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Like Father Like Daughter: Father and Daughter Communication Competence

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Abstract

This research study sought to find out whether there is a correlation between fathers' self-rated communication competence scores and daughters' self-rated communication competence scores. A literature review was conducted, and it was discovered that communication competence is a highly unstructured concept, as evidenced by the numerous definitions and instruments. No literature was available pertaining to any type of relationship between father and daughter communication competence scores. Forty individuals participated in this study (20 father-daughter pairs). Each participant filled out the self-report version of Wiemann's Communicative Competence Scale, which consists of 36 Likert-type questions, and the resulting answers were scored and compared. The correlation between the fathers' scores and the daughters' scores was $r = .23, p > .05$. Therefore, a weak positive correlation was found; however, the results were not significant.

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The main topic that was studied and researched is communication competence and how it applies to father-daughter relationships. In comparison to mother-daughter and father-son relationships, there have been very few research studies on father-daughter relationships and the ways fathers impact their daughters. Communication competence, while still a rather nebulous concept, is of the utmost importance in terms of social and financial success. For instance, communication competence continues to be one of the top five qualities sought by employers (Koesten, 2004, p. 242). Wiemann states that through communication competence, individuals establish a social identity (Perkins & Mincemoyer, 2001). In light of this, finding a correlation between father and daughter communication competence would be a breakthrough and a significant finding not just for individuals in the field of communication, but also for the general public. Such a finding would not just affect a small enclave in society, but over half the American population. If a correlation was found between the communication competencies of fathers and daughters, it could spur fathers to think and act differently toward their daughters and shed light on the underrated father-daughter relationship.

Literature Review

Having read past and current literature on father-daughter relationships and communication competence, it became clear that there is no existing research or literature to support or reject a correlation between fathers' and daughters' communication competence. There was a decent amount of literature theorizing and testing impacts that fathers have on their daughters. While there was some research dealing with the affect family communication patterns have on one's communication competence, nothing focused specifically on a connection between father and daughter communication competence.

First, some of the research pertaining to father-daughter relationships in general will briefly be discussed. According to Linda Nielsen, a prominent psychologist and author, "...compared to mothers and daughters, fathers and daughters have not received their share of attention in research oriented books or in books written by psychologists" (Nielsen, 2001, p. 282). In spite of the sparse research and literature about father-daughter relationships, in comparison to available information regarding mother-daughter and father-son relationships, some studies have shown specific impacts that fathers have on daughters. For example, fathers have an impact on the psychosexual development of their daughters and are as important as mothers in the triangular relationship formed between the father, mother, and daughter (Williamson, 2004, p. 218). Researchers have also found significant correlations between perceived fatherly affirmation and self-esteem, fear of intimacy, and comfort with sexuality (Scheffler & Naus, 1999, p. 42). Results of yet another study indicated that "specific results suggested that a woman's on-going relationship with a particular kind of father could impact her self-perception and in consequence her style of life" (Perkins, 2001, p. 621).

Communication competence is an amorphous construct (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1983, p. 364). As stated by researchers James McCroskey and Linda McCroskey, "In the case of communication competence, the words have been forced to serve many masters; so many, in fact, that no correlation constituent delineation of the construct has yet evolved...we are forced to select from among the many available definitions" (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988, p. 108). Communication theorists and researchers differ in their conceptions of and definitions of communication competence. For example, Wiemann, who created the Communication Competence Scale (CCS) in 1977, defined communication competence as an ability "to choose among available communicative behaviors" to accomplish one's own "interpersonal goals during

