

Parental Influence on Romantic Partner Selection in College Students

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ABSTRACT

This pilot study examined the negative and positive influences parents have on a romantic partner selection by exploring the interparental relationship, the child-parent relationship, and the view an individual has of their parents. By exploring the relationship between child-parent and the romantic partners chosen, it may improve the quality in long-term relationships by improving the process of selecting better romantic partners. This particular view on romantic relationships has minimal exploration, with studies focused on relationship quality, family interactions (i.e. family communication patterns and observed interactions), attachment theory, relationship closeness, and family approval (Dinero, et al., 2022; Levesque, et al., 2012; Macdonald, et al., 2006; Macdonald, et al., 2012; Young, et al. 2016). The mixed methods approach provided details regarding the interparental relationship and the parent-child relationship. The sample consisted of 41 university level students that were 18 years of age or older. It was found that individuals possess parent-child relationship within three categories which are distant, acquaintance, and very close.

INTRODUCTION

Individuals tend to follow their family's religion, political views, and morals; therefore, there can be some influence from parents when it comes to choosing a romantic partner. Studies have found that parents can influence an individual's self-esteem and confirmation usage (Dinero et al. 2022, MacDonald et al. 2012, Young et al. 2016). The intent of the study was to explore the influence an individual's parent-child relationship and interparental relationship have on their romantic partner selection. This mixed methods study utilized a convergent design to explore the qualitative data on the parent-child and interparental relationship in effect to the quantitative data on an individual's romantic partner choosing. By exploring the influence parents have on an individual's romantic relationship selection, it can potentially improve the quality and length of romantic relationships by selecting a better partner.

The environment an individual grows up in plays in effect when it comes to their style of interactions, communication, and emotions. This is due to a child learning early social interactions from the ones around them. Studies show that infants eventually transfer their emotional attachment from their caregiver into their adult relationships (Levesque, 2012). This previews the long-term effect a caregiver has on an infant's emotional state.

The interparental communication style plays a key role for an individual's form of communication and dependence in their adult relationships. This is due to the parents being an example of relationships and setting expectations throughout their lives. Studies have also shown the dependence an adult has on a relationship based on the quality their parental relationship in a collectivistic culture (Macdonald et. al., 2006). These studies preview the importance and deeper effects parents have on their children.

Although the connections between the quality of family of origin, which is the individuals one spends the most time during childhood, and romantic relationship's interactions have been studied, the influence an individual's parent-child relationship and interparental relationship had on their process of choosing a romantic partner has not been studied (Levesque, 2012). The intent of the study was to explore the influence of interparental relationship and quality of parent-child relationship on an individual's romantic partner selection. Based on previous studies regarding the quality of relationships and adult attachment theories, the hypotheses that will guide this study are as follows:

- i) The closer the relationship an individual possesses with their parents, the greater the influence that will be exhibited when choosing a romantic partner. How well does closeness with parents predict influence in choosing romantic partner?
- ii) Individuals who had negative experiences with their parents will have little to no influence from their parents in their partner selection. What factors predict the likelihood that respondents would not allow parental influence in partner selection?

METHODS

Participants

A total of 41 participants by convenience and snowball sampling took part of this survey via Google Forms. Google Forms was used for being readily available and user friendly. The participants consisted of 68% females and the rest male university level students. Majority of students were Hispanic/Latino (68%), non-Hispanic Caucasians comprised the second largest group at just under 22% (N = 9). For student classification, the largest group comprised of 39% of the sample were seniors. The second largest group at 32% (N = 13) were graduate students followed by juniors (22%). Underclassmen (freshman and Sophomores) finish the group at about 7%. This research explored the influence interparental and parent child relationships have on romantic partner selection in college level adults. University level young adults were used for this research since young adults in their 20's are more likely to be in search of a partner and date more often than other age groups (Brown, 2020).

