

Parents' Communication Styles and Their Influence on the Adolescents' Attachment, Intimacy and Achievement Motivation

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The study aims to know if the four parents' communication styles – loving, assertive, aggressive and passive - have an influence on the adolescents' attachment style, level of intimacy and achievement motivation. This descriptive-correlational study – with 251 SLU students as respondents - reveals that adolescents perceive their parents' communication style as loving; whereas, aggressive and passive styles are less likely perceived. Both aggressive and passive communication styles are related to the different insecure attachments. Assertive style is related to dismissing attachment instead of a secure attachment as previously hypothesized. Males are more secure while females are more fearful in their attachments. While males are more achievement-oriented; females are more inclined for intimate connections. Results have implications on improving parent-adolescent relationships.

Keywords: assertive, loving, aggressive, passive, secure, fearful, pre-occupied, dismissing, impact on goals, activities

Parents play an important role in shaping the child's perception of the world through the way they communicate with their children. Communication transmits mental content (Zajonc & Adelman, 1987) and likewise creates understanding among people and their relationship with each other. Through communicating, people bring about ideas, values, and identities that affect who they are and how they operate in relation to one another (Wood, 1995).

In this research, the four communication styles: assertive, passive, aggressive and loving is described according to the ego states proposed in Eric Berne's Structural Analysis (1966 as cited in Cacho, Kawi & Versoza, 2005). An *adult* ego state promotes a more *assertive* communication style. This is more characteristic of open families who tend to develop and maintain a lifestyle that emphasizes dialogue, patience, collaboration as well as a willingness to hear each other out (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2000). When communication is made up of put down statements that prevent other people from feeling good about themselves, this is an *aggressive* communication style characteristic of the *critical parent* ego state. The *child* ego state of an individual, considered as the *felt concept* (Berne, 1966),

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would likely display a more *passive* communication style. Last, a *loving* communication style would likely be displayed by the *nurturing parent* ego state. Parents whose communication style is loving tend to be consistently protective and attentive of their children and may make themselves a clutch to lean on. They can even make sacrifices at the expense of the self.

In this study, the influence of parents' communication styles on the variables attachment, intimacy and achievement motivation was explored. As gleaned from above, the theoretical background of parents' communication styles begins with an understanding of family dynamics. These functional demands or rules, including that for communication, organize the way family members relate to one another. The structure that regulates a family's transactions can be understood by observing the family in action or by looking at interactions unfolding among family members (Dinkmeyer & Sperr, 2000).

Child-rearing practices are important and impact attachment patterns. *Attachment* refers to the emotional and long lasting bond that an individual forms with an attachment figure who provides feelings of security and comfort (Ainsworth 1982; Fabes & Martin 2003; Fogel & Melson 1987). Bowlby (1982) and Ainsworth (1982) confirmed that the patterns of attachment in family systems can be seen as providing a long-lasting framework for intimate relationships in adulthood. Attachment theory assumes that an early relationship with parent figures or caregivers creates an example of expectations from adult friendship or intimate commitment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

There are four adult attachment styles as proposed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). *Secure attachment* means being at ease with others and finding no difficulty becoming emotionally close to others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Secure individuals reported more positive self-esteem, greater maturity and feel comfortable in engaging in friendships and intimate relationships with others without fear of closeness or distance. Those individuals who are uncomfortable getting close to others have a *fearful attachment* style. They are worried of being hurt if they permit themselves to be close to others. They have difficulty trusting others completely and depending on them. *Preoccupied attachment* is characterized by wanting to have absolute emotional intimacy with others

but they often find others to be hesitant to get as close as they would like. They are uncomfortable having no close relationships and sometimes they worry that others do not value them as much as they value others.

Dismissing attachment is characterized by being comfortable without having close emotional relationships. Dismissing and preoccupied attachment styles are believed to build up as a defensive response to insensitive care giving behavior (Owens, 2002).

