. 1994, 1996; Rudd et al. 1997).

In studies of fathers and sons, researchers have investigated the role of verbal aggression in fathers’ planning of messages, fathers’ communication apprehension, sons’ perceptions of fathers’ sarcasm and criticism (two types of verbally aggressive messages), and more recently, affection between fathers and sons (Floyd and Morman 2003; Strasser and Lambert 2009). Beatty et al. (1994) investigated fathers’ verbal aggression as related to their adult sons’ perceptions of the fathers’ trait verbal aggressiveness, and the verbally aggressive message types of sarcasm and criticism. The findings of this study suggest that men are conscious of their fathers’ verbal behaviors, and accurate in their assessments of verbal aggressiveness; the findings also imply the presence of a link between verbal aggression and sarcasm.

1.2.2 Verbal aggression and humor orientation

While some scholars have given careful consideration to the use of teasing as a form of aggressive communication\(^1\), the current research focuses on verbal aggression and humor orientation as two separate constructs, the former representing a negative form of communication, and the latter a tendency toward positive patterns of communication. In the only prior study that probed the relationship between verbal aggressiveness and humor orientation, Wanzer et al. (1996) found no general relationship between the two constructs. However, there were several findings that indicated differences between individuals with high and low humor orientation. First, those with a high humor orientation were less lonely than those with a low humor orientation, which suggests that high humor oriented individuals have a network of relationships that satisfy their interpersonal needs. Further, the higher an individual’s humor orientation score, the more others perceived that person as being funny.

\(^1\) DiCioccio (2010, 2012) and Wigley (2012) describe conceptual models of humor and aggressive communication that bring the two constructs under the same umbrella. DiCioccio (2010, 2012) presents an interactionist model of teasing communication, which recognizes “the individual qualities, situational characteristics, and relational conditions that together explain teasing” (2010: 340). She proposes that teasing represents a form of verbal aggression. Wigley (2012) focuses on conditions under which humor may serve as a trigger for verbal aggression by another person, suggesting that intentionality is a critical factor in understanding the relationship between humor and verbal aggression.
Additionally, humor orientation was perceived as an overall positive personality trait that has a direct impact on relational development. Finally, verbal aggressiveness was positively related to targeting others with humor (via “jokes, funny stories, or attempt(s) to communicate humor”, p. 47).

1.3 Relational satisfaction

Scholars have studied relational satisfaction in a variety of contexts: friendship (Ramirez 2002), supervisor-subordinate relationships (Daniels and Spiker 1983), new acquaintances (Miczo et al. 2009), romantic relationships (Emmers-Sommer 2004; Sargent 2002), step-families (Schrodt et al. 2008), and parent-child relationships (Beatty and Dobos 1992; Caughlin and Malis 2004; Forward et al. 2008). This study focuses on the father and son dyad, and therefore the discussion of the literature is limited to relational satisfaction in personal and family relationships.

The family context provides a number of opportunities for the examination of relational satisfaction, with the parent-child relationship receiving much attention. Caughlin and Malis (2004) found that as parent demand/withdrawal communication increased, adolescent satisfaction decreased. Parent satisfaction was negatively associated with both parent demand/adolescent withdrawal and adolescent demand/parent withdrawal communication. Regarding verbal aggression and relational satisfaction, Teven et al. (1998) found evidence to support the destructive nature of verbal aggression within interpersonal relationships. Further, Roberto et al. (2009) reported a strong negative association between parental verbal aggression and relational satisfaction, and a significant positive association between parental responsiveness and relational satisfaction, in a study of young adult children and parents. The study also established that while this outcome was true for young adult children’s perceived parent verbal aggression, the findings did not hold for parents’ reports of their own verbal aggression. Finally, Palazzolo et al. (2010) concluded that a parent’s verbal aggression is a strong model for their same sex child’s aggression.

1.3.1 Relational satisfaction and humor

While parental verbal aggression has been established as a negative predictor of parent-child relational satisfaction, the predictive roles of humor orientation and humorous communication have not been examined. Understanding the
father–son relationship and the use of humor and verbal aggression as predictive of relational satisfaction may provide insight into how males use these two types of behavior to communicate within this relationship. Males use teasing and humor, in an aggressive manner, differently in their same-sex relationships than they do in cross-sex relationships (Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006). Males, especially in sibling relationships, often use teasing as a display of affection.

Previous research has examined the association between humor and relational closeness in the romantic relationship context (Bippus 2000). For example, Bippus et al. (2011) examined humor in conflict discussions between romantic partners and found that one’s own report of humor use was positively related to one’s relational satisfaction, and other’s report of one’s humor use was negatively related to the other’s relational satisfaction. In contrast, Hall and Sereno (2010) found that the use of negative humor, regardless of public or private setting, had little to no influence on relational outcomes in intimate couple relationships (p. 366). Cann et al. (2011) found no support for their predictions that dating couples would have similar humor styles or that such similarities would predict relational satisfaction. The best predictors of satisfaction were perceptions of a partner’s humor style, with other-directed styles explaining the most variance.

