Communication Competence in Daughters:
How Fathers’ Impact Girls Communication Skills

By

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How Fathers’ Impact Girls Communication Skills

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is a correlation between the strength of a father-daughter relationship and the daughter’s self-perceived communication competence level. The study used Dr. McCroskey’s Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) Scale as part of a survey distributed to female college students. The survey also asked the participants about their relationship with their father and how satisfied they were with it while growing up. After calculating the SPCC score from McCroskey’s scale and formula, and analyzing the data from the survey, the researcher found a slightly significant positive correlation between the father-daughter relationships and the daughters SPCC score.
**Introduction**

The first relationships that anyone forms are the relationships with their parents. These relationships help to build the foundation for how a person communicates. Past studies and research have shown that communication with parents is vital during childhood and affects communication competence into adulthood. Typically, studies of this kind research a typical nuclear family with both a mother and a father. With the current rise of single mothers throughout the country, more researchers are looking at the importance of a father, or father-figure, in childhood. The rise in various violent acts has been linked in past research to the lack of fathers in today’s communities, which has also raised the question of the importance of said fathers and sparked the interest in researching just how important a father is to a child.

This study examined the role of fathers in one element of the lives of their daughters; their communication competence. The researcher wanted to determine if there is a significant correlation between the presence and relationship of a father and daughter and the daughter’s communication competence skills. Fathers are influential to their daughter’s and a strong, positive relationship affects the girl’s outlook on her life as she becomes an adult. Likewise, the same is true if the father-daughter relationship is a negative one. This study looked at how a father’s influence affects the self-perceived communication competence of daughters while they are in college.
**Purpose**

The purpose of this research study is to determine if there is a correlation between the presence of a father and the communication competence of the daughter. Experiences during youth often shape individuals into who they will be as adults. Past studies have proven the importance of a strong father for a child in several areas, including communication. Beatty (2009) found sons with a greater satisfaction in their relationship with their father had a lower sense of general communication apprehension. The results showed that the greater the satisfaction of the relationship the easier it seemed for the son to communicate, not just with his father but in general dyadic communication, as well. The same trend appears in the results for similar studies that deal with father-daughter relationships, such as a 2003 study by Rebekah Levine Coley, who studied psychosocial functioning in adolescent African American girls who lived with their father and girls who did not live with their fathers.

The present study aims to answer and probe future research questions regarding the self-perceived communication competence of college females and how they feel their relationship with their father affects them.

Communication competence is a person's ability to judge social situations and use correct grammar and syntax during social conversation with another (Canale and Swain, 1980). This study aims to determine female college students self-perceived communication competence skills and their relationship satisfaction with their father.
**Research Question**

What are the differences between girls who had a strong relationship with their father and girls who did not have a father-daughter relationship and their level of self-perceived communication competence?

Does having a strong father-daughter relationship affects daughters more or less in various social settings (i.e. such as stronger communication competence in a social situation with strangers, a large group of people, a smaller group of people, or with friends and acquaintances, etc.)?

**Rationale**

Communication skills are developed during childhood and the first relationships that we learn from are our parents. As children observe and interact with their parents, the form of communication that happens at home becomes a standard foundation that is built upon throughout school and into adulthood. Communication competence requires one to be able to judge the social situation and communicate in an appropriate manner. This study aims to determine and probe further research into how fathers influence their daughter’s self-perceived communication competence once in college.

Hodis (2009) studied the Communication Apprehension (CA), Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) of students throughout a semester. The results found by Hotis were that a student’s WTC and SPCC increased linearly throughout the semester while their CA scores decreased linearly. These results showed that a student’s willingness to communicate and self-perceived communication competence increase throughout a semester as the student becomes more comfortable in his settings. For this study, the researcher wants to determine if there is a
correlation between the satisfaction of the female college student’s relationship with her father and her own self-perceived communication skills.

**Theory**

*Communication Competence*

Communication competence is defined by Michael Canale and Merrill Swain (1980) as a person’s ability to use proper grammatical rules and words, as well as the ability to correctly use them in appropriate social settings. Canale and Swain break communication competence down into two areas; sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of the socioculture rules and language and strategic competence is the verbal and nonverbal communication strategies.
Literature Review Overview

Michael Canale and Merrill Swain are most often cited when it comes to research regarding what communication competence is and how it affects individuals in everyday communication. Communication competence has been studied in several different areas, from professional communication competence to interpersonal communication competence and even communication competence in the intimate relationship setting. Throughout the research process, several studies were found from these types of relationships that studied the importance of communication competence skills.