Sex				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	13	31.7	31.7	31.7
Female	28	68.3	68.3	100.0
Total	41	100.0	100.0	

Classification				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Freshman	1	2.4	2.4	2.4
Sophomore	2	4.9	4.9	7.3
Junior	9	22.0	22.0	29.3
Senior	16	39.0	39.0	68.3
Graduate	13	31.7	31.7	100.0
Total	41	100.0	100.0	

Ethnicity				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Hispanic/Latino	28	68.3	68.3	68.3
Non-Hispanic	13	31.7	31.7	100.0
Total	41	100.0	100.0	

Measures

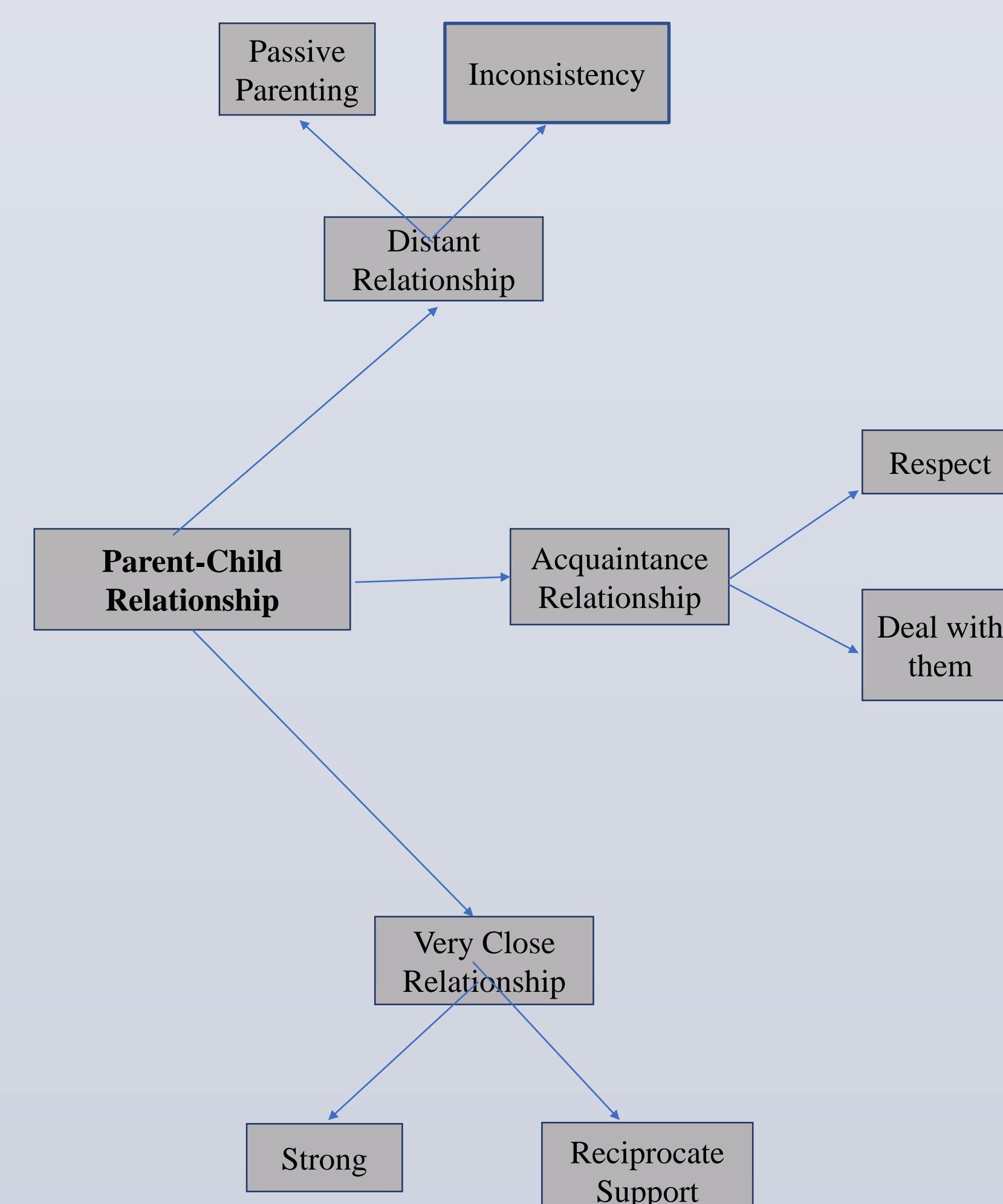
A mixed methods approach was used for the research. By adapting a mixed methods approach, it provided a deeper understanding of the interparental and parent-child relationship, and the internal and external process an individual follows when selecting the romantic partner. The open-ended questions allowed participants to share as much information as they wanted and allowed them to express themselves comfortably due to anonymity. Many participants wrote a sufficient amount of information that helped understand their relationships.