Communication also affects the closeness between two or more individuals. Intimacy is the feeling of proximity in a relationship and the degree to which a person can share feelings freely with another (Wood, 1995). The ways parents communicate to their children do not only form their attachment with their children but also the level of how intimate their relationship would be. Intimate relationships are characterized by high degrees of warmth and affection, trust, self-disclosure, and commitment, and are formalized through symbols and customs (Derlega & Chaikin, 1975). The attributes of intimacy are characterized by the need for a sense of emotional feelings for another and the ability to share feelings honestly with others (Adams & Gullota, 1983). This reflects a deep emotional involvement with another and is an essential skill for survival (Tan, 1988).

Intimate individuals look forward to being with each other because they experience joy in each other's company, they enjoy talking with each other, and they enjoy sharing experiences (Verderber & Verderber, 1998). Secure teens are comfortable with intimacy and do not have undue fears of rejection; preoccupied teens report intense needs for closeness but fear that there is something wrong with them which will ultimately drive their partner away; dismissing teens report difficulty being close to as well as trusting others (Feeney, Noller & Patty, 1993).

When parents' expectation of closeness is increased, it is possible that parents would be more intentional about spending time together or expressing acceptance of the child. However, parents may be more disappointed by the feelings of distance and increased conflict typical of parent-child relationship when they expect greater closeness to their child (Kerns & Richardson, 2005). In studies on adolescents' relationships with their parents, the majority of adolescents have noted feeling close to and getting along with their parents. It was found out that mother-daughter

relationships are more intimate than father-child relationships. Buekel-Rothfuss, Fink, and Buerkel (1995) emphasized that father-child relationships are characterized more by shared activities.

Achievement motivation is also affected by the parents' communication styles. Parents appear to be the primary influence on a child's motivation to learn (Wlodkowski & Jaynes, 1990). *Achievement motivation* is an important determinant of aspiration, effort and persistence when an individual expects that performance will be evaluated in relation to some standard of excellence (Atkinson & Birch, 1978). Achievement motivation drives an individual to excel, succeed, or outperform others at some task (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2003). Parental involvement improves academic performance and school behavior. It increases academic motivation, and decreases the number of dropouts (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). When it comes to achievement, parents expect and evaluate attitudes of their own achievement. In addition, they communicate in different ways to pass on these evaluative attitudes to their children. Parents who support their children's ideas are related positively to achievement aspirations, and parents who give little feedback, and are uninvolved are negatively correlated with achievement aspirations. (Crandall, Katkovsky & Crandall, 1965).

In line with gender differences, fathers and mothers treat sons and daughters differently (Berns, 2004). Parents view their sons as stronger, more coordinated, and more alert. Daughters are smaller, softer and more fragile. Fathers encourage their sons to foster more independence, competitiveness, and aggression while they encourage their daughters to be more gentle and expressive in their emotions. Fathers talk more with their daughters and engage more in activities with their sons. Mothers talk more about emotions and relationships with their daughters than with their sons. Mothers are disposed to make communication the center of their relationships, especially with their daughters (Wood, 2007). Boys are given more chances for autonomous problem solving and exploration, while girls are more closely supervised and controlled in their experiences. Boys are more curious and competitive while girls seek approval more often and are more affiliated (Berns, 2004).

Mothers and fathers are important attachment figures for their children. Although both mothers and fathers are affectionate toward their

children, mothers are more often the parent to whom children turn to for comfort and with whom they share personal feelings (Collins & Read, 1990).

The above variables are studied in the Philippine setting where the relationship between parents and their children are difficult to describe with precision because of heterogeneity of social, economic, educational, religion and provincial backgrounds of the residents (Mendez & Jocano, 1975). Generally however, the relationship is anchored on affective and supportive ties with authoritarian discipline being imposed when extremely necessary. The collective culture may engender greater dependence in children compared to the more individualistic orientation of the west where children are more encouraged to be independent.

The researchers used the above framework to work on the following problems and test their hypotheses.