an encounter while maintaining the face and line” of “fellow interactants within the constraints of the situation” (Rubin, p. 125). He believed that communicative competence allows a person to establish a social identity, and he developed a model which “describes the competent communicator to be other-oriented, empathetic, affiliative, supportive, and relaxed while interacting with others” (Perkins & Mincemoyer, 2001). Basically, Wiemann viewed and researched communication competence as a composite of skill constructs (Spitzberg, 1983, p. 324). Spitzberg conceptualized communication competence as knowledge, skill, and motivation, because these components can enhance or inhibit performance. He also argued that communication competence is an interpersonal impression, judged on a continuum of effectiveness and appropriateness (Perkins & Mincemoyer, 2001). He delineated the difference between communication skill, “the ability of an individual to perform situationally appropriate behavior” and communication competence, “the ability of an individual to demonstrate knowledge of the situationally appropriate behavior” (Spitzberg, 1983, p. 323). Spitzberg believed that communication competence played a role in the success or failure of significant human relationships (Lahey & Canary, 2002, p. 217). According to McCroskey, communication competence is “adequate ability to pass along or give information; the ability to make known by talking or writing” (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988, p. 109). Not only is communication competence unstructured in the professional sphere, but one study indicated that college students were confused as to what communication competence was explicitly. The study’s results stated that “communication competence was often construed as quality of performance, conceptions of communication competence varied from the purely physical to the purely intellectual, and communication competence was often conceived as a form of sociality” (Almeida, 2004, p. 360).

In addition to the copious conceptualizations and definitions of communication competence, researchers and theorists disagree as to whether interpersonal communication competence is dispositional (“traits”) or situational (“states”). On this topic, Cupach and Spitzberg said that “States refer to psychological experiences of the moment (e.g., loneliness, anger), and traits are viewed as cross-contextual psychological predispositions (e.g., dogmatism, social anxiety). Dispositional measures use items that reference behavioral tendencies over several communication events....Situational measures refer to a specific communication event or situation such as conversation” (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1983, p. 365). An example of a dispositional measure of communication competence is Wiemann’s Communicative Competence Scale (1977), consisting of 36 Likert-type questions that can be used in self-report or other-report format. A major example of a situational measure of communication competence is Cupach and Spitzberg’s relational competence (1981) which is made up of both self-rated and other-rated competence for a given situation (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1983, p. 366).

Self-reporting measures of communication competence have been discussed and assessed in terms of strengths and weaknesses. Throughout the years, the self-report approach has been the most commonly used method of communication competence measurement. Self-report occurs when the subject under study self-assesses him or herself through a series of items determined by the researcher (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988, p. 109). In the words of James McCroskey and Linda McCroskey in their article *Self-Report as an Approach to Measuring Communication Competence*, “In the case of communication competence, self-report scales may be very useful if we want to know how communicatively competent a person thinks he/she is. If we want to know how competent the person actually is, such scales may be totally useless, because the person very likely does not know” (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988, p. 110). They

went on to say that “it is our position that many of the most important decisions people make concerning communication are made on the basis of self-perceived competence rather than actual competence” (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988, p. 110). In this way, sometimes measuring how competent a person believes him or herself to be is of more value than measuring a person’s actual competence.

Now that communication competence as a concept has been discussed, the focus will shift to research on communication competence and how it affects/is affected by other variables. In one study, results indicated that sensitivity to a partner’s goals is a key factor in how judgments of others’ communication competence are formed. Communication scholars, including Wiemann, have previously implied that there is a link between the value of being aware and sensitive towards one’s partner and perceived communication competence. Therefore, this study is of great importance because it “moves that consideration beyond implication into a clearly stated role in people’s evaluations of the actor’s communication competence” (Lakey & Canary, 2002, p. 230). Part of the research hypothesis for Joy Koesten’s study was that family history will affect ability to enact certain communication skills, and the results indicated that family communication patterns do indeed influence the development of communication competencies in same-sex friendships and romantic partnerships (Koesten, 2004, p. 231). According to Koesten, “As adolescents grow into adults, interpersonal communication competence becomes more important as they begin to seek a broader group of friends and experiences outside the family unit. But without adequately developed relationship schema developed through a conversation oriented family communication environment, young people are likely to have problems creating and maintaining meaningful relationships that will allow

them to mature into successful adults” (Koesten, 2004, p. 241). Koesten’s study evidently linked family communication and communication competence.

