

LOVE ATTITUDES

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN PARENTS AND BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN*



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Parents may influence their children's relationship development by their own attitudes toward relationships, by the parent-child relationship, and by the parental relationship. The current research explored parent-child love attitude similarity in 86 triads composed of young adult children and their parents. Measures assessed demographics, love attitudes, parent-child relationship quality, children's self-disclosure, and parental relationship satisfaction. Results indicated considerable love attitude similarity between marital partners (parents), but little similarity between parents and children

As we attempt to understand how young adults form primary romantic attachments, we must consider a number of potential influences, ranging from parental socialization to peer group norms. The parent-child relationship usually is a child's initial primary social relationship, and may provide a model for later intimate relationships (e.g., Bowlby, 1969). How parents relate to each other may also affect the attitudes and values the child forms about relationships (e.g., Amato, 1986). In addition to the effects of their overt behavior, it may also be that the attitudes that parents hold about their own intimate relationships and about intimate relationships in general ultimately will influence their children's attitudes about relationships (e.g., Fisher, 1986). Young adults are also influenced heavily by their peers (for a review, see Gecas & Seff, 1990).

Thus, a number of early socialization influences may affect the process of children's later formation of romantic attachments. This article is primarily concerned with how parents might affect one aspect of a child's romantic relationship, namely the child's attitudes toward love. This specific research issue exists within a broader context of attitude transmission and family relationships.

Transmission of Attitudes

Two perspectives informed the current research. The *cohort* perspective on attitudes (e.g., Bengston & Cutler, 1976) focuses on ways in which groups (identified by the various criteria of generational membership) differ with respect to specified attitudes or behaviors. Given this perspective, it might be expected that young adults would hold attitudes and values similar to those of their peers, and might be less likely to simply assume parental attitudes and values (e.g., Clebone & Taylor, 1992).

A *lineage* perspective views childhood socialization as so intense that the attitudes formed in the family context are "handed down" from parents to child, persisting through adolescence and perhaps across the lifespan (Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). As a result, children share parental perceptions of the world (Bengston & Black, 1973; Gecas & Seff, 1990).

Parental attitude transmission may be influenced by a number of factors, including general family cohesiveness (Troll, Neugarten, & Kraines, 1969), attitude agreement between the parents (Jennings & Niemi, 1968), and parental supportiveness of the child (Sanders & Mullis, 1988). In contrast, some research indicates that the degree of emotional closeness between parents and their children may have little effect on how much parents influence their children (Acock, 1984; Kandel & Lesser, 1972; Smith, 1983).

One key finding has been that attitude congruence between children and parents was highest for behaviors that were highly visible and salient over long periods of time (e.g., religious affiliation, political party affiliation), and lowest on abstract or diffuse attitudes and general value statements (e.g., Acock, 1984; Glass, Bengston, & Dunham, 1986; Smith, 1982). In other words, attitudes and values may need to have explicit referents in order for similarity between parents and children to develop. Consistent with this perspective, Fisher (1986, 1988) found that, among late adolescents, parent and child sexual attitudes were correlated in a high family communication group, but not in a low communication group. These findings suggest that attitude congruence between parents and children requires attitude visibility and salience.

Some research has focused more specifically on how parents and young

adult children may influence each other vis-à-vis the children's intimate relationships. For example, Leslie, Huston, and Johnson (1986) found that children may effectively block a parent's influence by not communicating about partners of whom they know their parents will disapprove (providing indirect evidence that parental attitudes are known and are indirectly shaping communication and behavior). Parental support or lack of support for a child's love relationship may have direct influence on the status of the child's relationship (e.g., Cate, Huston, & Nesselroade, 1986).