However, this present study also looks at one source of the development of communication competence skills. That source comes from childhood, and as most things that come from childhood, it is believed that communication competence skills are built from the relationship that a child has with their parents. The articles in the literature review summarize some of the research that has been done on families and how communication relationships with parents affect a child in their young adult years.

The literature review is broken into three sections, summarizing cited articles regarding communication competence in professional relationships, interpersonal and intimate relationships and finally in parent-child relationships.
Literature Review

Professional Communication Competence

Communication is everywhere and in the professional world, communication competence is a necessary skill. Wilcoxson (2007) studied the effects of student affairs supervision of students in a Christian institute of higher education. The research was done in order to determine if there was a direct correlation between the amount of supervision by the student affairs office and the communication competence of the students enrolled at the institution. The study surveyed over 100 different Christian institutes of higher education about the roles of their student affairs offices. The survey used this information in order to determine how different sections of the campus aided the students and affected their communication competence skills. The results of the study were found to be statistically significant, showing a strong positive correlation between the level of oversight of the student affairs offices and the communication competence skills of the students. This study showed that the more supervision and communication between student affairs and the students themselves increased the communication competence skills.

Spisak (1992) conducted a professional communication competence study in the field of dental hygiene. The purpose of Spisak’s study was to determine how students enrolled in a dental hygiene program at Temple University acquired the communication competence skills that they felt were needed in order to succeed professionally. This was an extensive study that took place over a long period of time and surveyed both students and faculty members. The results of the study found statistically significant numbers that pointed towards the students who reported interacting more with faculty acquired further communication competence skills than those students who did not interact with faculty as much.
**Intimate Relationships Communication Competence**

Williams (2007) conducted a study that examined the importance of interpersonal communication in intimate relationships. Although communication competence was not the main subject of this study, communication competence is needed in effective interpersonal communication in intimate relationships. The study is a content analysis where Williams looked at relationships throughout the passage of time and the changing of cultures. His study is based in faith and travels through time to today, from Christianity to Humanism. In his research, Williams found that confident interpersonal communication is linked with communication competence and leads to stronger intimate relationships.

**Father-Child Relationships Communication Competence**

Past research studies of father-daughter relationships seem to mainly focus on the communication between fathers and daughters. Although there have been some studies that research how daughters function in social situations and how the presence of a father affects social skills, self-perceived communication competence does not seem to be a main focus of research studies. There were several useful studies found that back up the importance of having a present father in the lives of children, and in particular daughters. Many of these studies, although not specifically regarding communication competence, pave the way for future studies to research communication competence and how the presence or absence of a father affects daughters.

Coley (2003) analyzed father-daughter relationships in low-income African American families. The focus of this study was the daughters adolescent psychosocial functioning and how her relationship with her father affected her behavior. The study surveyed approximately 300 adolescent African-American girls in after school programs on their functioning in social situations and their relationship with their father. The survey also took
notice that many girls may not have their biological father in their life, but they did have a “social father”, meaning a strong male influence that filled the role of a father in the girls’ life. The survey given to the female participants consisted of Likert-style questions that gauged the quality of the girl’s relationship to her father. The majority of the girls in the population sample reported living in a single mother household, with some reporting very infrequent visits with their biological father. The ones that did report the infrequent visits with their biological father put most trust into a “social father”. Coley used the term “social father” to describe a male influence in the girl’s life, whether it be a step-father, teacher or a family friend that somehow filled the role of a father in some way. Although the end result did not conclude that the presence or absence of a father had much of an effect on the girl’s social functioning, it was noted that the girls lived with their father or had the most frequent visit with their fathers reported less anger and less depressive symptoms.

Katorski (2003) studied communication adaptability and how Father-Daughter relationships effected the daughter’s romantic relationships. Katorski asked five research questions in order to test her hypothesis of the importance of a father to a girl as she begins searching for a romantic partner. The results discovered from Katorski’s research were that girls who grew up with an actively involved father had a better idea of what they were looking for and what to look for in a romantic partner than girls who grew up without a father.