Research Purpose/Problems and Hypotheses

The present study aims to explore the communication style of parents as perceived by their adolescent children. It tried to determine the influence of parents' communication styles on attachment style, intimacy and achievement motivation.

Generally, assertive communication style is viewed as more positive; hence, it is hypothesized that it will have more impact on secure attachment style, greater capacity for intimacy and higher levels of achievement motivation. The hypothesis is that a parent with an assertive communication style is likely to develop a secure attachment style in their child. It is assumed that a parent with an assertive communication style is likely to have an adolescent who would be motivated to achieve more. Gender differences were also explored given the differences in socialization between boys and girls.

Method

Subjects

There are 251 valid respondents who participated in the survey. These are undergraduate students of Saint Louis University in the Philippines

taken from the different schools of the institution. For gender differences, 98 males and 153 females were included in the analysis. The participants are late adolescents to young adults ranging from 16-21 years old.

Instruments

The descriptive surveys used were specifically the (1) Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale (PACS), (2) Relationship Scale Questionnaire (RSQ) by Griffin & Bartholomew (1994b), (3) Intimacy scale (IS) by Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto (1989), and (4) Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ) by Elliot and Church (1997).

The Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale (PACS) was used to measure the dominant communication style of the parents as perceived by their children. Based on content analysis, it comprised of 40 items; ten items each describing the assertive, passive, aggressive, and loving communication styles as they relate to the different ego states. Sample items for each include: 'defers judgment unless sure of facts' (*assertive – adult ego state*); 'gives consoling remarks' (*loving – nurturing parent ego state*); 'tends to hurt feelings of others' (*aggressive – critical parent ego state*); 'often asks advice or approval for actions taken' (*passive – child ego state*).

The Relationship Scale Questionnaire (RSQ) consists of items like "I find it difficult to relate with other people", "it is very important for me to feel independent", etc. The Cronbach alphas ranged from .41 for the secure scale to .70 for the dismissing scale. Internal consistencies of the two dimensions have been shown to range from .85 to .90 for both avoidance and anxiety, respectively. It has a moderate convergent validity of .58 for the self-dimension model and .57 for the other-dimension model.

The Relationship Closeness Inventory assesses the participant's close relationship with a person. The questions involve the person closest to them and the number of hours they spent with that person during the past week, activities they did together like "did laundry", "prepared a meal" and items regarding how this person affects their plans such as "vacation plans", "school related plans", etc. The scale adopted has a test-retest coefficient for frequency is $r = .82, p < .001$, test-retest coefficient for diversity is $r = .61, p < .001$, and test-retest coefficient for strength is $r = .81, p < .001$.

The Achievement Goal Questionnaire assesses the participants' performance-approach goal, mastery goal, and performance-avoidance goal

in all their subjects. The items consist of questions such as “It is important for me to do better than the other students”, “I wish my class was not graded”, etc. The internal consistency of the three was presented respectively as follows: Cronbach's alpha = .89, .91, and .77.

Procedure

The researchers used descriptive surveys using the above set of questionnaires. These were distributed to the target respondents in their classrooms. The deans of each school or college assigned some classes where the researchers may float these questions. Some students were also approached during their free time.

For the treatment of data, the following statistics were employed. Pearson correlations, One-Way ANOVA, ANOVA for repeated measures and a series of t-tests.

Results

Parents' Communication Styles

The obtained $F(3,750) = 283.198$, $p < .001$ reveal differences in the way the respondents perceive their parents' communication styles. Table 1 shows the result of Bonferroni Pairwise Comparisons where it is revealed that the respondents perceive their parents' communication style as more loving compared to the other patterns. Compared to loving and assertive communication styles, the respondents would less likely perceive their parents' communication style as aggressive and passive.

