Hello! My name is Chris Soria, and this is my first time presenting at PAA, or any academic conference for that matter, so any feedback or ideas on how to improve my research are much appreciated.

This presentation, Father Connection and Support in Adulthood, is based on a working paper – and I have nothing to disclose.

**Introduction**

**Literature Review: Fatherhood Research**

First, a bit of background on the current state of fatherhood research.

We know that children tend to do better when they have a father in their lives, but this research can be limited in that it typically only measures the mere presence or absence of a father and doesn’t further measure the *quality* of a father’s presence.

And although the general consensus is that fathers are crucial to the socialization of their children, it’s not clear as to why or how that is the case. For example, is it the mere presence of a father, or is it the quality of their relationship with the child?

Further, much of the existing fatherhood research examines his impact on his children at a young age. For example, a positive relationship with the father is associated with a more healthy personal network in children. There’s less research, however, on his impact throughout the life course.

What I’m interested in is how the positive presence of a father in in adulthood is associated with unique adult personal network characteristics.

**Hypotheses: Are Fathers Essential?**

There are two broad competing hypotheses on the father’s impact within Fatherhood research that I’ll be testing in this study. The first is the essential father hypothesis, which argues that fathers produce a unique impact on their children relative to the mother.

The second is the important father hypothesis, which argues that the father’s impact on his children is important, but that his impact is *not* unique.

**Theory: Attachment Theory**

There are two theoretical frameworks that I have drawn from in shaping my hypothesis.

The first is attachment theory, which posits that when individuals feel they have an attachment figure which acts as a “secure base,” they are more likely to go out and explore their world and meet new people.

Attachment is usually thought of as something that only matters in children, however; attachment behaviors continue to exist in adults.

**Theory: Social Capital**

The other theory that has informed my research is Social Capital theory.

There are two ways that *I’m* focusing on in which social capital can be passed down by a father. The first is parent community capital, which is basically the father introducing his children to his connections.

The second is through parental socialization, which is basically the father teaching their children social skills which are conducive towards generating a stronger personal network.

Because personal networks tend to be homophilous in regards to gender, the consequence *could* be his children have a more robust personal network that looks more like him.

**Hypotheses**

With these two theories in mind, I laid out two hypotheses for this study.

The first is that when respondents have a positive and emotionally close relationship with their father, they will have report more total social companions in their personal network.

The second is that when respondents have an emotionally close relationship with their father, they will report only more male social companions in their personal network.

**Methods**

**UCNETS**

To test my hypotheses, I drew from the UC Berkeley Personal networks Study, also known as UCNets, which allowed me to measure the size and composition of an individual’s personal network as well as the quality of their father’s presence.

“UCNets” is a five-year panel study funded by the National Institute on Aging and is unique it’s ability to look in-depth at personal networks across two age cohorts – 21-30 year olds, and 50-70 year olds, all of whom were living in the San Francisco Bay Area at baseline.

Responses were collected in 2015 through address and Facebook-based sampling in the first wave of a longitudinal panel survey.

The UCNets study consists more predominantly of women. To correct for this, I applied weights that would amplify the responses of men so as to make their representation more equal to the SF Bay Area demographic.

**Personal network**

In order to get detailed information on the respondent’s personal network, respondents were asked a series of name-generating questions. For this presentation, I will present *mainly* on social companions.

**Father Conceptualization**

After respondents listed various alters to the name-generating questions, they were *then* asked to describe their relationship to those alters. If they were a father, they would be labeled as “parent” and male.” Respondents were also asked which of the people they named were people they felt “especially close to.”

Respondents were also asked to identify whether their father was still alive. The study informed respondents that “Father could be biological, adopted, or step.”

People who stated that their father was deceased were not included in this sample.

**Independent Variables**

Father variables were constructed around three categories of respondents. First, there were people who named a father in their personal network and also considered him to be “especially close.” Second, there were people who named their father but did not consider him “close.” Lastly, there were respondents who did not name a father, but reported that he was alive. This last category represents respondents with an “estranged” father.

Parallel “close” mother variables were also created to be used as controls.

**Dependent Variables**

To assess informal social engagement, respondents were asked, “How often do you go out to concerts, plays, clubs, sports, or other events with friends or relatives?”

I used the total number of people the respondent named as a social companion as a dependent variable. I then broke these out into male and female only totals and used each as dependent variables.