Love Attitudes

In discussing the importance of parental approval and support for a young adult's intimate relationships (e.g., Cate et al., 1986; Leslie et al., 1986), it is important to consider how parents may contribute to their children's specific ideas about love. As we noted earlier, children learn about attachment, love, and security from their early caregivers, typically their parents (e.g., Bowlby, 1969). And it has been proposed that these earliest lessons are linked in some ways to adult abilities to forge successful relationships (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

One basis for relationship success is love, about which considerable recent research has been concerned. One contemporary approach to love has viewed

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it as multidimensional, and Lee (1973) proposed six major styles or attitudinal orientations toward love. The love styles include *Eros* (passionate love), *Ludus* (game-playing love), *Storge* (friendship love), *Pragma* (practical love), *Mania* (possessive, dependent love), and *Agape* (altruistic love). These are viewed as different but equally valid ways of loving. Hendrick and Hendrick (1986, 1990) developed a measure of the six love styles, and in subsequent research found that several of the love attitudes were predictors of relationship satisfaction.

For dating couples, passionate love, and the absence of game-playing love (men only) and possessive, dependent love (women only) were predictors of relationship satisfaction (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988), and couples who stayed together were more passionate and less game-playing than were couples who broke up. Across groups of Hispanic-oriented, bicultural, and Anglo married couples, passionate love was the strongest consistent predictor of marital satisfaction (Contreras, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1994). Thus, love is important for relationship contentment—and potentially for relationship outcome.

In an attempt to study the link between young adult love attitudes and older adult love attitudes, Crow (1991) compared love attitude endorsements of college-age women and their mothers. In Crow's sample, the mothers endorsed *Mania* significantly less strongly than did their daughters, indicating cohort differences on this love attitude. However, mothers' and daughters' *Pragma* scores were significantly correlated, suggesting modest covariation between mothers and daughters on this one love attitude.

Although parents are likely to be motivated for their children to establish suitable bonded relationships, it is not clear how explicit parents may be about their specific attitudes toward love. In many cases it is likely that parents offer implicit communications about love; these communications may or may not be received.

Overview

Although parents are unquestionably important in a child's development and maturation, research findings on the actual similarity between parents' and children's attitudes are somewhat mixed. Parents may have considerable influence on their children's intimate relationships (Cate et al., 1986), however, that influence may not translate into actual relationship attitude similarity (Crow, 1991). A question unanswered by previous research is whether young adult children and their parents share

similar attitudes about relationship characteristics, especially about love. And if there is similarity, is it influenced by the quality of the parent-child relationship, by the quality of the parental relationship itself, or by both?

There has been limited attention paid to the influence of parental romantic relationship attitudes on children's relationship attitudes, particularly in the context of the intact family. Yet such influences (or their absence) would teach family researchers and clinicians much regarding the ways in which late adolescents form and maintain their intimate relationships. Thus, the current research explored the similarity of relationship attitudes, specifically love attitudes, held by late adolescent/young adult children and their parents.

A number of hypotheses were generated. The first hypothesis was that mothers and fathers would show similarity of love styles and relationship satisfaction, consistent with previous research. Hypothesis 2 predicted that parents and children would have similar love attitudes, consistent with the lineage perspective of attitude transmission. Third, the greater the parental attitude agreement, the greater the expected parent-child attitude congruence (Jennings & Niemi, 1968).

Attitudinal influence or transmission is not necessarily a simple process, however, and, as noted earlier, parental communication may be implicit rather than explicit. Strauss (1969) noted that intrafamily continuity may not become apparent until a child reaches adult status and encounters critical life-stage transitions into adult institutions that were previously encountered by the parents (e.g., marriage, parenthood, occupation, see also Kulis, 1992). Thus, because it was recognized that cohort influences might equal or exceed parental influences on children's love attitudes (Gecas & Seff, 1990), especially in young adulthood, it was expected that parents and their children would differ in their degree of agreement with the various love attitudes. This fourth hypothesis was tested by assessing mean differences via analysis of variance (ANOVA) techniques, whereas the previous hypotheses were all tested by correlational methods.

