

# Father/Daughter Relationships: Effects of Communicative Adaptability and Satisfaction on Daughter's Romantic Relationships

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## ABSTRACT

Research has shown that the relationship a daughter has with her father remains with her into adulthood. The father/daughter relationship is said to have an affect on future relationships, including romantic relationships. One hundred and eight-one females from the La Crosse, WI area completed questionnaires regarding the relationship with their father as well as the relationship with their current (or most recent) romantic partner. The females were asked to determine what attachment style best describes each relationship, assess their satisfaction level concerning the relationship with their father, and asked questions regarding their communication adaptability level. Results showed that relationships could only be made between the attachment styles in the father/daughter relationships and the communication satisfaction and adaptability.

## INTRODUCTION

A great deal of research has been conducted to find the effects of family during one's childhood. Researchers have found that parent-child relationships affect the psychological well being of the child. Barnett and Kibria stated that positive parent-child relationships are thought to enhance several aspects of psychological well being while negative relationships are thought to predispose to psychological distress. Due to such findings, one might suggest that the impact of the family environment on young adults is significant as well (Kissee, Murphy, Bonner, & Murley, 2000). Dumlao and Botta (2000) and Perkins (2001) state that the relationship between young adult women and their fathers has previously been neglected when examining the relationships within a family. Family influences within the young adult cycle of life have gone virtually unstudied (Kissee, Murphy, Bonner, & Murley, 2000; Lamb, 1981; Way & Gillman, 2000).

Many are convinced that the relationship between mothers and daughters is the most important parental relationship. While the relationship is certainly valuable, the connection that a female has with her father in many ways matters more than the one with her mother (Nielsen, 2001). Due to this, research on the affects of a young-adult daughter's relationship with her father is of value. Therefore, research was conducted on young adult women determining if or what was the relationship between father/daughter relationships and the daughter's romantic relationships. Each young woman completed surveys regarding attachment style in the relationship with her father, her satisfaction level regarding the relationship with her father, and her communicative adaptability.

In a strong statement by Secunda (1992), she described a female's father as her "first love," regardless of the experiences in her relationship with her father. This text noted that it might be assumed that the father-daughter relationship has the potential to shape interaction patterns that surface as women enter adult relationships. Therefore, this supports the hypothesis that a pattern may be apparent between father-daughter relationships and the daughter's romantic relationships. Research has found that women with abusive or absent fathers often choose partners who abuse or abandon them (Secunda, 1992). Research concerning intermediate variables as adjusting factors proves interesting.

According to Beatty and Dobos (1992) satisfaction may be described as an internal affect resulting from the acquisition of pleasure and/or avoidance of pain. More specifically, any stimulus that fulfills needs, produces positive reinforcement, or confirms one's ideal self-image produces satisfaction (Beatty & Dobos, 1992). Previous findings from Vangelisti, Crumley, Baker, & Canary (1999) have supported the interdependence theory, which states that relational satisfaction is linked to the degree to which one's standards are met. Satisfaction has also been used as the primary criterion for evaluating the quality of family communication (Pearson, 1989). Some research has focused on the satisfaction in conversation with others viewing satisfaction as a global response to relationships. Due to various types of interaction with one's father, satisfaction was operationalized in global terms for this study.

Attachment is an overall term that refers to the state and quality of an individual's attachments. These attachments are divided into two distinct different types, secure and insecure attachment. Attachments are part of relationships from infancy. The emotional bonds that infants form with their caregivers serve as blueprints for the way people view themselves and others. They affect the way people act in their adult relationships. (Bowlby, 1969;1973)

Specifically regarding attachment in relationships, Bowlby stated that attachment relationships were important for humans across the life cycle and that attachment behaviors depicted interaction "from cradle to the grave." (Bowlby, 1979, p129). Once working attachment models are formed early in life, they are used as a guide for the child's attachment behavior both in familiar and new situations (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988). Research has been conducted and supported the hypothesis that one's early attachment styles serve as a prototype for later relationships outside the family (Crowell & Feldman, 1987; Main & Goldwyn, 1988). Due to these findings, using attachment styles as the comparison between family and romantic relationships serves as dependable.

As previously stated, communication is the core of every relationship. Generally, individuals desire to express a positive nature through communication. In order to do so, one must be able to adapt to situations accordingly. Communicative adaptability, the ability to adjust in social settings, can also be defined as the capacity of the individual to adjust him/herself to the situation with minimum friction (Karlsson, 1963). Beatty, Marshall, & Rudd (2001) state that communicative adaptability involves the use of wit and emotional reactivity as well as emphasizes individual differences in the capacity to adapt to immediate surroundings.

A number of scholars have researched this area, only with slight variations to the research. There are subtle differences in the theory constructs, yet they all share the recognition that the degree to which individuals adjust in social settings is unevenly distributed across the population. Since communication is inevitable, individuals experience various social settings, and the variance in communicative adaptability is considerable, it would be of interest to discover if there is relationship between attachment styles in relationships and an individual's level of communicative adaptability.