Table 1

Means of the Communication Style According to Clusters

Loving	=4.3024 Likely
Assertive	=3.9331 Likely
Aggressive	=3.2195 Less Likely
Passive	=3.1367 Less Likely

Influence on Attachment Style

Table 2 shows that both passive and aggressive communication styles are positively related to the different insecure attachments - fearful, pre-

occupied and dismissing. Passive style has a correlation coefficient of $r(251) = 0.292, p < 0.01$; $r(251) = 0.275, p < 0.01$ and $r(251) = 0.150, p < 0.05$ respectively. On the other hand aggressive style yields these values $r(251) = 0.232, p < 0.01$; $r(251) = 0.142, p < 0.01$ and $r(251) = 0.201, p < 0.01$ respectively. For loving communication style, it is related to preoccupied attachment $r(251) = 0.161, p < 0.05$ and dismissing attachment $r(251) = 0.156, p < 0.05$.

Table 2

Correlation of Communication Style and Attachment Style.

Communication Style	Attachment Style			
	Secure	Fearful	Preoccupied	Dismissing
Assertive	.049	.115	.095	.218*
Passive	.070	.292**	.275**	.150*
Aggressive	.036	.232**	.142**	.201**
Loving	-.030	.103	.161*	.156*

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Influence on Intimacy and Achievement Motivation

Although correlations were not significant at alpha 0.05, values close to significance levels were noted between the different Communication Styles with one dimension of intimacy; that is, 'Impact on Goal' except for Aggressive Communication Style $r(251) = 0.047, p > 0.05$. The values are Assertiveness $r(251) = 0.107, p < 0.10$; Passive $r(251) = 0.105, p < 0.10$ and loving $r(251) = 0.114, p < 0.10$.

The relationship between achievement motivation with the different communication styles were all insignificant.

Gender Differences

Table 3 indicates that for secure attachment, the $t(249) = 3.94, p < 0.01$ reflect that males ($mean = 3.78$) tend to be more secure than females ($mean = 3.47$) while females ($mean = 3.42$) are more fearful in their attachment styles than males ($mean = 3.08$) with a $t(249) = -2.86, p < 0.01$. Males ($mean = 3.81$) have significantly higher achievement motivation than females ($mean = 3.60$) with $t(249) = 2.31, p < 0.05$. In

intimate relationships considering $t(249) = -1.98, p. < 0.05$, females ($mean = 9.99$) are more inclined to spend more activities with significant others than males ($mean = 8.22$). Significant others are also more likely to affect the goals of females ($mean = 3.65$) as compared to males ($mean = 3.25$) with $t(249) = -2.51, p. < 0.05$.

Table 3
Gender Differences on Significant Variables

Variables	Gender		t-value	Significance Level
	Male	Female		
Secure Attachment Style	3.7816	3.4709	3.935	.000
Fearful Attachment Style	3.0827	3.4212	-2.863	.005
Activities	8.2245	9.9869	-1.984	.048
Impact on goal	3.2454	3.6459	-2.512	.013
Achievement Motivation	3.8093	3.6030	2.305	.022

Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

The respondents generally perceive their parents as having a *nurturing parent* ego state. Although there is a lot of warmth and care, these parents may be quite self-effacing and may easily be manipulated by their children. If a parent is undemanding and permissive with the child but highly nurturing, the parenting style will be democratic and uncooperative (Adams & Gullota, 1983). It is possible that the Filipino culture also contributes to this particularly in the tendency to value emotionally closely knit connections. According to Mendez and Jocano (1975) parents in the Philippines are generally nurturing, devoted, affectionate, and protective. They allow their children to reason out and express themselves, to raise questions, think for themselves and their own future.

The students generally perceive their parents as loving. Although this communication style is warm, it is weak in the sense that it might engender spoiled children. Hence, assertiveness in the parents' communication style may still be further strengthened in order to help balance the children's need for warmth at the same time acknowledging some limits or restrictions in behavior.

Compared to loving and assertive communication styles, the respondents would less likely perceive their parents' communication styles as aggressive and passive. Since college students spend less time with their parents caused by lack of proximity and time (Fogel & Melson, 1987), they will spend their time by showing their love and support rather than reminding them of their limits and restrictions.