Although it is ultimately important to explore parent-child relationship attitude similarity in all types of families (e.g., divorced, remarried, gay male, and lesbian), our focus was on love attitudes held by children and parents in intact families as a stepping stone to understanding these other types of families.

Participants

The college student participants for this study were recruited from undergraduate psychology courses at a large Southwestern university. Students were also asked to volunteer their parents for the study. Initial data collection included 238 college students and, of this group, 86 (25 sons and 61 daughters) had both parents from intact families respond to the survey.

College students. The total college sample was composed of 29% men and 71% women. Most participants were 18 to 20 years of age (50%), and another 39% were 21 to 23 years of age. Ethnic identification was primarily white non-Hispanic (93%), with the next largest group Hispanic (6%). Blacks and other minorities comprised 1% of the sample. With regard to religious preference, 45% of the sample was Protestant and 21% was Catholic; 34% did not specify religious affiliation.

The majority of the sample was single (87%), with a few participants married (11%) or divorced (2%). Many of the students reported that they were not in love at the time of the survey (43%); however, the remaining students said that they had been in love for from 1 month to over 1 year. All students reported that their parents were married. Some 67% described their parents' marriage as very good, 17% as good, 9% as average, and 6% as poor.

Parents. By design, 50% of the parent sample were male (fathers) and 50% were female (mothers). With regard to age, 32% were age 45 or younger, 35% were 46-50, 21% were 51-55, and 12% were 56 or older. Only 5% had not completed high school, 19% had completed high school, 38% had college experience, 23% had a college degree, and 16% had some graduate work. The majority of the parents indicated that they were Protestant (74%), 19% were Catholic, and 6% had some other religious affiliation.

All parents were married at the time of the survey. Most parents had been married 11 to 30 years (94%). When asked to describe their own parents' marriages, 28% of the parent participants described it as "very good," 31% as "good," 23% as "average," 14% as "poor," and 4% as "very poor."

Procedure

Testing of the college students was scheduled in advance and conducted



Table 1
Correlations Between Fathers' and Mothers' Scores on Love Attitudes and Relationship Satisfaction

Mothers' Scores	Fathers' Scores						Relationship Satisfaction
	Eros	Ludus	Storge	Pragma	Mania	Agape	
Eros	.49**	-.37**	.14	-.10	-.02	.33**	.40**
Ludus	-.28*	.25*	-.10	.08	-.06	-.37**	-.36**
Storge	.10	-.37**	.30**	.14	-.14	.15	.26*
Pragma	.13	-.26*	.25*	.37**	-.11	.08	.13
Mania	.09	-.15	.00	.12	.23*	.13	.14
Agape	.27**	-.44**	.06	-.15	-.02	.31**	.41**
Relationship Satisfaction	.55**	-.55**	.18	-.01	-.05	.29**	.69**

Note N = 86 fathers and 86 mothers
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

during regular class periods. Questionnaire packets included a background information form, the Love Attitudes Scale, the Parent-Child Relationship Survey, and the Self-Disclosure Index. After completing the questionnaire, students who thought one or both parents would participate were given one or two large envelopes and cover letters to address to the parents. These materials were then collected and later were mailed, handled, and coded in such a way that family members could be grouped and analyzed as a unit, yet confidentiality could be maintained.

Separate packets were sent to each parent, and each envelope contained the previously mentioned cover letter, a consent form, the questionnaire, and a stamped envelope addressed to the experimenter. The parent questionnaire included a background information form, the Love Attitudes Scale, and the Relationship Assessment Scale. Parent questionnaires were sent out 1 to 3 weeks after their child participated in the study and were returned approximately 2 days to 1 month following the time they were sent.