Barelds and Barelds-Dijkstra found that humor plays only a limited role in intimate, long-term relationships; for men, humor appreciation rather than humor production was related to relationship satisfaction. They concluded that “previous studies may have overestimated the role of [the use of] humor in intimate relationships” (2010: 264). These studies point to the complexity of humor in its interpretations and uses within a stable relationship.

1.4 Research questions

Based on the review of literature on fathers and sons, verbal aggression, humor and humor orientation, and relational satisfaction, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: Is a father’s or son’s relational satisfaction correlated with their own or the other’s humor orientation?

RQ2: In the prediction of a father’s or son’s relational satisfaction, is there an interaction between the other’s humor orientation and the other’s verbal aggressiveness?

RQ3: Is a father’s or son’s relational satisfaction related to the use of particular types of humorous messages during conflict?
2 Method

2.1 Procedures

Two versions of a survey instrument were created: one worded for fathers and the other for adult sons. College students enrolled in undergraduate communication courses at a mid-western urban university in the United States were given the paired instruments. Female students were asked to find a father–son dyad to complete the survey instruments. Male students were asked to fill out the sons’ instrument, and return their father’s packet in a provided sealed envelope. Fathers were required to provide a contact phone number on the outside of the envelope as a means to verify their participation. The instrument and the data collection protocol were approved by the university’s institutional review board.

2.2 Participants

The total sample consisted of 101 father–son pairs. Son participant ages ranged from 18 to 59 years ($M = 24.17$, $sd = 6.66$) and fathers’ ages ranged from 37 to 82 ($M = 54.12$, $sd = 9.00$). The racial distribution of sons was reported as: 63.4% Caucasian, 22.8% African American, 3% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 7.9% other, with 1% non-response. The racial distribution of fathers was reported as: 64.4% Caucasian, 21.8% African American, 5% Hispanic, and 6.9% other, with 2% non-response. Half (50.5%) of fathers and sons reported living together, with 47.5 % not living together, and 2% non-response. Sons reported their relationship types as follows: 86.1% biological sons, 6.9% step sons, 3% adopted sons, 1% foster sons, 2% other and 1% non-response. Fathers reported their relationship types as follows: 84.3% biological fathers, 7.8% step fathers, 3.9% adoptive fathers, 1% foster fathers, 1% other, and 2% non-response.

2.3 Measures

2.3.1 Humor orientation scale

The instrument included the 17-item Humor Orientation Scale (Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield 1991). Responses were on a five-point Likert-type response scale. Example items include “I regularly tell jokes and funny stories when I am
with a group,” “Being funny is a natural communication style with me,” and “I cannot tell a joke well” (reverse-coded). The present study found the internal consistency reliability to be $\alpha = 0.93$ for fathers and $\alpha = 0.91$ for sons.

### 2.3.2 Humorous conflict messages

The use of humorous messages was measured using original items created for this study, applying four humor types (Neuendorf et al. 2014). Participants were given a series of four questionnaire items defining each of the humorous message types: (1) “Humorous messages that rely on a sense of superiority–by disparaging or putting down an individual or group”; (2) “Humorous messages that are based on incongruity–the unexpected linking of two or more things that usually do not go together”; (3) “Humorous messages that rely on general arousal–reactions to extreme or shocking things”; (4) “Humorous messages that rely on familiarity and social currency–messages that create a sense of connection among people, often through shared knowledge or experience”. For each of the four items, participants were asked to indicate (a) how often they use this type of humorous message during disagreements within the father–son relationship, as well as (b) how often they receive each type during such disagreements, using a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 indicating they never use or receive these messages and 10 meaning that they always use or receive these messages.

### 2.3.3 Verbal aggression scale

The instrument also included the Verbal Aggression Scale (Infante and Wigley 1986), twenty items with a five-point Likert-type response scale. Example items include “I am extremely careful to avoid attacking individuals’ intelligence when I attack their ideas” (reverse-coded), “When individuals insult me, I get a lot of pleasure out of really telling them off,” and “When people will not budge on an issue of importance, I lose my temper and say rather strong things to them.” The scale reliability was $\alpha = 0.89$ for fathers and $\alpha = 0.80$ for sons.