In order to build upon completed research, the objective is to address the following questions:

- RQ1:** Is there a relationship between a daughter's attachment style with her father and the attachment style with her current (or most recent) romantic partner?
- RQ2:** Is there a relationship between the daughter's attachment style with her romantic partner and her satisfaction level regarding her relationship with her father?
- RQ3:** Is there a relationship between the daughter's attachment style with her father and her satisfaction level regarding her relationship with her father?
- RQ4:** Is there a relationship between the daughter's attachment styles with her father and her level of communication adaptability?
- RQ5:** Is there a relationship between the daughter's attachment style with her romantic partner and her level of communication adaptability?

## **METHOD**

The researcher conducted descriptive empirical research. Empirical, as defined by Reinard (1998), means "observable." Empirical research involves gathering data to test statements. This data enabled the researcher to explore how things were at the time of examination.

Questionnaires, surveys in which individuals respond to written items, were used to gather data for this study. This quantitative research was successfully conducted on 181 women. The females were asked to rate their attachment with their father on a five point Likert scale for four separate attachment styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). They were then asked to choose the attachment style best representing their relationship with their father.

They were also asked to consider their level of satisfaction with the relationship they have with their father. A 10-item questionnaire was used for the women to describe specific aspects of the relationship with their father. These descriptions were noted by placing an X on one of the seven spaces appropriate for the answer desired.

The females were also asked to fill out a 30-item questionnaire regarding their communication adaptability (Duran & Kelly, 1988). The women responded to each statement by circling the appropriate number, 1-5, indicating the degree to which it applies to them.

Finally, they were asked to consider their relationship with their current, or most recent, romantic partner. They completed the same attachment style questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) for the romantic relationship

as they had previously for the relationship with their father. This included completing the 5-point Likert scale along with choosing one style that best represents the romantic relationship.

### *Subjects*

Females above the age of 18 were the subjects of this research. Due to the separation from close parental guidance, women this age are appropriate subjects for this study. One hundred and eighty-one women completely responded the previously mentioned questionnaires.

### *Procedures*

This data was collected by a convenience sample. Majority of the women is students in the La Crosse area. Surveys were distributed throughout a few residence halls, a couple classrooms, and a campus organizational meeting. The researcher immediately collected the surveys upon completion by the subject.

### *Data Analysis*

Due to the number of variables involved in this study, several tests were completed in order to best analyze the data. Chi Square was run comparing the attachment styles of the relationship with the father to the attachment styles of the relationship with the partner. ANOVA was used to compare the attachment styles with the communication satisfaction and communication adaptability. SPSS will be the mode of determining results. The intermediate variables will be compared one another, then examined regarding style of relationships for each individual.

## **RESULTS**

Upon computing the results of the questionnaires received, fascinating answers were found for the proposed research questions. The following is an explanation of the findings in relation to each of the five specific research questions.

**RQ1:** Is there a relationship between a daughter's attachment style with her father and the attachment style with her current (or most recent) romantic partner?

The data from each of the participants was entered and a cross-tabulation was conducted. Each of the four attachment styles in the relationship with the father was cross-tabulated with the four attachment styles in the relationship with the romantic partner. The Pearson Chi-Square test showed a significance level of .53, which is not statistically significant. Therefore, this shows that one cannot assume any relationship between the attachment style with the father and the attachment style with the romantic partner. The results show that one cannot determine any sort of relationship outside of a chance relationship.

**RQ2:** Is there a relationship between the daughter's attachment style with her romantic partner and the satisfaction level regarding her relationship with her father?

From the results computed through an ANOVA test, one cannot confirm that there is a relationship between a daughter's satisfaction level with relationship with her father and her attachment style in her romantic relationship. None of the results showed statistical significance between any of the levels.

**RQ3:** Is there a relationship between the daughter's attachment style with her father and the satisfaction level regarding her relationship with her father?

The level of satisfaction regarding the relationship with her father is much higher when the attachment style is secure. The mean for the satisfaction is 6.2705 with a secure attachment style. This mean drops to 4.9643 with a preoccupied attachment style. Next, the mean is 4.2704 for the dismissing attachment style and 4.2118 for the fearful attachment style. Due to these results, one could make a connection between the secure attachment style and a high level of communication satisfaction.

**RQ4:** Is there a relationship between the daughter's attachment style with her father and her level of communication adaptability?

Although there is not a drastic difference in the levels of communication adaptability, those individuals with a fearful attachment style displayed the highest level of communication adaptability with a mean of 3.8725. The preoccupied and secure attachment styles were 3.8357 and 3.8011 respectively. Lastly, those individuals with the

dismissing attachment style had a mean of 3.6202. Those who have a fearful attachment style do have a higher tendency toward communication adaptability, however a strong relationship would be hard to support.

**RQ5:** Is there a relationship between the daughter's level of communication adaptability and the attachment style with her romantic partner?

A different result was found when comparing the attachment styles of the romantic relationship with the communication adaptability. Those individuals with a secure attachment style with their romantic partner had a mean of 3.82. The mean scores continued to lessen with preoccupied at 3.7619, fearful at 3.7263, and dismissing at 3.6745. Again, one may be able to speculate; however, it may be difficult to make a strong relationship between the two.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As previously stated some of the results showed a relationship, while others did not do so. This causes more analyzing to occur in order to gain a greater understanding of the relationships between the variables.