Habermas’ Theory of Communicative Competence

There are aspects of this theory that could apply to the communication competence measurement process and the way in which competence is viewed. The first component of this theory is the notion of ‘universal pragmatics’, which refers to rules that must be mastered by competent communication speakers so that intersubjective communication can be created and sustained (Burlison & Kline, 1979, p. 413). Also, Habermas theorized and described the ideal speech situation. He believed that individuals are free to select and utilize any communicative act and that individuals are able to account for their validity claims in a rational way (Burlison & Kline, 1979, p. 424). According to Habermas’ theory, being a competent communicator directly implies “the mastery of the means...necessary for the establishment of the ideal speech situation” (Burlison & Kline, 1979, p. 424). In this way, ‘universal pragmatics’ can be used to attain the ideal speech situation. This thinking rests on the idea that dispositional attributes and situational behaviors can be rated and quantified.

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory, or Social Learning Theory, examines the interrelationship of a person’s behavior, the environment, and cognition (Billek-Sawhney & Reicherter, 2004, p. 321). Most applicable in predicting and explaining a correlation between a father and daughter’s communication competence is the idea of observational learning, also referred to as modeling or imitation. In Malone’s article, she stated that “the behaviorist notion of learning by reinforcement is extended in SCT to include learning by watching others’ action and the consequences of their actions” (Malone, 2002, p. 10). Perhaps daughters have a similar

level of communication competence as their fathers based on observational learning growing up. By watching and imitating, daughters could end up with similar dispositional communication competence attributes as their fathers and display similar situational behaviors in different communication contexts as their fathers.

Koener and Fitzpatrick's Model of Family Communication

This theory suggests that “interactions within families may play a crucial role in the development of the ability to create and maintain future successful interpersonal relationships” (Koesten, 2004, p. 227). According to Koener and Fitzpatrick, adolescents will most likely use social knowledge from their family, the relationship type they know best, to develop interpersonal relationships (Koesten, 2004, p. 227). Based on this assumption, “it is important to examine how interactions within the family influence the development of an individual’s interpersonal communication competence” (Koesten, 2004, p. 228). The research question in this study has to do solely with fathers’ and daughters’ communication competence and how they correlate, if at all. However, this theory applies to the research question in a broader sense, providing a foundation with which to work from.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

The research question is: do fathers’ self-rated communication competencies correlate with the self-rated communication competencies of their daughters?

Method

Subjects

There were a total of 40 participants in this study, which broke down into 20 pairs of fathers and daughters. The 40 participants were aged between 16 and 55. Therefore, the overall age range was 39. Specifically, the 20 daughters’ ages were between 16 and 22 (a range of 6),

and the 20 participating fathers were between 46 and 55 years old (a range of 9). There were 38 white participants (19 pairs of white participants) and 2 participants (1 pair) of African American participants. All of the participants had a medium to high socioeconomic status.

Procedures

A nonrandom, convenience sample was utilized. The questionnaires were distributed and received back between November 22, 2005 and December 3, 2005 via mail, e-mail, and direct contact. The participants were each instructed to fill out a consent form and a questionnaire.

Instrumentation

Fathers' communication competence. This variable was measured using Wiemann's Communicative Competence Scale (CCS). It is a 36-item questionnaire consisting of Likert-type questions ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree with 5 reverse-coded questions. This study used the self-report format version, meaning each participant rated their own perceived communication competence. This particular version of Wiemann's CCS has been deemed reliable by multiple researchers, with a reported alpha between .85 and .91 (Rubin, 126). The possible range of scores for the CCS is 36-180, with an absolute mean of 108. The higher a person's score, the more competent the communicator perceives him or herself to be.

Daughters' communication competence. This variable was also measured using Wiemann's Communicative Competence Scale, in particular the self-report format version. The above description of this scale applies for measuring this variable as well.