### 2.3.4 Relational satisfaction

Relational satisfaction was measured using a modified version of the Quality Marriage Index (Norton 1983). The words “marriage” and “partner” were replaced
with “relationship” and “father”/“son” as was done in past research (Roberto et al. 2009). Two items regarding intentions to terminate the relationship and conversations regarding termination of the relationship were excluded. For the current study, two additional items were excluded; in both cases the negatively worded stems did not match the responses offered. The present study found the internal consistency reliability of the revised five-item factor-analysis-created relational satisfaction scale to be $\alpha = 0.71$ for fathers and $\alpha = 0.91$ for sons.

3 Results

3.1 Assessment of research question 1

The first research question (RQ1) asked: is a father’s or son’s relational satisfaction correlated with their own or the other’s humor orientation? Table 1 presents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sons’ HO</th>
<th>Fathers’ HO</th>
<th>Sons’ RS</th>
<th>Fathers’ RS</th>
<th>Sons’ VA</th>
<th>Fathers’ VA</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Sons’</td>
<td>$r$</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>$p$</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>101</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sons’</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.538</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers’</td>
<td>$r$</td>
<td>–0.37*</td>
<td>–0.01</td>
<td>0.62*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>0.963</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sons’</td>
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<td>0.09</td>
<td>–0.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
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<td>0.627</td>
<td>0.359</td>
<td>0.724</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers’</td>
<td>$r$</td>
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<td>0.08</td>
<td>–0.11</td>
<td>–0.25*</td>
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<td>0.028</td>
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<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: When the analysis sample is limited to biological father/son pairs, key correlations remain either non-significant or significant: For father/son HO, $r = 0.06$ ($p = 0.593$, $n = 86$); for father/son RS, $r = 0.62$ ($p < 0.001$, $n = 80$); for father/son VA, $r = 0.29$ ($p = 0.007$, $n = 86$).
correlations among the major study variables. Sons’ relational satisfaction was not significantly correlated with either sons’ humor orientation or fathers’ humor orientation. However, fathers’ relational satisfaction was significantly and negatively correlated with sons’ humor orientation ($r = -0.37, p < 0.001$), but not correlated with fathers’ own level of humor orientation. The more a son reports using humor in his communication, the lower his father’s satisfaction with the father–son relationship.

3.2 Assessment of research question 2

The second research question (RQ2) asked: in the prediction of a father’s or son’s relational satisfaction, is there an interaction between the other’s humor orientation and the other’s verbal aggressiveness?

First, a multiple regression was executed using sons’ relational satisfaction as the dependent variable with fathers’ humor orientation and fathers’ trait verbal aggressiveness as the main effects, and including a multiplicative term to represent the interaction between fathers’ humor orientation and fathers’ trait verbal aggressiveness, with the independent variables centered prior to the construction of the interaction term (following Jaccard et al. 1990). An examination of tolerances and condition indexes revealed no problems with multicollinearity. The overall model showed a significant prediction of sons’ relational satisfaction with 11.5% of the variance explained (see Table 2). The main effect of fathers’ verbal aggressiveness and the interaction term were both significant. Fathers’ humor orientation remained non-significant as related to sons’ relational satisfaction ($\beta = 0.03, p = 0.784$). Fathers’ verbal aggressiveness proved to be a significant unique contributor to the prediction of sons’ relational

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>$r$</th>
<th>Sig. of $r$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>Sig. of $t$</th>
<th>Tol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fathers’ Humor Orientation (FHO)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.269</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.784</td>
<td>0.972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers’ Verbal Aggressiveness (FVA)</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.144</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>-1.99</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction (FHO x FVA)</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
<td>-3.26</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.906</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Equation: $R^2 = 0.115$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.088$

$F_{(3,95)} = 4.13, p = 0.008$

Note: The two main effect independent variables were centered before construction of the interaction term (Jaccard et al. 1990). Collinearity diagnostics revealed no multicollinearity problems; tolerances all exceeded 0.90, and no condition indexes exceeded 15.
satisfaction, with a negative relationship apparent ($\beta = -0.20, p = 0.049$). The interaction between fathers’ humor orientation and fathers’ trait verbal aggressiveness also significantly predicted sons’ relational satisfaction ($\beta = -0.33, p = 0.002$). Figure 1 presents the nature of the significant interaction, splitting fathers’ humor orientation scores and fathers’ verbal aggressiveness scores into quartiles. For only the very highest fathers’ humor orientation group, relational satisfaction decreased as trait verbal aggressiveness increased. For all other humor orientation groups, fathers’ trait verbal aggressiveness was not linearly related to sons’ relational satisfaction.