The five-part qualitative aspect of the survey asks for an explanation of the interparental relationship, the parent-child relationship, and qualities of mother, father, and serious partner.

The survey consisted of four basic demographic questions regarding age, gender, classification, and race/ethnicity. No identifiable or specific data from participants was collected to ensure all participant's anonymity. The 25-part quantitative questions provided insight of the external and internal influences that affect the consideration of a romantic partner, which were answered using a Likert scale (clarified "Strongly Agree" with being all the time and "Strongly Disagree" with being never). The questions consisted of information regarding the participant's considerations when choosing a partner like race, attractiveness, parental approval, personal preference, or certain qualities and quantities. There were questions regarding the consideration of their parents when choosing a partner, if there is any or none at all. Questions like these helped view the influence the parents have when their child choose partners.

RESULTS

Theme	Subtheme	Quotes
Very Close	Strong	"Always had a strong relationship with them and feel that I can confide to them about personal issues" "We always support each other" "I go to my dad for life advice and my mom for moral/emotional support."
	Reciprocate Support	"Because they do so much for me, I want to do all I can for them" "I do my best in school so that one day she won't have to worry about bills anymore"
Distant	Passive Parenting	"Typically, just around the house or out and about the whole family" "My relationship with my father has been pretty distant as he wasn't around as much" "I don't have a close relationship with my dad beyond him asking how I am every once in a while" "We do not talk about personal matters, rather just small talk when necessary"
	Inconsistency	"It fluctuates with mum but I'm pulling away from dad" "Speak once every eighteen months" "have a rocky relationship, we will yell and fight to no end, but we always end up okay"
Acquaintance	Good Terms	"We get along and keep sane" "We bud heads a lot" "have a relationship, but not close"
	Respect	"They are still authority figures in my life" "I have a strong resentment towards him, but I still show respect"



Correlations							
		Age	Sex	Ethnicity	ParentInfluence	Closeness	ParPressure
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	-.138	.153	-.375*	-.342*	.024
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.389	.339	.016	.029	.885
	N	41	41	41	41	41	40
Sex	Pearson Correlation	-.138	1	-.437**	.196	.104	.282
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.389		.004	.220	.518	.078
	N	41	41	41	41	41	40
Ethnicity	Pearson Correlation	.153	-.437**	1	-.363*	-.258	-.059
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.339	.004		.020	.103	.716
	N	41	41	41	41	41	40
ParentInfluence	Pearson Correlation	-.375*	.196	-.363*	1	.870**	-.062
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.016	.220	.020		<.001	.703
	N	41	41	41	41	41	40
Closeness	Pearson Correlation	-.342*	.104	-.258	.870**	1	.005
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.029	.518	.103	<.001		.977
	N	41	41	41	41	41	40
ParPressure	Pearson Correlation	.024	.282	-.059	-.062	.005	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.885	.078	.716	.703	.977	
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

CONCLUSIONS

A thematic analysis was conducted to analyze the qualitative portion of the study. Upon reviewing themes distant, acquaintance, and very close relationships emerged. Within those three themes, subthemes emerged that shared more detailed information regarding the parent child relationship. It was found that individuals who possessed an acquaintance relationship with their parents still showed respect but viewed them as individuals they had to put up with. The participants who described their relationship with their parents as having to put up with them described the relationship as "not close, but not distant". Others described their relationship as "get along and keep sane". Participants who shared a distant relationship with their parents were mixed with passive parents and inconsistency. Passive parents were parents that tended to be physically present for their child but did not possess any deep connections. Inconsistent parenting were the parents who were not readily available for their children due to work or divorce/separation. Participants who shared a very close relationship were considered strong relationships and many reciprocated support. Participants who share a strong close relationship with their parents stated that their parents showed continuous support, listened to them, and shared a friend relationship.

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