Julia Perin studied father and daughter communication competence. Perin distributed a survey to 20 pairs of fathers and daughters that consisted of 36 Likert-style questions. With the small sample the study was not overly conclusive, but her results did trend to the side of a present father being important to the communication competence of the daughter.
As stated before, an important research topic in family structure is the communication and importance of a present and active father. Acock (2007) looked at the connection and communication of father-child relationships and the well-being of that child in adolescent child. This study took data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) and used a structural equation taken from the LISREL program, as well as studying a sample of 362 father-adolescent pairs. The study surveyed both father-son pairs and father-daughter pairs, but the results showed a positive correlation in having a strong father-child connection and communication in the well-being of the adolescent child.

Beatty (2009) surveyed adult sons’ satisfaction with their relationship with their father and the son’s communication apprehension. Although this study dealt with the opposite sex, the results trended toward easier communication with a greater satisfaction in the relationship with the father. The study found that communication apprehension between the father and son did not have any direct correlation with general dyadic communication apprehension. Communication apprehension and communication competence are two different areas of study in the field of communication, but the relationship that fathers share with their children affect communication on all levels.
Method

The researcher distributed paper-and-pencil surveys to college-aged females across the Rochester Institute of Technology campus. The survey was confidential. The questions asked each participant if she had a father growing up and how close the relationship was during childhood. There were also questions inquiring into the participants’ current father-daughter relationship status and how confident the participant feels in social situations.

There were two types of questions included in the survey. The first part was Dr. McCroskey’s SPCC scale comprised of 12 statements that describe various social situations that involve a certain level of communication, such as presenting to a group of strangers or talking in a group of friends or acquaintances. The participant was asked to rate their self-perceived communication competence for each statement on a scale of 0 to 100, with 0 being completely incompetent and 100 being completely competent.

Dr. James C. McCroskey is a professor and researcher in Department of Communication Studies at the University of Alabama-Birmingham and is well-known in the communication field. He has researched and written on several topics in communication and has also developed several scales for measuring communication. His website (http://www.jamescmccroskey.com/) lists several of his publications and the scales he has developed for measuring aspects of communication. Each social situation statement is weighted differently to effectively measure communication competence based on public speaking skills, interpersonal communication, effectively speaking with strangers and others. The categories that McCroskey breaks his scale into are Public, Meeting, Group, Dyad, Stranger, Acquaintance and Friend. There are either three or four questions that fall into each category and McCroskey’s formula takes the average of each of the questions for each formula. These scores determine a self-perceived communication competence score for the separate categories. Taking the average of these sub-scores determines an overall
self-perceived communication competence score (See Appendix A). This study looks at the overall self-perceived communication competence scores.

The last few questions were Likert-scale questions about their family structure during their childhood. Since the survey was confidential, no identification of the participants is within the recording of the data results.

Distribution

The distribution of the survey consisted of approaching female students on the Rochester Institute of Technology campus. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to explain the survey to the participants and answer questions if they had any. However, it did also pose a challenge of trying to find enough participants to take the survey. For an example of the survey used for this study, see Appendix B.

The researcher ended up with a population sample of 26 participants. Although the goal was to get twice that number for the population sample, time constraints did not allow the researcher to reach anymore participants. The researcher handed out each survey individually, asking participants if they were interested in taking a survey to aid in the research of parent-child relationships and communication skills. As the participants filled out the survey, the researcher stayed in the area but gave each participant privacy room so as not to make them feel uncomfortable.
Variables

There are a number of variables to be measured in this research study.

*Review of Research Question #1*

What are the differences between girls that had a relationship with their father growing up and girls that did not have a father-daughter relationship and their level of communication competence?

*Independent Variable*

Whether or not the participants of the study had a relationship with their father and the satisfaction level felt the daughter (female participant).

The *moderator* in this independent variable is the presence or absence of a father or father-figure.

*Dependent Variable*

The dependent variable of this study is how the participants feel about their own communication competence.

*Review of Research Question #2*

Does having a strong father-daughter relationship affects daughters more or less in various social settings? i.e. Such as stronger communication competence in a social situation with strangers, a large group of people, a smaller group of people, or with friends and acquaintances.
**Independent Variable**

Whether or not the participants of the study had a relationship with their father and the satisfaction level of the daughter (female participant).

The *moderator* in this independent variable is the presence or absence of a father or father-figure.