A second multiple regression used fathers’ relational satisfaction as the dependent variable and sons’ humor orientation and sons’ trait verbal aggressiveness as main effects, with a multiplicative term representing the interaction, again with the independent variables centered prior to the construction of the interaction term. An examination of tolerances and condition indexes revealed no problems with multicollinearity. The overall model showed a significant prediction of fathers’ relational satisfaction, with 14.3% of the variance explained (see Table 3). One main effect was statistically significant—that of son’s humor orientation ($\beta = -0.37, p < 0.001$). Thus, the significant negative relationship between sons’ humor orientation and fathers’ relational satisfaction found in the earlier

Figure 1: Graph of significant interaction between fathers’ humor orientation and fathers’ trait verbal aggression in the prediction of sons’ relational satisfaction.
Note: The four groups on both fathers’ trait verbal aggression and fathers’ humor orientation are quartiles, with 1 being the lowest group and 4 being the highest.
correlational analyses held its significance in this regression, essentially controlling for sons’ trait verbal aggressiveness and the interaction term.

3.3 Assessment of research questions 1 and 2 using the actor–partner interdependence model

Given this study’s use of non-independent data from father–son dyads, and the fact that the correlation between dyad members on the dependent variable for RQ1 and RQ2 (i.e., relational satisfaction) is substantial ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$), we employed the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (Kashy and Levesque 2000; Kenny et al. 2006) to further probe and confirm our findings relevant to Research Questions 1 and 2. Figure 2 shows the structural equation model used to test the relationships between humor orientation, verbal aggressiveness, and the interaction of the two for the prediction of relational satisfaction for both fathers and sons.

The model overall demonstrated good fit. The chi-square was non-significant ($5.89$, with df = 9 and $p = 0.751$), and measures of goodness of fit indicated a good model fit (CFI = 1.00, RMSEA < 0.001, p-value for the test of close fit = 0.86). The standardized path coefficients and correlations within this model that were significant are flagged in Figure 2 via circling the coefficients. These included a significant path from fathers’ verbal aggressiveness to fathers’ relational satisfaction ($\beta = -0.29$, $p = 0.003$, $SE = 0.090$) and a significant path from sons’ humor orientation to fathers’ relational satisfaction ($\beta = -0.31$, $p < 0.001$, $SE = 0.086$). Also significant were two paths from the interaction of fathers’ humor orientation and verbal aggressiveness—to fathers’ relational satisfaction ($\beta = -0.25$, $p = 0.009$, $SE = 0.089$) and to sons’ relational satisfaction ($\beta = -0.31$, $p = 0.002$, $SE = 0.104$).

**Table 3:** Multiple regression predicting fathers’ relational satisfaction from sons’ humor orientation and sons’ verbal aggressiveness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>$r$</th>
<th>Sig. of $r$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>Sig. of $t$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>Sig. of $t$</th>
<th>Tol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sons’ Humor Orientation (SHO)</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>-3.71</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>0.957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sons’ Verbal Aggressiveness (SVA)</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.137</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.85</td>
<td>0.400</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction (SHO X SVA)</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.433</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.717</td>
<td>0.936</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Equation: $R^2 = 0.143$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.115$

$F_{(3,92)} = 5.10$, $p = 0.003$

Note: The two main effect independent variables were centered before construction of the interaction term (Jaccard et al. 1990). Collinearity diagnostics revealed no multicollinearity problems; tolerances all exceeded 0.90, and no condition indexes exceeded 15.
Significant correlations between exogenous variables were those between fathers’ verbal aggressiveness and the fathers’ interaction term ($r = -0.27, p = 0.008, SE = 0.099$) and between fathers’ verbal aggressiveness and sons’ verbal aggressiveness ($r = 0.22, p = 0.025, SE = 0.097$). The two endogenous variables, fathers’ relational satisfaction and sons’ relational satisfaction, remained correlated at $r = 0.57, p < 0.001, SE = 0.094$.

This comprehensive test of relationships among humor orientations, verbal aggressiveness, and relational satisfaction confirms the main findings of Tables 2 and 3, although the just-significant negative relationship between fathers’ verbal aggressiveness and sons’ relational satisfaction has dropped to non-significance in the full model. The test of this full model also forwards the possibility of additional significant predictors of fathers’ relational satisfaction not emergent in the tests presented in Tables 2 and 3. In the comprehensive model, both fathers’ aggressiveness and the fathers’ interaction term (between
Humor orientation and verbal aggressiveness) emerge as significant in the prediction of fathers’ relational satisfaction.

