



**Familial Experiences:
The Translation in Adults' Future Romantic Relationships**

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Abstract

This paper explores the different ways in which familial experiences can impact an adult's future intimate relationships. There are multiple factors such as parent-child attachment styles, parenting styles, personal background (race, ethnicity, religion, culture) and gender that influence their approach and attitude towards intimate relationships. Current research suggests that positive upbringing and familial experiences positively reflect adult children's future intimate relationships. On the contrary, unpleasant familial experiences can negatively impact one's social competency, jeopardizing their ability to maintain and establish relationships with others. I will discuss the multidimensional factors traced from the quality of family relations and how that translates to adult children's intimate relationships. Family serves as children's initial sense of emotional bond, moulding their competence in various social settings and ability to establish relationships with others.

Introduction

The definition of family as being a basic unit consisting of parents and their offsprings, connected by genetics, over time, has transcended this description. Defining what a family is, has significantly shifted across time and space attributable to social changes and complex relationship concepts such as increased rates of divorce and remarriage, cohabitation, single parenting, LGBTQ+ marriage and parenting, all of which decrease the role of matrimony and biology in conceptualizing families (Holtzman, 2008, p. 169). Consequently, through these ever-changing definitions of family, it inevitably constitutes unique familial experiences and relationships, especially highlighting the impacts it places upon children and adult children and their development. Existing literature and discourses concerned about the topic of familial experiences, adult children's social-emotional development and its quality's impact on future intimate relationships have contributed to future studies and understandings of this relevant discussion within intimate relationships.

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The majority of present research that discusses social-emotional development, places significance on both positive and negative experiences in one's childhood, shaping their cognitive, behavioural, social and emotional development. Components that are considered when analyzing social-emotional development include attachment styles, which is implied as an important marker for either a healthy or otherwise, social-emotional development (Cooper et al., 2019, p. 4). Analyses on attachment styles have indicated that experiencing high levels of secured attachment to both parents positively correlates to emotional competency; an ability to recognize, interpret and respond to other people's emotions, as well as the selves, allowing for positive and meaningful life satisfaction (Mónaco, Schoeps & Castilla 2019, p. 5). Persons who reported secured attachment styles tend to have healthy emotional abilities, a beneficial tool in maintaining relationships with others (Mónaco, Schoeps & Castilla 2019, p. 5). On the contrary, those with insecure attachment to their parents experience more difficulties with emotional regulation and are likely to present behavioural problems. They cannot understand their emotions, which can lead to destructive coping and poor management of their behaviour in social contexts (Colle & Del Guidice, 2010, p. 54).

Various parenting styles are another substantial addition to the many factors that influence development in adolescents and their future intimate relationships. Most parenting styles are categorized by the authoritarian style, also often referred to as controlling and restrictive, the authoritative style, a more warm-restrictive parenting style, the permissive or warm-lenient parenting style and the indifferent parenting style or cold-lenient parenting style (Kompirović, Radojević & Đurić 2020, p. 36). Research has asserted that warm-lenient parenting styles or parental warmth are a strong foundation for the most desirable developmental outcomes in children. Those children who experience parental warmth are likely to become socially competent, which allows for maintaining positive relationships with others ((Kompirović, Radojević & Đurić 2020, p. 43). This is an indication that experiences with distinct upbringings bring different forces in which determine children's social well-being and the ability to establish peer or romantic relations with others.

Personal background such as religion and ethnic/cultural identities are also considered in the literature to have an impact on dating and romantic relationships. A study has illustrated the existing pressure and influence drawn from adults' parents or community to preserve their faith as well as, cultural traditions (Yahya & Boag., 2014, p. 763). Racism and discrimination come into play as well, demonstrated by parents' disapproval of certain religions and cultures, refusing the fusion of different backgrounds through their adult children's intimate relationships (Yahya & Boag., 2014, p. 764).