**Dependent Variable**

The different social settings to be measured: public speaking, presenting in a meeting, small group or dyad. Also speaking with a group of strangers, friends or acquaintances.
**Results**

The majority of respondents are of college age, with 84.6% of respondents between the ages of 18 and 24. Only 7.7% of respondents were 25 to 29 years old and another 7.7% were over the age of 30.

Of the 26 respondents in the sample population, the majority of the respondents reported at least satisfaction in their relationship with their father. 11.5% of respondents reported not having a relationship with their father while growing up and another 11.5% of respondents reported not being satisfied at all in their relationship with their father. However, 73.1% of respondents reported a satisfied to highly satisfied relationship with their father.

The researcher recorded all data from the surveys in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and used the built in formulas within the program to determine the meaning of all of the data. Because the study is about finding a correlation in variables in a relationship, the researcher analyzed data using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient formula.

After calculating the overall Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) scores for each of the respondents, 96.1% of respondents had an average to high score. 53.8% of scores ranked in the average range, while 26.9% were high average and 15.4% were high SPCC scores.

As a study testing the relationship between self-perceived communication competence in female college students and their relationship with their father, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient formula was determined to be the best way to analyze the data.
The researcher used the following chart to interpret the results from Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.00 – 0.19</td>
<td>Negligible or chance correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.20 – 0.39</td>
<td>Slight correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.40 – 0.69</td>
<td>Moderate correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.70 – 0.89</td>
<td>High correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.90 – 1.00</td>
<td>Very high correlation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data computed a Correlation Coefficient value of 0.11, which means that the data either does not have a true correlation or is it a correlation that happened by chance. The small population sample could be insufficient in order to determine the true correlation between female college students Self-Perceived Communication Competence and their relationship with their father.

It is also worth noting that the girls who reported the highest level of satisfaction with their fathers scored the highest overall SPCC score.
Discussion

The sample population of this study comprised of female students on the Rochester Institute of Technology campus. The majority of the population that took the survey grew up with both a mother and a father and there was also the factor of siblings affecting not only the relationship of the father and the daughter, but also the development of their communication competence skills.

Being that the sample population in this study was so small the results are not conclusive to make a concrete conclusion regarding the impact of a positive or negative father-daughter relationship on the daughter’s communication competence skills. However, the results did show that there does appear to be some correlation between the two variables of the relationship and daughter’s self-perceived communication competence.

Despite the small sample however, the study does seem to agree with past research regarding parent-child relationships and the affect these relationships have on communication skills in young adult life. The studies reflected in the third section of the literature review, earlier in the study, were all about parent-child relationships and how the child communicates in adult life and in romantic relationships. The studies summarized in the literature review resulted in a positive correlation between the fathers that were studied along with their children, both sons and daughters.
Limitations

The researcher acknowledges that there are a number of limitations to this study that may have affected the overall results of the research. The population sample of this study is not conclusive to the entire population of female college students. The participants of the survey are from one college campus. Although location is not a variable in this particular study, a sample from one source is not reliable as the only sample for a particular research study. However, this study does allow for further research into the subject to see if the results found do trend toward the communication competence of female college students as a whole.

Season was also a factor for this study as it was during the summer time when not many students are on campus. The researcher needed a specific group of individuals (females) to take the survey and trying to find enough to take on a very limited timeline proved to be a challenge. The sample population ended up at just over half of the original goal, but the sample population did have a good amount of diversity in childhood family structures.

As with any kind of self-report survey that is sent out, there is always a concern for the truthfulness of the participants answers, or whether they are putting down answers that they feel would be more “socially acceptable”. This is known as “selective reporting”, which is when the participant doesn’t tell the truth, or the whole truth, in answer to survey questions. In the case of this survey and its participants, the researcher feels that the risk of not getting completely truthful answers is minimal and did not affect the analysis of the data.
Conclusion

Parent-child relationships start from the very beginning of childhood and continue for the rest of both the parents’ lives and the child’s life. The influence never ends on either side. As the child grows they develop more mature and refined skills, often times emulating that of their parents.