### 3.4 Assessment of research question 3

The third research question asked whether a father’s or son’s relational satisfaction is related to the use of particular types of humorous messages in conflict. Social currency was the humorous message type most frequently reported during conflict for both self (\(M = 4.91, sd = 2.77\)) and other (i.e., father or son) (\(M = 4.88, sd = 2.82\)). Arousal was the next most frequently used message type as self-reported (\(M = 3.69, sd = 2.49\)) and reported to be used by the other person (\(M = 3.63, sd = 2.49\)). Incongruity was the third most used message as gauged by self-report (\(M = 3.31, sd = 2.35\)) and reported to be used by the other (\(M = 3.22, sd = 2.40\)). Superiority was the type of message least reported to be used both by self (\(M = 2.86, sd = 2.38\)) and other (\(M = 2.76, sd = 2.32\)). An inspection of the means to identify differences between fathers and sons produced three significant or near-significant differences. Sons were significantly more likely to report using arousal humor (\(M = 4.04, F(1,198) = 4.02, p = 0.046\)) and incongruity humor (\(M = 3.78, F(1,196) = 8.03, p = 0.005\)) when in conflict than were fathers (\(M = 3.34, M = 2.85\), respectively), and sons were near-significantly more likely to report their fathers using superiority humor (\(M = 3.06; F(1,195) = 3.42, p = 0.066\)) than were fathers likely to report sons using superiority (\(M = 2.45\)).

RQ3 is directly addressed by the correlational analyses shown in Table 4, which reveal that both fathers’ and sons’ relational satisfaction are negatively related to the use of most humor types in conflict; this is particularly true for sons’ relational satisfaction. It should be noted that sons’ relational satisfaction is more strongly related to fathers’ use of all types of humorous messages during conflict than fathers’ relational satisfaction is related to sons’ use of such messages.

As an exploratory extension of this analysis, a series of difference scores was created, calculating the differences for father–son pairs in reported use of humorous messages during conflict for each of the four humor types. These differences were computed both as the simple (father–son) difference, and the absolute value of that difference. Only one of these difference scores was correlated with either fathers’ or sons’ relational satisfaction. A greater absolute value difference between fathers’ and sons’ use of superiority humor during conflict is negatively correlated with fathers’ relational satisfaction (\(r = -0.23, p = 0.024\)). That is, a greater difference in fathers’ versus sons’ reported use of superiority humor during conflict is associated with less relational satisfaction.
Table 4: Correlations for relational satisfaction, verbal aggressiveness, and humor orientations with humor types used during conflict.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of humor messages used during conflict</th>
<th>Fathers’ relational satisfaction</th>
<th>Sons’ relational satisfaction</th>
<th>Fathers’ VA</th>
<th>Sons’ VA</th>
<th>Fathers’ HO</th>
<th>Sons’ HO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superiority (use by Father)</td>
<td>$r = -0.28^*$</td>
<td>$-0.31^*$</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p = 0.006$</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>0.275</td>
<td>0.318</td>
<td>0.853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n = 95$</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incongruity (use by Father)</td>
<td>$r = -0.28^*$</td>
<td>$-0.20^*$</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p = 0.007$</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.144</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>0.627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n = 95$</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arousal (use by Father)</td>
<td>$r = -0.18^a$</td>
<td>$-0.30^*$</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p = 0.077$</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>0.551</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n = 95$</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Currency (use by Father)</td>
<td>$r = -0.09$</td>
<td>$-0.19^a$</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p = 0.399$</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.252</td>
<td>0.907</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n = 95$</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superiority (use by Son)</td>
<td>$r = -0.20$</td>
<td>$-0.21^b$</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p = 0.052$</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.476</td>
<td>0.492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n = 95$</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incongruity (use by Son)</td>
<td>$r = -0.15$</td>
<td>$-0.19^a$</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p = 0.143$</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>0.654</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>0.728</td>
<td>0.419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n = 95$</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arousal (use by Son)</td>
<td>$r = -0.13$</td>
<td>$-0.25^{aa}$</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p = 0.211$</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.400</td>
<td>0.130</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n = 95$</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social currency (use by Son)</td>
<td>$r = -0.18^a$</td>
<td>$-0.27^{*}$</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p = 0.087$</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.756</td>
<td>0.369</td>
<td>0.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n = 95$</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All measures of Humor Messages as reported above are self assessments. Analyses using “other”/partner assessments (e.g., fathers’ reports of sons’ use of superiority) were conducted as well. Differences were generally limited to significant or near-significant correlations for self assessments that fell to non-significance when assessed with other reports. The differences are noted in the table as follows:

$a$A significant or near-significant correlation for self assessment is not significant or near-significant for partner assessment.