Instruments

Love Attitudes Scale. Lee's (1973) six love attitudes were used to assess love attitude similarity between generations. These attitudes include Eros (passionate love), Ludus (game-playing love), Storge (friendship-based love), Pragma (practical love), Mania (possessive, dependent love), and Agape (altruistic love). A scale developed to measure these six love attitudes (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986, 1990) consists of 42 five-point rating items, seven items measuring each of the six love attitudes. Alpha coefficients for the subscales ranged from .68 for Storge to .83 for Agape, with test-retest values ranging from .70 for Mania to .82 for Ludus. For the current sample, alphas ranged from .64 (Ludus) for fathers to .83 (Agape) for both mothers and adult children.

Parent-Child Relationship Survey. This questionnaire assesses young

adults' perceptions of the quality of their relationships with their parents on a number of dimensions, including perceived emotional closeness, trust, clarity of the parent's role in their life, accuracy of their perceptions of parents, anger toward parents, communication with parents, their respect for parents, and the influence their parents have on their life (Fine, Moreland, & Schwebel, 1983; Fine, Worley, & Schwebel, 1985). The scale consists of 24 Likert-type items per parent, with agreement/disagreement statements worded appropriately. Scoring for this scale originally employed a seven-point format (Fine et al., 1985), which was reduced to a five-point format for the current study. Alpha coefficients were .96 for the Father version and .94 for the Mother version (Fine et al., 1985). Alpha coefficients for the current sample were .94 for both Mother and Father scales. This measure was used because, unlike most parent-child relationship questionnaires available, it is focused on young adults.

Self-Disclosure Index. This brief 10-item Likert-type scale assesses a respondent's willingness to disclose about personal issues to a particular target person (Miller, Berg, & Archer, 1983). In the current study, young adults were administered two versions of this index, one with the father as the target person and the other with the mother as the target person. Alpha coefficients for various targets ranged from .86 to .93 (Miller et al., 1983). Coefficients for the current sample were .90 for the father version and .92 for the mother version.

Relationship Assessment Scale. This brief 7-item Likert-type scale assesses the level of satisfaction an individual experiences in a close, romantic relationship (Hendrick, 1988). Previous analyses confirmed the presence of a single factor, with an alpha of .86. In this study, alphas for both mother and father were .93. In previous research (Hendrick, 1988), the scale correlated .80 with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976).

Background Information Form. This short form requests demographic

information such as gender, age, education, family variables (e.g., quality of parents' marriage), and relationship status (e.g., whether currently in love).

RESULTS

Familial Similarity of Love Attitudes

Parental data. Correlational analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between parents' Love Attitudes Scale scores. Table 1 provides the Love Attitudes Scale correlations between mothers and fathers. Inspection of the diagonal (e.g., Eros with Eros, Ludus with Ludus) reveals that mothers' and fathers' scores were significantly positively correlated on all six love attitude scales, supporting Hypothesis 1. In other words, fathers and mothers demonstrated at least moderate similarity on all six love attitudes. Nine of the off-diagonal correlations for love attitudes were significant as well, with six of these (all negative) involving the Ludus scale (game-playing love).

Parental relationship satisfaction, as measured by the Relationship Assessment Scale, was assessed so it could be determined whether links between relationship satisfaction and love attitudes found in previous research (e.g., Contreras et al., 1994) would be replicated in the current study. Parents showed considerable similarity in relationship satisfaction, with a correlation of .69 (see Table 1), and love attitudes were related to satisfaction in ways consistent with existing literature (e.g., more passionate love and less game-playing love were related to greater satisfaction for both wives and husbands).

Parents and children data. Parent-child similarity of love attitudes was also explored. Table 2 provides the correlations between the love attitudes for children and each parent. The only significant diagonal love scale correlations were for Storge and Mania. For friendship love (Storge), fathers and their children showed modest similarity. For pos-