Assertiveness did not relate to secure attachment which is not supportive of the hypothesis of this study. The assertive communication pattern is related to a dismissing attachment style instead of a secure attachment style as hypothesized. Again, the researchers may only speculate on this. It might be likely that the respondents give more premium to warmth rather than to discipline (which may be in the form of giving limits or restrictions). Since assertiveness may also sometimes demand limits, a child who gives more premium to warmth might feel threatened and withdraw from relationships (hence, dismissing). In addition, the assertive communication style's objectivity and impersonal stance might be misinterpreted as dismissal on the adolescent's part.

Passive and aggressive communication styles were related to a fearful attachment style while a loving and assertive communication style were not. An aggressive stance from one's parents may instill fear. The researchers can only speculate on the relationship of a passive stance of one's parents with a fearful attachment style. Possibly, there is an identification with the parents' passive pattern, that is, a kind of social modeling. After all, a passive communication style may be adopted by one who has a lot of fears.

Passive and aggressive communication styles differ from loving and assertive in the sense that the latter two has no relation with fearful attachment style. Passive and aggressive communication styles have opposite qualities and yet both yield insecure attachments. In a passive style, no rules are set by parents; hence, the insecurity will more likely come from a lack of structure in the family where children are not properly guided as to what is right and wrong behavior. An aggressive communication style, on the other hand, may likely set too much rules. These rules are often rigid and absolute in nature. The element of fear may dominate child-rearing practices and this can be the source of insecurity where a child has difficulty finding a sense of identity. More likely, his/her voice is not heard and self-esteem is low.

Except for aggressive style, the other three - assertive, passive and loving communication styles – relate, albeit weak, to planning one's future goals. That is, they are more likely to include others in their future plans whether it be vacation, school-related, career-related or any other future commitments. An aggressive communication style, as compared to the other patterns, is not related to *impact on goal* which is a dimension of intimacy. Indeed, a fault-finding and dominating countenance will have difficulty establishing intimacy of any kind.

Differences in socialization come into play when it comes to the gender differences found. Although this study did not support the impact of parents' communication style on the achievement motivation of students, there is gender difference in achievement motivation favoring the males. Females are brought up to be more relationship-oriented; whereas, males are reared to be more independent and achievement - oriented. Females tend to be closer in relationships and share their personal feelings, experiences, fears, and problems to be known and to know another deeper. If not, they will be criticized by the society for not being affectionate and sensitive (Harris & Howard, 1984). Males, on the other hand, are unable to disclose their feelings and generally receive more training and support for achievement. Parents exert more demand on achievement and independence on males lest the latter are criticized for not being goal-oriented and achievement minded (Harris & Howard, 1984). As such, females compared to males tend to guide their behaviors – such as their activities and goals – in connection with others. Being so, females may find dissolution of relationships more threatening which renders them a higher score in fearful attachment style. Males, on the other hand, because of the accorded greater sense of autonomy, develop a more secure attachment style than their female counterparts.

The study is useful in determining the relationship of parents' communication styles to attachment, intimacy and achievement motivation. How parents treat their children, manage the household and create a home atmosphere affects the behavior of their children in relation with other people, in creating relationships with significant others, in having intimate commitments and in motivating themselves in order to excel in goal-directed behaviors. This study is crucial in pointing out the paramount importance of

the parents' role in their children's lives. Emphasizing the significance of family would let the readers, particularly the parents, to become aware of their actions toward their children. As their children reach the adolescent stage of development, they become highly influenced positively or negatively by these actions. Hence, the study is vital in family systems especially in issues that concern parenting. It may also be useful for adolescents to assess their relationship with their parents and how this would somehow make them understand themselves in relation with others and with their achievements. Psychologist may use the results of this research to analyze parent-adolescent dynamics and recommend programs that will improve this relationship. This study may also encourage parents to be more sensitive to their children and adopt a more positive assertive communication style. Given gender differences, training programs may be developed in order to balance the needs for individual achievement and connections. Males may benefit from programs that will make them more sensitive to relationships; whereas, females may benefit from programs that will promote more autonomous functioning.

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