When comparing the communication satisfaction level with the attachment styles of the father relationship and the communication satisfaction level with the attachment styles of the romantic relationship, one finds very different results. There is complete statistical significance between the communication satisfaction and the attachment styles with the father. The ANOVA shows that the number for statistical significance is .000, whereas there is not statistical significance between communication satisfaction and the attachment styles with the romantic partner. That score of significance is .145. Although it is not very high, there is no way of making a connection. This is the same situation for communication adaptability. There is statistical significance for the score of communication adaptability at .024. The communication adaptability and attachment with partner score is .208. These are not quite the results expected; however, they do prove to be interesting.

The relationship a daughter has with her father is one that greatly affects her life. This relationship began at childhood, and has continued into adulthood. Regardless if the relationship is healthy or not, it still has some sort of affect on the daughter. When comparing it to the relationship with a romantic partner, one is looking at a much different relationship. This consistency continued throughout the results. Statistical significance was present when addressing the relationship between the father and daughter, yet never present between the daughter and her partner.

Using multiple comparisons allows one to examine the specific attachment styles to the level of communication satisfaction. The secure attachment style shows statistical significance in regards to communication satisfaction when compared with each of the other attachment styles. For each of these match-ups, the statistical significance is .000. None of the other combinations displays statistical significance in regards to communication satisfaction.

Continuing with the relationship with the father but looking at the communication adaptability level displays slightly different results. There is statistical significance when comparing the secure attachment style and the dismissing attachment style in regards to communication adaptability. Statistical significance is present when comparing dismissing and fearful as well. This is fascinating because the only one not showing statistical significance when compared is the preoccupied attachment style. The preoccupied attachment style can be described as, "I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them," (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). When one is a part of a preoccupied type of relationship, she desires to be very emotionally intimate. This would cause her to feel hurt more easily possible take each comment or conversation to heart. Therefore, responding with a witty comment or joke would not be in the nature of this individual. The mean score for those individuals with a preoccupied attachment style is 5.7190, which is relatively high. One could any speculate as to why that score is high. Speculations could lead to the belief that only certain aspects of the relationship cause dissatisfaction.

A point of interest regarding the dismissing attachment style in the relationship with the romantic partner is the placement of the mean scores for that style. The level of communication satisfaction concerning the dismissing style is the highest of the four; however, the level of adaptability is the lowest. This could be because these females desire independent relationships, therefore feeling satisfied rather easily. Due to the desire for an independent relationship, she is able to state her feelings in a more aggressive manner. Wit, humor, and ease of conversation would not be a high priority when one does not desire any intimacy in that relationship. Another hypothesis could include the fact that the female is used to a high level of satisfaction in her relationship with males. If her romantic partner does not live up to her expectations, than she would rather remain completely independent from him, seeing no need to adapt to situations smoothly. . The research does not allow one to conclude that there is a relationship

between the attachment styles in father/daughter relationships to those in romantic relationships. However, there is statistical significance (.000) to show that there is a relationship between the attachment styles in the father/daughter relationship and daughter's communication satisfaction. There is also statistical significance (.024) to reveal a relationship between the attachment styles in the father/daughter relationship and the daughter's communication adaptability. One disappointing finding is that there is no statistical significance with the daughter's romantic relationship related to any variable. This is slightly shocking due to past research and literature that supports the importance of the father/daughter relationship and its effects on the daughter's life in the future. No conclusions can be drawn from this research relating to romantic relationships; in fact, more questions are raised.

## LIMITATIONS

As one may notice, the only relationships that can be made are within the father/daughter relationships. Due to the difference in length of the relationships between one's father and her romantic partner, the results may not express the reality of the attachment styles with the romantic partner. One limitation that may have affected the results is that individuals who were not currently in a relationship responded about their most recent romantic relationship. Rough breakups may have played a part in the answers given about that relationship. In addition, some of the individuals have wonderful relationships with their fathers, yet discouraging ones with their mothers and vice versa which may have influenced their romantic relationships. The convenience sample of La Crosse area females does not completely represent the United States population. The racial and ethnic background of the women was not diverse, while the family backgrounds were on the other hand. In addition, because this could be a sensitive subject for some individuals, the truthfulness of the answers is unknown. Lastly, the time for this research project was rather condensed, which may have affected the project as a whole.

More research on this topic would be fascinating. If the ages of the women were more diverse, that may lead to different results. In addition, a different variable than attachment styles may get at the core of the relationships more. Interviews might disclose more intimate information regarding romantic relationships or specific details regarding daughter's perceptions of her father. Maybe a questionnaire could be conducted to discover the similarities between the father and the partner, leading to a better understanding of the father's affect on the future.

Literature consistently states that father/daughter relationships tend to be the least studied. This would lead to a greater urgency for such research. Interviews, along with questionnaires may allow other connections between the relationships to surface.

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