



Communication Gap in Impression Management by Fathers on Their Adolescent Sons

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Fatherlessness, which refers to the distant relationship between fathers and their children, is a prevalent issue in modern society. Fathers focus more on their roles outside the home to fulfill their responsibilities. Thus fathers have limited time to interact with their children compared to mothers. In addition, as the heads of the family, fathers must maintain their figures, especially with their adolescent sons who are starting to get to know the wider environment.

This study aims to investigate how fathers use impression management in their interactions with their adolescent sons.

Study design: A study with a subjective interpretation approach was carried out to understand in depth how impression management by fathers is a form of communication that can build interpersonal relationships with their adolescent sons.

Place and Duration of Study: This study was carried out in Indonesia, from December 2022 to June 2023.

Methodology: In-depth interviews were conducted with 7 pairs of fathers (aged 38 to 50 years) and sons (aged 12 to 15 years) who each attended private schools in 7 major cities in Indonesia.

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Results: Fathers do impression management when interacting with their adolescent sons to maintain their self-image. Fathers manage self-impression as a figure that must be respected through creating a respected image, having similar interests in gender and role models. The implication is that fathers when communicating with their adolescent sons, tend to maintain a quiet condition and create an atmosphere where their adolescent sons should have the same attitude as them. This causes discomfort for their adolescent sons so they prefer to communicate with other people rather than with their fathers.

Conclusion: Impression management becomes a communication gap, which in turn creates a distance in father-son relationships.

Keywords: Impression management; communication gap; fathers; adolescent sons.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fathers-children relationships in Indonesia are very concerning. This reality can be seen through the Global Fatherhood Index Report in 2021 noting that Indonesia is included in the top three as a fatherless country (<https://www.kompas.id/baca/opini/2023/06/21/pe-ran-apbn-di-tengah-fatherless-country>), [1]. The term fatherless is often used to describe a child who may have experienced the loss of a father or has had limited contact with their father due to various circumstances such as abandonment or distance. One of the causes is the wrong understanding of the concept of family and it is still in their minds as published on health.okezone.com on May 24, 2023, by M. Sukardi. The topic of fatherlessness has been gaining more attention in Indonesia as it has been reported by multiple news sources such as www.kompas.com and <https://jabar.tribunnews.com>.

The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) Retno Listyarti said that the lack of father figures for children, in physical and psychological forms, is quite high in the country. "Fatherless is defined as a child who grows and develops without the presence of a father, in other words, namely children who have a father, but the father lacks or even very minimal presence of his figure which is optimally needed to accompany the child's development process, namely in education", (Mindrakyat-Bekasi.com, 2022). According to Retno, this phenomenon is seen in children who live big without the presence of a father in the development of the child, many factors also influence circumstances.

In particular, there is a tenuous gap in father-adolescent son relationships. This is seen through their minimal interactions. Fathers spend time interacting with their adolescent sons by 0.25 hours per day. Meanwhile, they spend time

interacting with their daughters by 0.50 hours per day, [2]. In addition, there is also an assumption that fathers are closer to their daughters than to their sons.

A preliminary study by researchers in December 2022 confirms the aforementioned condition where of the five fathers interviewed, three of them admitted that the time they spend interacting/communicating closely with their adolescent sons aged 12 to 15 years is only during their free time. Due to their work, fathers do not specifically allot time to talk to their children. In contrast, mothers have a lot of time to talk to their children establishing communication with them. In contrast, it's common for mothers to have additional opportunities to devote to their children, such as offering assistance with academic tasks, participating in school-related activities, engaging with educators, and even waiting in line for school pick-up. According to Rewindinar's study, Mothers of today, regardless of their employment status, have the ability to run prosperous businesses such as online sales or culinary ventures while still fulfilling their responsibilities like picking up their children from school and attending meetings, [3].

In the context of culture, the development of communication technology in modern times has also slightly obscured the assumption that fathers should be feared. Compared to traditional times, today's children are more expressive—they can look at their father in the eyes and show their expression. Even though, today's developing communication technology can provide more space for parents to be able to establish communication with their children, [4].

However, the father figures in the family have an image as the leader. The important role they play is the head of the family. They are responsible for raising, taking care of, and protecting their

family—especially their children. Patriarchy culture, projecting fathers as figures to be respected, inevitably has an indirect major influence on the self-image of fathers when communicating with their children, [5].