All of the mentioned factors above present a sense of control over dating and romantic relationships among adult children and are undeniably impacted by one of the major socially constructed concepts: gender. Genders in all aspects are considered, hence the gender of the parent involved in parent-child attachment styles, the gender of the parent practicing parenting styles and the gender of the children, will not be excluded from the discussion in this study. I hypothesize that family experiences and overall upbringing will translate and reflect adult children's dating experiences and intimate relationships in the future. I further propose that adult children who grew up in positive family climates are likely to display the most desirable development and will be emotionally equipped to establish positive and healthy romantic relationships in their adult life.

Literature Review

Family experiences can have long-term influences on adult children's attitude and approach to dating and intimate relationships, thus presenting the risk of romantic relationship anxiety and low social competency. Existing literature dedicated to improving the understandings of the effects of distinct family experiences in adult children's relationships, all have a pattern of emphasizing the importance of parent-child relationships. A study conducted by Del Toro in 2012, illustrated the importance of understanding the relationship between a parent and child and their attachment, as parents naturally hold a substantial influence on their children. This approach can be seen beyond the topic at present such as parents' influence on their children's educational success, career attainment and even values and beliefs. What I have unearthed from the literature that I have gathered during my research, is the pattern of conducting a free-response method. In a research conducted by Hammond and Fletcher (1991), they have designed a free-response questionnaire where participants freely described their relationships (satisfaction and intimacy). A similar method has been used more recently, in young children, in research conducted by Colle and Del Giudice (2010). In this specific study, participants were asked to freely represent situations using vignettes in an attempt to establish attachment styles, between parent and child, accompanied by the use of dolls to represent the children themselves and their mothers. Both pieces of literature mentioned above, demonstrate a method that allows for a customized and unique representation of family experiences which I believe is the best method in attempting to conclude the influences of the parent-child relationship and attachment styles, regarding adult children's dating and romantic life. This way, distinct experiences can be analyzed, and generalization can be avoided. Another study conducted by Kochendorfer and Kerns (2017) theorized that parent-child attachment has an impact on romantic relationship involvement, concluded through a longitudinal study. A longitudinal study is commonly used across this discussion, which I consider a great strength, allowing to accurately predict the relation between family experiences and adult romantic life with temporal awareness.

An additional observation I have noticed in some literature I have gathered is the promotion of policy action. Research conducted by Cekaite and Bergnehr (2018) shows that studies support policymakers to integrate relational care and intimacy care in educational settings, which is where a huge development occurs for children. The same recommendation was made in an article published by Cooper, Masi and Vick (2009) where it was proposed that policymakers should promote a quality childcare environment in which is set up to support social-emotional development. As well, require screening to identify parents who may be suffering from mental illness and provide parenting supports and treatments.

All of the literature I have discovered during my research is that over the years, have mostly maintained the same patterns with little to no turning points. The importance of establishing parent-child attachment styles has always been present when examining childhood experiences concerning adult children's social-emotional development, which affects their relationships with others. While consideration of gender maintained its presence throughout literature, there is still a gap in expanding on different gender identities, including those who belong to the LGBTQ+ community. Most research I have accumulated only tends to focus on men and women. Due to constant social changes and progression and with relationships becoming more complex than ever, more recent studies should be continued with great consideration of all gender identities.