In the case of father-daughter relationships, daughters tend to grow up searching for a romantic life partner that reminds her of her dad. Her communication competence skills aid her in finding success in her romantic partnership, as well as success in her professional relationships and all other relationships she forms through her adult life. However, her relationship with her father is always one of the most important. Whether good or bad, a father affects his daughter’s adult life and her communication competence skills in all social settings. This study touches just the tip of the iceberg into discovering just how much a father affects his daughter in regards to her communication competence. This study focused on the self-perceived communication competence of the daughter and how she feels about her father while in college. But what about the father’s self-perceived communication competence skills, both before having his daughter and afterwards? What about how the father would analyze his daughter’s communication competence skills? There are a number of ways this study can be adapted in order to further explore father-daughter relationships and the effects it has on communication competence.
References


Perin, Julia. Like Father, Like Daughter: Father and Daughter Communication Competence. University of Kentucky.


Wilcoxson, Douglas A. An Investigation of the Effective Supervision and Communication Competence of Chief Student Affairs Officers in Christian Institutions of Higher Education. (December 2007.) University of North Texas.

**APPENDIX A**

**McCroskey’s Formula for Calculating Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) Scores**

Scoring: To compute the subscores, add the percentages for the items indicated and divide the total by the number indicated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Subscores</th>
<th>Divide by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>1+8+12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>3+6+10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>4+9+11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyad</td>
<td>2+5+7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>1+4+7+10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>2+6+9+12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>3+5+8+11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To compute the total SPCC score, add the subscores for Stranger, Acquaintance, and Friend. Then divide that total by 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>SPCC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>&gt;86 High SPCC</td>
<td>&lt;51 Low SPCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>&gt;85 High SPCC</td>
<td>&lt;51 Low SPCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>&gt;90 High SPCC</td>
<td>&lt;61 Low SPCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyad</td>
<td>&gt;93 High SPCC</td>
<td>&lt;68 Low SPCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>&gt;79 High SPCC</td>
<td>&lt;31 Low SPCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>&gt;92 High SPCC</td>
<td>&lt;62 Low SPCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>&gt;99 High SPCC</td>
<td>&lt;76 Low SPCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>&gt;79 High SPCC</td>
<td>&lt;59 Low SPCC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Higher SPCC scores indicate higher self-perceived communication competence with basic communication contexts (public, meeting, group, dyad) and receivers (strangers, acquaintance, friend).

Source:
APPENDIX B

Survey Instrument Used in Study

College Student Perceptions of Communication Competence

Relationship with parents and communication that occurs between parent and child typically sets the tone for the child's communication competence in adulthood.

This survey is collecting responses to determine the connection between self-perceived communication competence and father-daughter relationships for the purpose of research into further understanding of the fundamentals of parent-child communication. All information will remain anonymous throughout the data collection, analysis and reporting. The survey should take no more than five minutes to complete. This study is completely voluntary and you can choose to stop participating at any time. Any questions about the study, you can contact Tracy Bonzo by e-mail at tracybonzo@tracybonzo.com.

Directions: Below are twelve situations in which you might need to communicate. People's ability to communicate effectively varies a lot, and sometimes the same person is more competent to communicate in one situation than in another. Please indicate how competent you believe you are to communicate in each of the situations described below. Indicate in the space provided at the left of each item your estimate of your competence.

Rate yourself on each item with a score ranging from 0 to 100 where 0 = completely incompetent and 100 = completely competent.

_____ 1. Present a talk to a group of strangers.
_____ 2. Talk with an acquaintance.
_____ 3. Talk in a large meeting of friends.
_____ 4. Talk in a small group of strangers.
_____ 5. Talk with a friend.
_____ 6. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.
_____ 7. Talk with a stranger.
_____ 8. Present a talk to a group of friends.
_____ 9. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.
_____10. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.
_____11. Talk in a small group of friends.
_____12. Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.
Just a few questions for statistical purposes

How old did you turn on your last birthday?

What was your family structure like during childhood? (Check One)

- Mother and Father, no siblings
- Mother, Father and siblings
- Single Mother, no siblings
- Single Mother and siblings
- Single Father, no siblings
- Single Father and siblings
- Other (Please describe) _______________________

(Circle One) - N/A = Not Available (Mother/Father/Sibling not present)
How satisfying was your childhood relationship with your Mother?

N/A <-|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|->
Less Satisfied  More Satisfied

(Circle One) - N/A = Not Available (Mother/Father/Sibling not present)
How satisfying was your childhood relationship with your Father?

N/A <-|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|->
Less Satisfied  More Satisfied

(Circle One) - N/A = Not Available (Mother/Father/Sibling not present)
How satisfying was your childhood relationship with your siblings?

N/A <-|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|->
Less Satisfied  More Satisfied