This study aimed to explore, first, how impression management is performed by fathers on their adolescent sons. Second, how the communication gap that occurs through impression management, in turn, creates a distance in father-son relationships.

2. LITERATURE FRAMEWORK

Activities carried out by individuals are part of communication activities—and communication is very dominant in life, especially interpersonal communication. According to Miller (2005), interpersonal communication involves transmitting messages from one person to another. These messages can be verbal or non-verbal—and can be conveyed through various means such as in person, telephone, or text message. It is explained that interpersonal communication involves the process of the recipient interpreting the message in a way that allows the message conveyed to be well understood, [6].

In the context of family communication, interpersonal communication has an important role in shaping family dynamics and relationships. Effective communication between family members can help build trust, respect, and understanding, whereas poor communication can cause conflict, misunderstanding—and even damage relationships between family members, [7].

In the interaction process carried out, each individual uses certain tips and tricks—unconsciously or consciously, to manage the impression they will show to other individuals with the hope of showing their best impression to them (the public). This (impression management) can also be seen in the process of showing self-denial when determining individual positions, including in the family order when structuring the direction of the interaction.

A process of imitating actions and schemes by displaying and managing a person's profile and trying to cover up their shortcomings by not showing them is the concept of impression management. Therefore, impression management links roles, stages, and

impressions—and shows great theoretical power in describing psychological performance in terms of how social actors work, [8].

Impression management expresses the process of self-presentation by strategically ascertaining, managing, and optimizing other impression of oneself. Impression management is largely determined by how a person wants to be on the opposite side and how a person should behave according to their social role, [9]. Leary and Kowalski (1990) argue that individuals then try to present themselves as good actors in their roles.

Referring to the views of Goffman (1956), when people interact, they construct and maintain face in much the same way as actors playing a role on a stage. In other words, people prepare "behind the scenes" before they perform, speak/act on stage, use stage props, and dress for their roles, [10]. There are individuals who take on the role of observers and offer encouragement for the presentations. Although this metaphor can be seen in obvious roles such as doctor, nurse, waitress, and teacher—everyday conversations are also performed in much the same way.

Impression management is not a clearly focused theory but a type of construct representing the presentation and maintenance of social identity during an interaction. When researchers talk about impression management, they are not implying manipulative or artificial agendas. They refer only to the symbols that a person displays during the interaction. Some researchers use the terms social or public self to distinguish social identity from the private self. Individuals are constituted of many features, beliefs, values, habits, attitudes, skills, interests, needs, family history, and so on. When interacting with others, individuals may not display all aspects of privacy. Therefore, from the behavioral and psychological matrices, individuals select characteristics that they believe will present the persons they should be during interaction, [11].

In the process, this is done only when the identity of a person is important, for example, when they are preparing for a job interview or when they lose their composure after an embarrassing experience. However, a person actually displays a social self in all of their interactions—including in a conversation with friends, in a workshop, as a student in class, and even on first dates. Although cultural norms that define what is appropriate vary, people within all cultures

present and manage impression they believe to be appropriate in a particular context.

The dramaturgical theory is the basis for the concept of impression management (paying attention to information conveyed by one participant to another) or in other words "self-presentation in everyday life", [12]. This refers to theater theory and provides different assessments regarding impression management during the process of social interaction. There are three aspects used, namely role, stage, and impression. Behavior is divided into information that a person provides (intentionally) and (unintentionally) distinguishes between focused interactions (when people work together to maintain a focus of attention, for example in conversation) and defocused interactions (when people convey information from observations), such as noticing a foreigner's costume.

Particular emphasis is placed on the code of conduct that binds actors together, especially face (claim positive social values) and facework (face-saving strategies). Impression management as a concept is widely used in interpersonal and organizational communication; Face and facework have been widely studied in cross-cultural communication. There are two ways of sharing information about oneself: by giving expressions and by giving "expressions". The first type of expression refers to the classical forms of verbal communication, while the latter involves non-verbal signals that a person has less control over, [13].

3. METHODS

The depth interviews were conducted with seven dyads of communication of fathers and sons where fathers aged between 38 and 50 years, worked in private sectors and sons aged between 12 to 15 years, attended private schools. The long interview, commonly referred to as the depth interview, is a formal and comprehensive research approach. Both the informants and researchers regard the interaction as an interview. This method of research can be implemented together with participant observation or used as an independent method. The primary objective of the depth interview is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the informant's perspective on a phenomenon or experience in great detail, [14].