Parent-Child Attachment

Development discourse is undeniably paramount in analyzing adult outcomes, as is the relationship or the attachment between parents and children. The first agent of socialization is family, thus making them imperative in exerting influence on adult children's social skills, affecting future intimate relationships. I suggest that positive, secured attachment between children and their parents promotes open and intimate romantic relationships for adult children. Their positive experiences with a nurturing family lifestyle make them likely to exercise healthy relationship qualities and apply various effective approaches and attitudes towards romantic matters. Carrying out the attachment theory, Colle and Del Giudice (2010) assessed attachment patterns in children. They categorized children's attachment styles through children's vignette stories and doll narrations to represent their relationships with their mothers. This model demonstrates that children with insecure (ambivalent) attachment develop less behavioural engagement strategies, are unlikely to recognize others' emotions and are likely to develop a sense of helplessness. Whereas children with secure attachment, develop emotion regulation, high self-efficacy and constructive coping strategies (Colle & Del Giudice, 2010, p. 67). Lastly, disorganized attachment is associated with less sophisticated knowledge of cognitive regulation (Colle & Del Giudice, 2010, p. 67). Parent-child attachment proves its influence on a child's social competence and in expansion to this, it has also been theorized to impact adult children's romantic relationships (Kochendorfer & Kerns, 2017, p. 1010). Successful interaction competency in later romantic relationships is directly expected from children who are securely attached, as they are more likely to experience positive and healthier romantic relationships due to positive parent-child attachment (Kan, McHale & Crouter, 2008, p. 169). Children's positive parent-child relationship including intimacy and acceptance, strongly correlates to intimacy, satisfaction and love in adult children's romantic relationships, as they experience this during their development (Kan, McHale & Crouter, 2008, p. 169). Those who have experienced insecure attachment have gained anxious feelings in their romantic relationships. This attitude can be traced and explained from another study conducted by Del Toro (2012), where it is illustrated that inconsistent responsiveness from a caregiver, results in anxious attachment from their partners. "I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me", a participant's answer on a questionnaire from a study conducted by Hammond and Fletcher (1991, page 58). Parent-child attachment shows true relevance in an individual's development, shaping their social-emotional development. As children's initial experience with intimacy and emotional bond begin with their parents, their environment at home essentially becomes a setting where their social skills and abilities are exercised. Depending on their family climate, as seen with the literature discussed above, positive family climates translate into positive romantic relationships.

In respect to gender, multiple works of literature have complemented each other's hypothesis on gender not having an effect nor differences in their analyses.

Parenting Styles

As parent-child attachment styles act as a predictor of the outcome and quality of adult children's intimate relationships, discussion of parenting styles is demonstrated to be of impor-

tance across other literature as well. The two elements are parallel to each other, albeit differ in styles, as parent-attachment styles focus on nurturing connection, while parenting styles focus on parental authority and discipline. In this section, I argue that an authoritarian parenting style inhibits children's potential for great emotional-social development skills, while an authoritative parenting style raises social-emotional competency. Both of which are important when building romantic relationships. Authoritarian parenting constitutes strict rules, they constrain initiative, spontaneity and freedom of opinion. They often use force and do not provide warmth and love towards their children (Kompirović, Radojević & Durić 2020, p. 36). With the restriction, discouragement of initiative and the lack of agency, children consequently develop a lack of self-esteem, a high degree of aggressiveness and anti-social behaviour (Kompirović, Radojević & Durić 2020, p. 36). Kompirović, Radojević & Durić have concluded in their study that parental upbringing that is concentrated on coercion, emotional rejection and cold, or other components that constitute an authoritarian parenting style, may be implemented and imitated by children, translating a rather aggressive approach to dating and intimate relationships (Kompirović, Radojević & Durić 2020, p. 44). On the contrary, children with authoritative parents experience a much more encouraging verbal communication and initiative, the rules and discipline they are faced with, change as they age and parents in this style maintain a reasonable and healthy responsible parental behaviour. (Kompirović, Radojević & Durić 2020, p. 36). The outcomes for this type of parenting are great for social competence, confidence and independence. In a study by Neal and Horbury (2001), they assessed parenting styles using a Parenting Practices Survey and gathered scores from 56 adult children, ages 18 to 22. Those who reported high scores on authoritative variables were predictive to have intimacy abilities and tend to mirror secured attachment outcomes (Neal and Horbury, 2001, p. 181).

Gender

In the study of Kan, McHale and Crouter (2008) their models suggest that parents, especially mothers, are more restrictive towards their daughters. As well, parents provide sons more autonomy and demand obedience in daughters, more than with their sons (Kan, McHale & Crouter, 2008, p. 169). This gender difference also predicts the different extent of involvement in their daughter's romantic life versus their sons (Kan, McHale & Crouter, 2008, p. 169). This demonstrates gender stereotypes in which boys are granted more agency and independence, while girls are restricted and controlled within their romantic pursuit.