$b$A non-significant correlation for self assessment is significant or near-significant for partner assessment; for Superiority (use by son as reported by father) and fathers’ VA, $r = 0.27$ ($p = 0.007$), and for Superiority (use by son as reported by father) and fathers’ HO, $r = -0.18$ ($p = 0.078$).
on the part of fathers. Further, a total difference score was summed across the four types. The total difference score was found to be negatively correlated with relational satisfaction—non-significantly for sons ($r = -0.05, p = 0.610$) but significantly for fathers ($r = -0.21, p = 0.049$). This indicates that for fathers, an overall lack of congruence in “senses of humor” employed during conflict between themselves and their sons may be a source of relational dissatisfaction. Other difference score correlations were conducted with verbal aggressiveness measures, which revealed that fathers higher in verbal aggressiveness used all four humor types during conflict more so than did their sons ($r = 0.21, p = 0.040$ for use of superiority humor; $r = 0.24, p = 0.017$ for use of incongruity humor; $r = 0.25, p = 0.012$ for use of arousal humor; $r = 0.27, p = 0.007$ for use of social currency humor). Sons’ verbal aggressiveness was related to use of humor during conflict in only one way—sons higher in verbal aggressiveness reported using more superiority humor than did their fathers ($r = -0.24, p = 0.015$).

Further, we conducted analyses aimed at comparing self-assessments with assessments for one’s partner (i.e., father or son) with regard to using the four types of humor in conflict. We investigated the correlations between self and partner assessments of the use of the four types of humor during conflict. In all eight possibilities (four types of humor, and fathers’ and sons’ reported use of these types of humor), the correlations between the self assessment and the partner assessment were highly significant, ranging from a low of $r = 0.29$ ($p = 0.003$) for sons’ use of social currency humor to a high of $r = 0.50$ ($p < 0.001$) for sons’ use of arousal humor. There were no discernible differences between the two familial roles (i.e., no differences emerged between sons’ and fathers’ reported use correlations). This is unlike the findings of research on self and partner reports on verbally aggressive behaviors. Of note, Sabourin et al. (1993) found greater congruence between husbands’ self-reports and wives’ perceptions than between wives’ self-reports and husbands’ perceptions with regard to verbal aggressiveness. Bippus et al. (2011) found in their study of couples’ humor in conflict situations that partners’ humor usage is related to relational quality. Cann et al. (2011) reported “regardless of similarity or accuracy of perception, the importance of humor style for relationship satisfaction depended more on perceived humor style than self-report humor style of partner” (p. 17).

Second, we constructed difference scores (self–partner reports) for all eight possibilities (four types of humor, and fathers’ and sons’ use of these types). None of these eight difference scores were significantly correlated with relational satisfaction. That is, disagreements with regard to fathers’ (or sons’) reported use of any of the four types of humor during conflict are not related to the relational satisfaction of fathers or sons.
4 Discussion

This study examined the role of humor orientation, verbal aggression, and use of humorous communication in father and son conflicts and how these variables may impact relational satisfaction. The first research question asked how humor orientation and relational satisfaction were linked in the father–son dyad. The sole significant correlation was a negative one between sons’ humor orientation and fathers’ relational satisfaction, a relationship that held significant even when controlling for sons’ verbal aggressiveness, and also when controlling for fathers’ verbal aggressiveness and the interaction terms for both fathers and sons. This corresponds to previous research that has identified the importance of child humor orientation in family dynamics. Prasinos and Tittler (1981) found an association between adolescent boys’ humor orientation (as determined by peer nomination rather than via the self-report scale developed later by Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield [1991]) and lower family cohesion, as well as greater family conflict and greater perceived distance from the father. Prasinos and Tittler frame their findings within a perspective in which an individual’s humor orientation develops in response to perceived distance in family relationships. As they note, “humor represents an attempt to relate from a distance” (p. 303). A slightly different interpretation for the present study’s finding is that sons may develop a higher humor orientation as a result of exposure to their fathers’ expressions of dissatisfaction with the father–son relationship. Humor orientation may develop as a coping mechanism for dealing with negative communicative behaviors by one’s father (possibly following Wanzer et al.’s (2005) findings of humor coping in the health communication context).

Research Question 2 investigated the interaction of humor orientation and trait verbal aggressiveness in the prediction of relational satisfaction. In the prediction of sons’ relational satisfaction from fathers’ humor orientation and verbal aggressiveness, both verbal aggressiveness and its interaction with humor orientation were found to be significant. Fathers with higher verbal aggressiveness (when controlling for humor orientation) tended to have sons with lower relational satisfaction. Further, the significant interaction identified a unique status for dyads in which the father had a very high humor orientation—in these dyads, greater verbal aggressiveness by fathers was related to lower relational satisfaction by sons (while in other dyads the relationship was nil).

This seems to indicate a unique impact on sons of the combination of high verbal aggressiveness and high humor orientation in fathers. While these two constructs were not directly correlated in this study, they were linked in the production of sons’ relational satisfaction. The overall negative relationship between fathers’ verbal aggressiveness and sons’ relational satisfaction was
focused in the very highest group for fathers’ humor orientation. Clearly, the high verbal aggressiveness/high humor orientation combination in fathers is a potent predictor of lower relational satisfaction among sons.