Results

When taking the entire sample of 40 (N=40) into consideration, the mean of the communication competence scores=140.275, median=140.5, mode=131, range=63 (with a high score of 166 and a low score of 103), and the standard deviation(sd)=14.865(which indicates a

substantial variance). When graphed, the histogram of these statistics has a mesokurtic distribution, a normal or bell-shaped curve, and a slightly negative skew. When the fathers' scores and the daughters' scores were analyzed separately, the fathers' scores yielded the following results: $N=20$, $\text{mean}=138.15$, $\text{median}=140$, $\text{mode}=131$, $\text{range}=63$, and $\text{sd}=16.239$. The histogram of this data has a mesokurtic (somewhat leptokurtic) distribution and a normal curve. The daughters' scores yielded the following results: $N=20$, $\text{mean}=142.4$, $\text{median}=142$, $\text{mode}=131$, $\text{range}=53$, and $\text{sd}=13.429$. The histogram of these descriptive statistics has a mesokurtic distribution and a normal curve. The reliability of the instrument employed to measure communication competence (Wiemann's CCS) had a reliability of 0.79 ($\alpha=.79$). The Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to compute the correlation between the communication competence scores of the fathers and daughters. The confidence level for this study was 95% (confidence interval of + or - .4). It was 2-tailed (non-directional hypothesis) and yielded a correlation of $r=.234$, $p=.32$ ($p>.05$). Therefore, I failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Discussion

Interpretation of Results

The communication competence scores, measured using Wiemann's CCS, were on the high end of the scale (above 108), and thus it is evident that overall the individuals who comprised the sample for this study think quite highly of themselves in terms of communication competence. When the descriptive statistics of the daughters' and fathers' CCS scores were split up, evaluated separately, and compared, the fathers' and daughters' results were similar. The daughters' mean and median were a little bit higher, whereas the fathers' scores yielded a higher standard deviation and range. The three histograms (all scores, daughters' scores, and fathers' scores) had a normal curve, meaning self-reported communication competence was normally

distributed in this sample. The correlation found was .234, which suggests a weak positive correlation. However, $p > .05$; hence, the results of this study were not significant and there was a failure to reject the null hypothesis. In other words, there may be zero correlation between the communication competence scores of fathers and daughters.

The weak, positive correlation between the communication competence scores of the fathers and daughters in this sample size of 40 could indicate that the Social Cognitive Theory is at work, in that daughters learn how to react and how to be in terms of observing their fathers over time, striving for similar attributes and recreating behavior patterns. Koener and Fitzpatrick's Model of Family Communication could also potentially predict/explain the weak, positive correlation obtained, because although this theory is not father-daughter specific, "interactions within the family influence the development of an individual's interpersonal communication competence" (Koesten, 2004, p. 228).

Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this study was the measurement. Wiemann's Communicative Competence Scale, developed in 1977, has been used and deemed reliable in previous studies. For this study, the reliability was fairly good, with an alpha of 0.79. There are multiple limitations of this communication study, namely that a nonrandom, convenience sample was used. Also, the sample size was only 40, and there was a lack of diversity among the participants on a variety of levels, including socioeconomic, racial, age, etc. This study solely took self-report format scores into account, instead of analyzing self-report and other-report scores. Finally, there is a possibility that interaction between fathers and daughters while completing the CCS occurred, for example, comparing answers or copying answers.

Directions for Future Research

For conducting future research, a larger, more diverse sample would be a good place to start. Also, future research could try measuring communication competence with Wiemann's other-report or partner-report format instead of the self-report format. Also, measuring communication competence with a completely different instrument, for example, Rubin's Communication Competency Assessment Instrument (1982), would be interesting. Another idea for future research is to have participants indicate whether or not their father-daughter relationship is good, strained, or somewhere in between, and compare that with the pair's communication competence score. In addition, a study comparing the communication competence scores of fathers, daughters, and mothers would be advantageous. Adding this third variable would indicate whether daughters' scores correlate stronger with the scores of their mothers or fathers, adding more breadth and depth to the research.

Conclusion

A review of literature was provided, as well as possible theory explanations and finally the methods and results. The research question had to do with whether the self-rated communication competence scores of fathers and daughters correlated or not. Wiemann's Communicative Competence Scale (CCS), in the self-report format, was used to measure the perceived competencies of 40 study participants, or 20 pairs of fathers and daughters. A weak, positive correlation coefficient was found, yet the results were statistically insignificant because $p > .05$. Therefore, there was a failure to reject the null hypothesis.

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