Background

Religion and Ethnicity

Most people are born into specific religions and cultural heritage, it makes up most of their identity and the family they belong in. Families and communities are strongly connected by their faith, traditions and values. Within this matter, I believe that social pressure and an internal sense of obligation to conform to family and community strongly affect one's approach when seeking out a romantic partner. Literature has demonstrated that a strong relationship with a certain religion, decreases one's likelihood of engaging with others who identify with another faith (Yahya & Boag, 2014, p. 760). Additionally, participants in Yahya and Boag's (2014) study, represent that

the disapproval of friends and family makes them reluctant in entertaining interracial and interfaith relationships. “Family is a big factor in my life and I couldn’t do anything against what they think or say...” is a participant statement in Yahya and Boag’s study (2014). The outsider influences’ motive of disapproval, stems from wanting to maintain internal cohesion and homogeneity and as well, an act of prejudice (Yahya & Boag, 2014, pp. 760-764). Some participants in Yahya and Boag’s study shared that political and historical contexts shape prejudice behaviour that further increases disapproval (i.e. Muslims and Christians) (Yahya & Boag, 2014, p. 764). Conclusion was made in a study by Shenhav, Campos and Goldberg (2017) that intercultural dating triggers family conflict due to family disapproval. Because of increased diversity, individuals now are more exposed to others outside of their racial/ethnic groups, thus holding a more positive inclusive attitude in comparison to their parents (Shenhav, Campos & Goldberg, 2017, p. 398). This disapproval has demonstrated prevalence among ethnic minority and immigrant parents, with a specific concern in conserving ethnic identity, cultural traditions and religious identification (Shenhav, Campos & Goldberg, 2017, p. 399). Most participants in their study, who identified as second-generation young adults, reported that their parents either prefer or expect them to date within their culture, ethnicity and religion (Shenhav, Campos & Goldberg, 2017, p. 401).

Gender

Resolution within family conflict from intercultural and interfaith relationships is reported to be more difficult for daughters than it is for sons as well, women experience a greater attitudinal discrepancy in comparison to men (Shenhav, Campos & Goldberg, 2017, p. 411). Other than this, no more gender differences of conflict are reported, suggesting that both men and women experience intercultural and interfaith dating (Shenhav, Campos & Goldberg, 2017, p. 415).

Personal Reflection

This topic resonates with me, which inspired this discussion. Having to grow up under an authoritarian parenting style and being in an insecure parent-child attachment, I found that discussion is very appropriate and very fascinating.

I did not live with my biological mother up until the age of 11, as I was left behind in my hometown while she works in Canada. Back in my native country, my caregiver’s approach to my upbringing was more relaxed and open and I would describe it as authoritative parenting. The extent of parenting I received from my biological mother was through the phone and virtual conversations, thus I never had the ability to experience, nor was I aware of her parenting approach. Once I immigrated and we finally were able to live together, I soon discovered that her parenting style is authoritarian. I was discouraged from speaking up, discouraged from going out with friends and received more punishment than discipline. To this day, this experience affects my current relationships as I barely communicate my needs and wants properly. I even notice a pattern of indecisiveness in myself, to accommodate other people’s preferences. Additionally, the lack of socialization I was subjected to, made it difficult for me to interact and feel a sense of belonging with my peers. Beyond that, I was restricted from engaging in romantic relationships and have only started dating at the age of 21 and this made it challenging for me to keep up with the dating culture. This parenting style was also structured around gender stereotypes. As a woman, my

parents demanded more obedience from me in comparison to my brother, he was permitted to date at a young age, and he was provided greater leniency.

As a result of this parenting style, our parent-child attachment style was and is very insecure. I lacked nurturing support and often felt unwelcomed to seek comfort. I believe that a consequence of this is that I often have difficulty with opening up and when I do, it becomes overreactive. This is a result of the absence of emotional regulation, which is commonly generated from an insecure attachment style, unlike with a secure attachment. In my intimate relationship, during conflicts, I often result to ostracism or silent treatment, avoiding confrontation and avoiding the need to acknowledge the problem. I have learned, multiple times, that this demonstrates poor social competency and is unhealthy behaviour in a romantic relationship. My undesirable familial experiences have contributed greatly to an inconsistent and unstable emotional competence.