In past research within the father–son relationship, trait verbal aggressiveness was strongly related to anger under highly frustrating conditions (Rudd et al. 1997). This could also be applied to the current study, if one assumes that sons viewed the messages being delivered from a father high in both trait verbal aggressiveness and humor orientation as a source of frustration. These equivocal messages could result in a lower level of relational satisfaction because the mixed-message interpretation creates a communicative challenge for the sons. It is even possible that fathers might use such mixed messages in a strategic fashion (Chovil 1994). Of note is the lack of prediction of fathers’ relational satisfaction from the sons’ verbal aggressiveness or the sons’ verbal aggressiveness/humor orientation interaction.

The third research question examined the types of humorous messages used in conflict between fathers and sons. Social currency, a humorous message that creates a sense of connectedness among people (often through shared knowledge or experience), was the most frequently used message type, providing an initial encouraging view of the use of humor in father–son conflict situations. Differences between fathers’ and sons’ use of humorous messages were identified. Sons were significantly more likely to report using incongruity and arousal humor during conflict. Sons also were more likely to report their fathers as using superiority humor in conflict. This finding could be interpreted as stemming from the age difference between the fathers and sons—and this age effect might be either a developmental outcome (i.e., men’s use of humorous messages evolves as they age) or a generational artifact (i.e., age cohorts tend to have similar senses of humor and therefore usage of humorous messages). Another possible explanation is the subordinate role that sons play in childhood. Eliciting an arousal response or using incongruity could be tactics used by adult sons in leveling the status differential between fathers and sons. Additionally, adult sons may see their fathers’ use of superiority humor as a tactic to maintain their dominant role in the relationship. It is interesting to recall that the participants in this study were adult sons; perhaps these findings suggest that perceived power differences, at

2 Additional exploratory analyses probing the issue of age differential included the construction of an age difference score (i.e., father’s age–son’s age). Neither this age difference score, nor the father’s simple age, were correlated with any of the study’s major variables (i.e., humor orientation, verbal aggressiveness, use of each of four types of humor during conflict, nor relational satisfaction). That is, small incremental age differences were not as important as overall father/son differences.
least in terms of the use of humor in conflict, remain intact from childhood. Future research may draw comparisons from other work on the use of humor in power-differential relationships, as might occur in the workplace, and its impact on relational satisfaction (e.g., Holmes and Marra 2006; Plester and Orams 2008).

Research Question 3 directly queried the importance of particular humor types being used during conflict as related to relational satisfaction. While overall humor orientation may have a distinct son-to-father dynamic (i.e., from RQ1, a son’s humor orientation was related to a father’s lower relational satisfaction), with regard to particular humor types, a son’s relational satisfaction was more strongly linked to a father’s use of all types of humor in conflict than was a father’s relational satisfaction linked to a son’s use of those humor types. That is, sons are less satisfied with their relationship with their father if the father uses humorous messages during conflict—regardless of type of humor. A lack of congruence between sons’ and fathers’ use of these humor types during conflict was more strongly negatively correlated to fathers’ relational satisfaction than to sons’. That is, non-matching senses of humor (as manifested in messages during conflict) between fathers and sons seem to matter more to fathers than to sons. Clearly, a complex dynamic exists among fathers’ and sons’ general humor orientation, their use of different types of humorous messages during conflict, and their relational satisfaction.

Other findings of this study are worthy of note. The fact that fathers’ and sons’ verbal aggressiveness were significantly positively related may support a biological basis for verbal aggression, as proposed by the communibiological perspective (Beatty et al. 2001). In addition, fathers’ and sons’ relational satisfaction measures were significantly positively related, while fathers’ and sons’ humor orientation indicators were not related. This points to an inherent complexity of humor orientation and its impact on relational satisfaction, especially within the father–son context. It is apparently not the result of reciprocal interactive processes, as we would think relational satisfaction might be. It is not clear whether humor orientation is passed on from father to son (biologically or through socialization), as verbal aggressiveness is proposed to be (Infante and Wigley 1986). The mixed findings regarding humor orientation’s ability to predict relational satisfaction indicate that

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3 This is further supported by additional exploratory analyses that were limited to the $n = 86$ dyads who were biologically related. Within this subgroup, the correlation between fathers’ and sons’ trait verbal aggressiveness was 0.29. (The very small subgroup of non-biological father/son pairs of $n = 14$ yielded a correlation of only 0.03.)

4 However, additional exploratory analyses of this study’s data found that within a subsample limited to biologically related fathers and sons, the correlation between fathers’ HO and sons’ HO was very small—$r = 0.06$. And, intriguingly, in the very small sample of non-biologically related father/son pairs, the correlation was substantial—$r = 0.27$. This points to the possibility of humor orientation being socialized, and particularly so in adoptive/step/foster families.
humor orientation clearly interacts with the familial role (i.e., father vs. son) in the production of relational satisfaction.