The seven dyads of fathers and sons each live in 7 major cities in Indonesia, namely DKI Jakarta,

Banten, Bogor, Solo, Semarang, Palembang, and Balikpapan. It may be worthwhile for researchers to delve into the potential communication challenges that may arise amongst parents whose children attend private schools across various regions in Indonesia. Since early adolescents typically have fathers aged 38-50 (with 2 years flexibility), this study is unique and suitable for comparison to previous studies. It is necessary to receive consent from both parents when conducting research that involves father and child pairs. In addition, the protocol includes presenting the interview's goal, providing an overview of the interview's scope and format, and addressing ethical concerns. During the interview, there was a specific emphasis on delving into the dynamic between the father and son, as well as their means of communication. The interviews were conducted individually, with the minor being accompanied by his father.

Researchers focused on father-son relationships. In this dyad, the fathers are family leaders who already have managerial positions, so it requires a lot of time and focus at work and the current occupation of the wife is managing the household. During the onset of adolescence, there may be a tendency for teenage boys to venture out and discover the world, which can result in a challenge for fathers to effectively communicate with their sons.

Furthermore, in the results and discussion, the fathers' interview excerpts are marked with N1, N2, and so on. Meanwhile, the sons' interview excerpts are marked with A1, A2, and so on.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Being a father is a social role that significantly influences a person's self-expression. Fathers as parents will try to prove their parenting competence through their appearance. To do this, fathers must provide information about themselves to their children.

Impression management is performed by the fathers on their adolescent sons in various aspects, including emotional expression, verbal communication, and value understanding. Li et al. (2023) provided an explanation in their research, this impression can influence the sons' perceptions of themselves and the way they interact with their fathers and other people.

The father as the leader/head of the family communicates everything by taking concrete

actions in daily activities. Meanwhile, the son has an assessment of the role of his father based on what he sees in everyday life.

4.1 Respected image of fathers

The fathers really understand how they perform impression management in front of their adolescent sons, namely how they must always be able to exercise self-control. Performances in front of the stage are most successful when audiences see the actors as they want to be seen. To achieve this, the fathers seek to produce a convincing face by presenting their activities, roles, and relationships in a way that conforms to the norms and goals of a particular social setting. The dramaturgical theory that occurs is that the fathers perform their roles on the stage, namely at home, [15]. However, they perform different impression management when they are in the office or friendship environment,

"We must always understand and be aware of ourselves—we really have to control (ourselves), even though sometimes we may want to skip once or twice, but we should still be careful. The most important thing is self-control" (N1).

"At home, I have to be a father figure who is really strict with my children." (N5).

To continue to carry out the father figures who are strict and respected, there are times when the fathers must be able to refrain themselves from saying too much and remain quiet.

"Yes, my children barely talk to me, they are not open up to me. But to their mother, they are usually more open." (N4).

Various situations at home involving the fathers and their adolescent sons can be stimuli for their responses, especially those that spark emotion, for example, anger, annoyance, or other angst expressions. However, here, the fathers prefer to refrain from saying too much (limiting their words) and remain quiet. Thus Cleary (2022) explained that fathers are generally considered to be emotionally distant, unable, or unwilling to express love and care even, and some fathers are rejecting and abusive towards their sons, [16].

Fathers tend to be more introverted in an atmosphere that is not conducive when interacting with their adolescent sons. According to Odenweller et al (2013), it seems that a father

and son may leave a certain impression on each other during their interactions. Specifically, the father may come across as a person who is firm and respected, [17].

Meanwhile, their sons understand the respected impression as a figure to be feared. There are consequences for what is done if they do not show respect. So their attitude is to limit the interactions that occur. It has been observed that children tend to become apprehensive about losing respect and consequently limit their interactions when they feel disrespected. According to Saei (2022), fathers of adolescent children often participate in one-sided conversations that are based on warnings rather than engaging in a two-way conversation, [18].

"Yes, I have, but when I am annoyed during playing a game because I am losing when I hit my bed, I will be scolded. (My father) said that if I get angry over a game again, that will be deleted (uninstalled)." (A1)

"Angry, if for example, Aa is in the wrong but if someone else is in the wrong—not Aa, my father will leave it be and only give a warning not to repeat (the mistake)." (A5)

"I'm afraid when my father is angry, he is scary. Therefore, I choose to avoid him." (A4)

It is apparent from the child's statement that they avoid interacting with their father to avoid negative consequences, instead preferring to interact with their mother. The author's analysis found that fathers often create a sense of distance from adolescent boys due to being seen as authoritative figures. Despite this, the role and presence of fathers are crucial for guiding adolescent self-development and family welfare, [19].