Conclusion

Family is considered as a primary social institution in society, serving as the immediate form of socialization, responsible for social-emotional development in children. Family is the oldest institution through which social behaviour, expectations and roles are established, making it very significant in one's life. Because of the vital role families hold, it becomes very influential and is a determinant for members' social well-being. The ways in which one's development is formed, either from parent-child attachment, parenting styles or background, demonstrates a substantial impact on their later development and can affect their attitude and approach on dating and intimate relationships. The findings within the literature have demonstrated a strong correlation among positive and warm family experiences to social competency and effective intimate relationship skills. I have suggested that a secured parent-child attachment where openness and comforting relationship is normalized and encouraged, correlates with an adult children's attitude towards intimate relationships. A development grounded in an affectionate and reassuring environment enhances the likelihood of translating this behaviour into later romantic relationships. By receiving warm and positive responsiveness from parents and caregivers, children become accustomed to this kind of interaction, they become aware of the positive consequences this provides through satisfaction, thus are likely to demonstrate similar behaviour with others such as romantic partners. This allows for a comforting companionship and encouragement for openness. Equipped with emotional intelligence, secured children display a positive attitude in their romantic relationships and often carry out effective approaches to conflict or any relational concern and are able to cope in constructive ways. In comparison to insecure children who are deprived of affection and security, their attitude and approach to dating and intimate relationships are structured with destructive and ineffective management. Unlike those with secure attachment, insecure children develop to become anxious in social settings and exhibit inadequate engagement with others. The lack of social competency and emotion regulation determines the unsuccessful establishment or maintenance of intimate relationships.

Although generally parenting styles shift as children get old and parents' authority on their children declines as they age, parenting styles during children's developmental state, evidently leave a prolonged impact on their ability to form relationships. I have stated in this study that children who are raised under an authoritarian parenting style, are hindered to optimize and

enhance their social-emotional skills due to restrictive upbringing. Lack of agency and autonomy in children with decisions being made for them promotes poor self-esteem and decision-making abilities, which heavily affects social skills. As a result of this, their independence is troubled, making them dependent and helpless at times. Children with an authoritarian upbringing also display aggressive behaviours, which are carried out in romantic relationships, possibly creating a toxic relationship. They become anxious, lose trust and question their partners, as a result. I have also argued that those who are raised under an authoritative parenting style who often experience parental warmth, encouraging them to have initiative and independence, present higher and stronger social-emotional abilities. Echoing the characteristics of a secure parent-child attachment, children in this circumstance develop into confident individuals with high self-efficacy. This form of upbringing is proven to be beneficial in creating effective intimate relationships due to a sense of confidence and strong emotion regulation. When conflicts arise, they are likely to encourage open communication and model effective engagement strategies that provide positive consequences for their intimate relationships.

I further argued that the faith and culture that a person is born into, plays a significant role in determining their romantic relationship outcomes and attitude towards dating. Aside from biological relations, families are deeply connected and united through shared beliefs, values and traditional practices. Within this profound community, peer pressure from family members and other members of the community emerges, surrounding the discussion of interfaith and intercultural relationships. It is demonstrated that individuals who are seeking romantic partners, develop a sense of obligation to conform and respect their families and communities, to avoid any kind of unwanted faith and cultural integration. Despite the ongoing diversity across societies and improved inclusive attitudes among young adults, the hesitation on some adult children, mostly immigrant children, exists and obeys the wishes of their families and communities, mostly to avoid conflict. In an effort to prevent conflict between families and communities, young adults' experiences in romantic pursuits become limited and restricted. They end up ignoring their interests in other potential partners and focusing exclusively on people within their community.

The quality of familial experiences consistently relates to the quality of adult children's romantic relationships. It is important for those experiencing poor, undesirable familial experiences and family conflict to take action to repair and recover, as to enhance their experiences with intimate relationships and to avoid translating unhealthy social-emotional abilities to the next generation. Parents empowering their children during their development provides their children with the social ability and emotional competence to make informed decisions that will positively impact their future relationships.

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