Table 2
Correlations Between Parents' and Children's Scores on Love Attitudes

Child	Mothers and Fathers					
	Eros	Ludus	Storge	Pragma	Mania	Agape
Eros	- .13 (-.12)	.29** (.15)	-.06 (.02)	-.01 (-.08)	-.07 (-.07)	-.11 (-.22)*
Ludus	.20 (.07)	-.13 (-.05)	-.00 (.09)	.04 (.23*)	-.02 (.05)	-.00 (.18)
Storge	-.14 (-.08)	.20 (.04)	.04 (.22*)	.13 (-.02)	-.01 (.07)	.04 (-.05)
Pragma	.15 (.10)	.00 (-.05)	.02 (.03)	-.04 (-.06)	-.17 (.15)	.04 (-.04)
Mania	.06 (.01)	.01 (.11)	.06 (-.02)	.01 (.03)	-.26* (-.01)	-.05 (.00)
Agape	.06 (-.06)	-.07 (.00)	.01 (.13)	.01 (-.19)	-.23* (-.10)	.10 (-.11)

Note Values in parentheses are for fathers and children. Values not in parentheses are for mothers and children. *N*s = 86 father-child and 86 mother-child pairs
p* < .05 *p* < .01

sessive, dependent love (Mania), the scores of mothers and children were significantly negatively correlated. A few off-diagonal correlations were also significant. For example, children's passionate love was positively correlated with mothers' game-playing love, and negatively correlated with father's altruistic love. Children's game-playing love was related to fathers' practical love. And children's altruistic love was negatively related to mothers' possessive, dependent love. Thus Hypothesis 2 was only partially supported.

Several approaches were used to assess the third hypothesis that greater parental attitude agreement would be associated with higher parent-child attitude similarity. Because it was expected that one aspect of parental agreement would be greater marital satisfaction, a median split of parents' combined satisfaction scores was performed. Within high- and low-satisfaction groups, parents' and children's scores on the six Love Attitudes Scales were correlated. Virtually none of the correlations was significant. Another approach simply correlated the absolute difference scores in the parents' love attitudes with their children's love attitude scores. None of these correlations was significant. Extensive additional analyses included regression of children's love attitudes onto selected parent (love and satisfaction) and child (Parent-Child Relationship Scale and Self-Disclosure Index) scores. There were no significant findings. Thus, the third hypothesis was not supported.

The correlations computed above were also computed separately between daughters and mothers, daughters and fathers, sons and mothers, and sons and fathers, with patterns similar to those shown in Table 2, and with no distinct gender differences. It thus appeared that there was very little similarity in parents'

and adult children's attitudes about love, in sharp contrast to the strong similarity between mothers' and fathers' love attitudes.

Generational Differences

Although we had expected to find greater parent-child love attitude similarity than we did, consistent with the lineage perspective on attitude transmission, we had also recognized that cohort influences might be operating, particularly in young adults.

Because the cohort or peer-influence perspectives on attitudes might posit that there would be generational attitude differences, as stated in Hypothesis 4, we explored generational differences in love attitudes with a series of ANOVAs, using a repeated-measures design with family unit as the independent variable, and mother's, father's, and child's scores as three levels of that factor. Results for daughters, mothers, and fathers are shown in the top panel of

Table 3
Comparison of Mean Love Attitudes for Daughters and Parents and Sons and Parents

Love Attitude	Daughters (<i>N</i> = 61)	Mothers (<i>N</i> = 61)	Fathers (<i>N</i> = 61)	<i>F</i> (2, 119)
Eros	3.90	3.99	4.18	2.25
Ludus	2.30 ^b	1.62 ^a	1.71 ^a	17.12**
Storge	3.32 ^a	3.73 ^b	3.64 ^b	4.01*
Pragma	2.97 ^c	2.64 ^b	2.15 ^a	13.57**
Mania	2.99 ^b	2.12 ^a	2.31 ^a	22.10**
Agape	3.77 ^a	4.01 ^{ab}	4.23 ^b	7.34**
	Sons (<i>N</i> = 25)	Mothers (<i>N</i> = 25)	Fathers (<i>N</i> = 25)	<i>F</i> (2, 48)
Eros	4.03	3.87	3.77	1.62
Ludus	2.34	1.85	2.07	2.31
Storge	3.30	3.66	3.45	1.66
Pragma	2.29	2.45	2.27	.37
Mania	2.87 ^b	2.14 ^a	2.10 ^a	6.35**
Agape	3.98	3.81	3.90	.30

Note Means with different superscripts within each row differ significantly at *p* < .05 by Duncan's test. The higher the score, the greater the love attitude
p* < .05 *p* < .01.