**Dependent Variables cont.**

I removed parents from these three lists if they were named in them.

These are, then, measures of the respondent’s Social Companions *beyond* the parents.

**Model and Variable Structure**

I used an SPSS General Linear Model (also known as UNIANOVA with Fixed Factors and Covariates) due to its ability to incorporate categorical and continuous variables into one output. This model is mathematically similar to a linear regression.

Essentially, this model takes the “father not close” as the reference category to compare to each category below it independently, as can be seen in the graphic below. Sll covariates are fitted onto a regression line.

I controlled for respondent race, gender, education, income, age, and whether respondents completed the survey in-person or online.

Maybe it’s not *emotional* closeness that’s important for measuring the father’s impact on their adult children’s personal network, but rather physical closeness. For this reason, I controlled for the father’s proximity from the respondent.

Lastly, I also controlled for major life events that have been shown to affect an individual’s network and social support, and which may also affect the individual’s relationship with their parents. These are a new baby, a new job, and marital status.

**Results**

**General Models: Social Companions**

And, finally, here are the results.

First, we’ll look at total social companions.

Looking at the effect of father relationship quality on the total number of social companions, we see that individuals who named a Close Father have a significantly higher numbers of social companions compared to those who name a Father who is Not Close.

Additionally, there was no difference in the number of social companions named among respondents who either named a Father as Not Close or did not name a Father all.

**General Models: Social Companions cont. (2)**

It’s much easier however to interpret estimated marginal means, which are means adjusted for by the other variables in the model. In general, people who report having a close father have close to .6 more Social Companions on average.

**Male Social Companions**

Moving onto male social companions.

A Close Father was significantly associated with more **male** social companions compared to people who named a father but not consider him especially close.

And again, there was no statistical difference in the number of male social companions among those who name a father who was not close, and those who did not name a father at all.

**Male Social Companions cont. (2)**

In an estimated marginal means plots, it can be more clearly seen that people who report having an “especially close” also report having more *male* Social Companions.

**Female Social Companions**

The storyline takes a turn when I use female-only Social Companions as a dependent variable.

As you can see here, neither the “Close Father” or “Close Mother” variable produce any significant outcomes when using female Social Companions as a dependent variable.

**Female Social Companions cont. (2)**

Finally, in an estimated marginal means plot, it’s more clearly visible that no category in the “Close Father” variable differs significantly from the others.

**Conclusions**

**Summary**

In summary, people who have a father they feel especially close to are more likely to have more male Social Companions, but not female ones.

It is important to note that the absence of a father (father alive, but not named) was not associated with any difference in the personal network compared to those who named a father that was not close. These results suggest that the mere presence of a father is not associated with any change in the network composition.

Additionally, an emotionally close father produced significant outcomes even beyond what could be accounted for by the father’s physical distance from his children.

And, because I controlled for the mother’s presence and closeness in the same models, I can say that close fathers produce unique results in relation to mothers. This is in support of the “essential father” hypothesis. .

**Discussion**

First of all, I want to say that I consider this a good first step in the direction of this research.

Conclusions are limited because we don’t know the quality of father relationships before adulthood.

I also want to remind everyone that the UCNets study consists of self-reported data and that it’s representative *only* of the San Francisco Bay Area.

Because this is a cross-sectional study, more research will be needed for determining the direction of these associations. For this reason, I hope to utilize all three waves of the UCNets study in my next iteration.

Also, although I’ve identified that a close father is associated with a more robust personal network, I haven’t been able to pin down exactly what it is about a close father that may produce this result.

For now, I think these results make the most sense when interpreted through the social capital perspective.

Maybe fathers are more likely to introduce their adult children to people to people that end up becoming social companions. This is important because people with larger, more diverse networks, often benefit from better physical and mental health, more job opportunities, and greater knowledge of resources.

The father’s network is likely homophilous, and more likely to be male, and so it would make sense that most of the people he introduces his adult children to are also male—A sort of “father-specific parent community capital.”

Also, it’s possible that adult children who feel “especially close” to their fathers are more likely to mimic their father’s behavior and/or learn how to engage with people who are similar to him. And so, it’s possible that a close father passes down *social skills* that are more compatible with generating more males to socialize with. This could be labeled as “father-specific parental socialization.”

As I said further research will be needed in order to test this theory.

**Final**

Thank you for listening, and thank you to everyone who has helped me put this research together.