4.2 Father and Son's Common Interests

In positioning themselves and performing their impression management, the fathers also take into account that their communication partners are adolescent boys—having the same gender so their sons have the same maturity development as them. Beatty, McCroskey, and Heisel (1998) through their communibiology perspective argue that 80% of human communication is influenced by biological factors—and the other 20% is influenced by environmental factors.

For example, in a situation when the sons make a mistake that sparks their emotion and anger,

the fathers feel that as boys, their adolescent sons certainly expect to be treated as men.

"Boys cannot be scolded for too long. A maximum of 15 minutes and stop. Ask him to talk normally to give them an understanding." (N1)

"As a father, my sons and I are of the same gender so I realized that I used to be like that too. So, I admit that compared to my wife, I am more understanding of my sons. That's why when my wife educates our sons, sometimes they cry." (N5)

"I tend to avoid performing strict discipline (to my sons). I am afraid that being emotional will take the best of me and that I will hit my sons because we are men." (N4)

"The openness between men, adult men and adolescent boy, because of their mother does not joke around with the children—and we like music" (N4).

Father's statement found that Interpersonal communication can be strengthened between parents and children when they share common interests. Parents and children share similarities in both physical and behavioral aspects, [20]. Thus, parents prefer to talk to their children of the same gender, [21].

"My father likes to joke around with me and my friends, ask us to do karaoke" (A5).

"I feel more comfortable with my father to joke around and talk about music" (A4).

For adolescent boys, similar interests determine their attitude in building interactions. The sons will choose their fathers when it comes to common interests and will choose to communicate with their fathers because their mothers do not really understand them. Even so, the sons will limit themselves to talking with their fathers if there are consequences of their actions/attitudes that are not in accordance with the expectations of their fathers.

As per the result of the interview, it was noted by two of the seven participants that having shared interests plays a considerable role in the approach of adolescent boys towards establishing relationships. In terms of shared hobbies and passions, it appears that children often prefer to communicate with their fathers. Nonetheless, some may feel hesitant to engage

with their father if they perceive potential repercussions for not meeting his standards. According to Ewin et al (2021) research, there appears to be a constructive correlation between attention, interest, and parental engagement, with a particular emphasis on the involvement of fathers, [22]. Eldegwy (2022) has posited that fathers may also play a role in shaping their children's future academic pursuits, [23].

4.3 Outstanding Figures

Impression management of fathers as parents must convey information about their children as well as themselves through expression. Another finding in this study is how the fathers present themselves in front of their sons in everyday life.

Facework is often used by fathers in presenting themselves.

"In my opinion, being parents means that we should serve an example for our children. So I try as much as I can to set good examples, the bad sides should be kept hidden" (N1).

"It's more image-preserving because we rarely communicate meaning that communication is handled by their mother. If my sons and I talk, it is more like a light conversation at most and not about jokes" (N3).

However, this is not all. The sons feel their fathers are a good example and should be followed. Some daily things that the fathers do are find a solution to a problem, remind his obligations as a religious person, give encouragement/support, and be a cool partner when playing a game.

"Yes. For example, if they do not want to go to the Musholla for prayer even though I already tell them to go to the Musholla, but I myself do not go the Musholla"(N1).

"Yes, you have to support, set an example for your sons. If you (the father) go to the Musholla, then we will go to the Musholla too" (A1)

"For the preference, for example, if your son like playing futsal, as a father you should keep encouraging/supporting your son to achieve his goals" (A1).

Non-verbal language is the fathers' choice in interacting. The fathers tend to set a clear example in their actions. Although in their

confession, the fathers admit that there are a little few inconsistencies/dissimilarities. But for the sons, an actual action that the fathers think is a solution is a consequence. Upon analyzing the data, it was observed that fathers often utilize non-verbal communication to engage and model behavior. It is important to note that each father has distinct approaches, and their sons may interpret significant actions as forceful or intimidating resolutions. It is often perceived that actions with significant impact are viewed as assertive and commanding in nature. This consequential action is perceived as a figure that is strict and feared, [24].