Table 3, and results for sons, mothers, and fathers are shown in the bottom panel. Daughters differed from both parents on Ludus, Storge, Pragma, and Mania, and from fathers only on Agape. Daughters reported themselves as more game-playing, practical, possessive, and dependent than their parents and as less friendship-oriented. They were also less altruistic than their fathers. Sons differed from both mothers and fathers on Mania, describing themselves as more possessive and dependent than their parents described themselves to be. Interestingly, the generations did not differ on passionate love, and sons did not differ from their parents on game-playing, friendship, practical, or altruistic love. However, Hypothesis 4 was largely supported.

DISCUSSION

The current research assessed the similarity of love attitudes held by young adult children and their parents. Based on previous research and our own analysis of the literature, we expected a number of findings.

First, we expected to find spousal similarity. Indeed, spouses had significant positive correlations on all six love styles and on relationship satisfaction, thus exhibiting similarity consistent with and even stronger than that shown in previous research (e.g., Contreras et al., 1994). Most of these couples had been married for many years, and it is possible that similar attitudes contributed to the longevity or stability of their marital relationships. Conversely, it is equally possible that the partners' attitudes may have become more similar over the years, as their marriage matured. It is even possible that, based on homogamy in mate selection, people

seek marital partners who hold similar love attitudes. It is also worth noting that game-playing love was negatively related to a number of other love styles as well as to relationship satisfaction, for both husbands and wives.

Although marital partners were similar in their love attitudes, young adult children and their parents were less so. Only nine of a possible 72 love attitude correlations were significant for children and their parents, thus only partially supporting the second hypothesis. Of these, two were diagonal in that children and fathers showed similarity in friendship love, whereas children and mothers were dissimilar in possessive and dependent love. Although previous research (Crow, 1991) found mothers' and daughters' Pragma scores to be significantly correlated, such a finding did not appear in the current study. Because previous literature indicated that parent attitude agreement was positively correlated with parent-child attitude similarity (e.g., Jennings & Niemi, 1968), a number of analyses attempted to explore this issue. However, there were virtually no significant findings, so the third hypothesis was not supported.

Of course, it is always possible that a particular sample is simply idiosyncratic, and that that is why no love attitude similarities were found. However, the current sample did show substantial comparability in both mean love attitude scores and correlation patterns to previous adult and college student samples. In addition, although there were few parent-child love attitude similarities, other correlations displayed a readily interpretable pattern. For example, children's evaluation of their relationship with parents was positively related to their disclosure to parents (.72 for fathers and .77 for mothers), and their perceptions of the quality of the parents' marriage (an item on the background inventory) was positively related to the perceived quality of their relationship with and disclosure to both parents. Thus, some parental variables clearly had an impact on young adult children. The two groups simply did not share substantial similarity in most love attitudes.

There are a number of possible reasons for this outcome. First, it is likely that some strong generational differences may well exist in the area of intimate relationships, including love attitudes. Supporting the fourth hypothesis, analyses showed significant differences between daughters and one or both of their parents on all the love attitudes except Eros, and between sons and parents on Pragma. Given the rapid changes

in and redefinitions of intimate romantic relationships during recent decades, it is not surprising to find generational differences in levels of love attitudes. Young people in many ways are growing up in a totally different culture in the late 1980s and early 1990s from that experienced by their parents in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, the mean similarities between generations are in some respects more surprising than the mean differences. For example, parents and children did not differ on the love attitude of Eros (passionate love). However, this finding is consistent with research showing that Eros is an important love style for both dating (Hendrick et al., 1988) and married couples (Contreras et al., 1994). Thus, romantic/passionate views of love may exist across generations at comparable levels (e.g., Hatfield & Rapson, 1987).