An unanticipated pattern of findings in Table 4 shows the differential ways in which humor orientation and verbal aggressiveness related to the use of the various forms of humorous messages during conflict. Humor orientation scores tended to be negatively correlated with one’s own use of such messages, notably for fathers. In contrast, verbal aggressiveness showed positive correlations with one’s own use of humorous messages during conflict, again particularly for fathers. This difference between HO and VA in how they relate to the use of humorous messages during conflict, combined with the lack of correlation between HO and VA, seems to indicate that these two behavioral dispositions are manifested in quite different ways during instances of father–son conflict. Humor orientation seems to be a dampening factor in the overt use of humorous communication during conflict, while verbal aggressiveness appears to be an enhancer. This may indicate an overarching negative role of humorous messaging during father–son conflict, a possibility in need of further investigation.

4.1 In summary

This study has identified a complex set of findings that link general humor orientation, trait verbal aggressiveness, reported use of specific types of humorous messages during conflict, and relational satisfaction within the father–son dyad, a critical same-sex relationship in a man’s life (Floyd and Morman 2003). Key findings include: sons’ relational satisfaction was predicted by lower levels of fathers’ verbal aggressiveness, particularly for those with fathers with a very high humor orientation. On the other hand, fathers’ relational satisfaction was predicted by lower levels of sons’ humor orientation, and not by verbal aggressiveness. Further, sons’ relational satisfaction was negatively related to the use of all types of humorous messages (superiority, arousal, incongruity, and social currency) in a father–son conflict event. Of note, fathers’ relational satisfaction was reduced by sons’ general humor orientation, but less impacted by sons’ use of humorous messages during conflict. In stark contrast, sons’ relational satisfaction was not impacted by fathers’ general humor orientation; rather, it was strongly negatively impacted by fathers’ use of humorous messages during conflict.

4.2 Future directions

This investigation may motivate future research in several directions. We may expand our line of research in a variety of ways by invoking additional theoretic
models and corresponding measures. Specifically, building on the work on attachment style by Cann et al. (2008), we hope to expand our research to include an investigation of the relationship of humor orientation, trait verbal aggression and relational satisfaction to attachment style.

Models that have proposed a closer integration of humor communication and the study of verbal aggression offer additional templates for future study, with a focus on teasing behavior. While Wigley (2012) has identified teasing as an important intersection of humor and aggression, DiCioccio’s (2010, 2012) interactionist model of teasing incorporates both affectionate and aggressive teasing. Further, Kowalski et al. (2001) suggest that teasing may be differentially perceived by the target as good-natured and a reflection of intimacy and camaraderie, or as humiliating and an indication of relational devaluation (p. 190). While acknowledging both positive and negative aspects of teasing, they conclude that the consequences of teasing are predominantly negative for the target of teasing and for others as well, referring to teasing as “permitted disrespect.” The present study found no relationship between humor orientation and verbal aggressiveness, thus failing to support the primacy of teasing or other related behaviors that might emanate directly from an intersection of humor and aggression.

However, this study did establish one key manner in which humor and aggression interact in relation to relational satisfaction. It was found that fathers with high verbal aggressiveness and high humor orientation have sons with extremely low relational satisfaction. This might point to a need to examine these constructs within an argumentative skill deficiency model (Infante and Rancer 1996). Perhaps the deficiency of skills to argue constructively during conflict coupled with humor orientation influences the dynamics of the father–son context. A close consideration of this may allow scholars to better understand the relational impact of verbal aggression and humor orientation in the father–son relationship.

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**Bionotes**

**Kimberly A. Neuendorf**

Kimberly A. Neuendorf (Ph.D., Michigan State University) is a professor in the School of Communication at Cleveland State University. Her scholarship includes investigations of affective responses to media (including humor), the content and effects of the media portrayals of marginalized populations, and the methodology of quantitative content analysis.

**Jill E. Rudd**

Jill E. Rudd (Ph.D., Kent State University) is currently a professor in the School of Communication at Cleveland State University. Dr. Rudd’s interest in relational communication and dispute resolution has been the key focus of her research. Verbal aggressive communication is a primary interest to Dr. Rudd and she has published numerous articles on the relationship of aggressive communication and conflict.
Paul Palisin

Paul Palisin received his Master of Applied Communication Theory and Methodology from the School of Communication at Cleveland State University in 2012. He is currently a business entrepreneur in Northeast Ohio.

Elizabeth B. Pask

Elizabeth B. Pask (Ph.D., Arizona State University) is currently an Assistant Professor in the School of Communication at Cleveland State University. Dr. Pask’s research examines the intersections of relational communication and health. She specifically focuses on communication-related risk and protective factors for intimate partner violence involvement and sexual communication.