Good fatherhood reflects the positive involvement of fathers in parenting through affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects. The cognitive aspect in question is the existence of hopes, worries, confidence, and plans for the future. Whereas the affective aspect in question is the feeling of love and affection, sacrifice, and commitment. Fatherly attitudes were also found in the study. The role of a father in parenting is often linked to various positive attributes, encompassing both emotional and practical dimensions. These can include feelings of affection and commitment, as well as cognitive and behavioral factors such as hope, concern, confidence, and aspirations for the future. In today's society, fathers are known to take on a variety of roles, such as being a friend, partner, supporter, guardian, role model, moral leader, teacher, and caregiver. It should be noted that the degree to which these roles are assumed may differ among various cultural groups, [25].

According to Cabrera et al., 2018, the qualitative characteristics of father-son interaction such as intimacy, affection, sensitivity, and involvement are also important aspects of father involvement. In the process of impression management, a person tries to manage the important parts that contribute to self-representation, [26]. Impression management is very important for fathers because they need it in the process of, expressing their images in front of their sons and getting approval and recognition from their sons, [27].

From the results of in-depth interviews, it was found that the impression management of the father figures greatly influences the pattern and way of communication of children, especially children who are in their early adolescence (children aged 12 years) and adolescence (children aged 15 to 18 years). The pattern of

interpersonal communication in the family, especially father and mother, father and children, and mother to children, is a real example of the child communicating as a reciprocal. The father becomes the core player in a family and has an important role to establish healthy communication between members of the family—and the success of interpersonal communication in the family can overcome the communication gap that occurs especially for sons who see their fathers as a role model who must be followed in terms of behavior, actions, and words, [28]. A father as an individual uses people who are close to him, namely his sons to form their representations, [29].

The sons in their early adolescence are around 12 years old and adolescence are around 15 to 18 years old see that their fathers perform impression management in front of them to carry out their role as father figures who are exemplary, strict, disciplined, full of affection, and feared according to their perspective. The sons mostly realize that their fathers who are of the same gender can have similar interests with them. This makes it easier for the sons to voice their wishes and for fathers to share their experiences as children, so good communication can be established. Certainly, there are also things from the impression management by their fathers that make them afraid and worried because their fathers are strict figures, [30].

The more frequent communication that occurs between mothers and sons, is mostly due to the mother figures who do not work and are always at home. Thus the fact that fathers work and are rarely at home results in a communication gap in the impression management by fathers on their adolescent sons. Fathers with higher incomes may work more and have less time to spend with their children in direct care roles, [31].

The time allotted and spent by fathers with their sons and the existence of intense communication are the factors protecting children from various behavioral problems, especially at school or in the environment around where they live. The father figure as a leader includes accessibility; involvement; protection; providing material and economic support; giving understanding to their children; and sharing household responsibilities. The role of the father is not only about support in providing for the needs of the children but there is also an active reciprocal and sensitive relationship. Responsibility and accountability impact happiness in the association of having and raising children [32].

Self-image makes a father a totally different figure from everyday life in front of his colleagues. More or less, there is certainly a difference as it is very unlikely that a father can express himself in much the same way in front of his colleagues and sons. This is a part of impression management that fathers perform on their sons, namely roles, stages, and impressions. Fathers perform their role as firm, disciplined figures when he is at home and home is the stage for fathers to perform their impression management. The impression that is shown is that the father figures are admired by their sons as they set an outstanding example and must be followed in terms of behavior, actions, and words.

5. CONCLUSION

Fathers perform impression management on their adolescent sons to build their self-image as a man; a family leaders; and a figure to be respected, taken after, and followed. To form this impression, fathers tend to be quiet, and limit their interactions (words) with their sons. Meanwhile, adolescent sons in supporting the impression built by their fathers will withdraw themselves (from communicating with their fathers) and build communication with other people.

Thus, impression management builds a communication gap which in turn creates a distance in father-son relationships—mutually limiting the quantity and quality of the interaction between the two, [33]

This study has several limitations, namely, this study only focuses on adolescent sons aged 12 to 15 years who are in their early adolescence. The form of communication response in this group is certainly different from that of late adolescence. Therefore, the subsequent study can be focused on the late adolescent group, namely children aged 15 to 18 years, because in this age group, adolescents are brave enough to communicate and voice their opinion to their fathers, mothers, friends, and even social media. Furthermore, the subsequent study can also investigate the father's moral perspective in performing impression management.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The authors of this study hereby declare that all experiments carried out have been examined and approved by the competent ethics committee and have therefore been performed following the ethical standards specified in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki.

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As per international standards or university standards, all participants' written consents have been collected and kept by authors.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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