Previous research provides another possible explanation for the lack of similarity in love attitudes across generations. Strauss (1969) stated that intrafamilial continuity is likely to become more apparent as the younger generation moves into full adult status, which includes major life transitions such as marriage, parenthood, and occupation, most of which had not been experienced by the majority of the student participants. And indeed, research has found that individuals in different age groups conceptualize relationships differently (e.g., Knox, 1970). It is likely that age, developmental stage, and cumulative life experiences all contribute to the formation of love attitudes; thus, the felt experience of love should be somewhat different for young adult children and their midlife parents.

As discussed earlier (e.g., Acock, 1984), attitudes must be highly visible, concrete, and of lasting concern to parents in order to be imparted to their children. Although the quality of their child's romantic relationships is likely to be of concern to parents, relationship attitudes may lack the visible and concrete qualities necessary for similarity to develop. Attitudes about love and relationships take on an abstract quality that can be difficult to measure. Indeed, parental influence seems strongest in areas such as future plans and educational goals (e.g., Gecas & Seff, 1990). Of course, it is also possible that young people are fairly well aware of aspects of their parents' marriage, such as love attitudes, and, at least at age 20, specifically do not want to emulate many of those aspects.

Limitations

The current study was subject to the limitations of a cross-sectional study

and its associated sampling strategy. Data were primarily obtained from white, middle-class families. Future research should address differences in love attitudes cross-generationally among different ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic groups. In addition, the student sample contained a disproportionately high number of women, and findings might have differed if the sample size for men had been as large as that for women. Thus, the finding that sons differed less from their parents than did daughters should not be overemphasized.

What is also clearly needed is more longitudinal research to explore how love attitudes develop across the life span. Cohort differences may disappear as the younger generation matures. If the current sample could be followed until today's adult children are themselves parents of young adult children, perhaps love attitudes would look similar for every cohort at the same life stage. Perhaps we "become our parents" at a later time in our lives.

On the other hand, it is widely accepted that adolescents are greatly influenced by their peer group, so is it possible that a young adult holds love attitudes that are more similar to those of her or his friends than those of her or his parents? Or are children's love attitudes more similar to perceived parental attitudes than to actual ones (e.g., Acock & Bengston, 1980; Benson, Arditti, Reguero de Atilas, & Smith, 1992)? Such questions merit investigation.

Implications for Family Practitioners

The very modest parent-child love attitude similarity found in the current study will surprise some scholars and not surprise others. Indeed, excellent arguments can be made in favor of parental attitude transmission, peer socialization, or both as factors in adolescent attitude formation (e.g., Gecas & Seff, 1990). Parents who believe that they can impose their ideas about intimacy on their children would probably be well advised to settle for serving as consistent models of positive relationship behavior with the hope that this will contribute to children's long-term relationship stability. For example, parents could discourage a game-playing approach to close relationships. In the short term, it appears that college-age children and middle-age parents are in two different developmental stages, live two different social realities, and have two different mindsets about love. But for parents who fear that nothing they

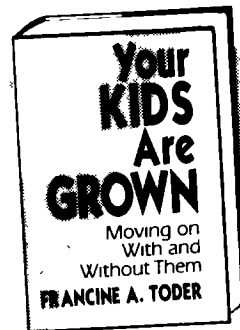
do matters to their children, it may be reassuring to hear that how the child perceives the parents' marriage, the parent-child relationship, and child-parent communication are all related to each other. Parents' behavior clearly is important, whether or not it fosters a particular attitude in the child.

Family practitioners may also be interested in pursuing the issue of love attitudes in adolescent or young adult children and their parents. Although family members might not have exactly the same perspectives on intimate relationships as indicated by the current findings, nevertheless the discussion of such an important topic as love might offer a useful communication task in family therapy.

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