

Correlation between Emerging Adults' Marital Attitudes and Their Attitudes towards Their Parents

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Abstract

The results of previous studies focusing on the influence of parent-child relationships on emerging adults' marital attitudes are not consistent. Such inconsistent results might be because, young adults' attitudes towards their fathers and mothers might affect sons' and daughters' marital attitudes differently, although the difference has not been researched. Thus, this study examined emerging adults' attitudes both towards their fathers and mothers and their marital attitudes according to their gender. A survey was conducted among undergraduates and 196 responses were analysed. The sample comprised 65 sons and 131 daughters with a mean age of 19.01 ($SD = 1.00$) years. The results showed that sons who had positive attitudes towards their mothers had positive attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation, but son's attitudes towards their fathers did not relate to their marital attitudes significantly. On the other hand, daughters who had positive attitudes towards their fathers tended to have positive attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation, but daughters' attitudes towards their mothers did not relate to their marital

attitudes significantly.

Keywords: emerging adults, marital attitudes, parent-child relationships

Introduction

In connection with emerging adults' marital attitudes, Meiji Yasuda Institute's (2016) survey about marriage and childbirth on 3,595 Japanese aged 20 to 49 years found that the percentage of unmarried Japanese who wanted to get married was less than in its 2013 survey, except for women aged 40 to 49. Because few children are born outside of marriage in Japan, decreasing marital aspirations is expected to relate to decreasing birthrates (Cabinet Office, 2018). Consequently, young adults' marital attitudes are an important social concern in Japan. In this context, some previous studies have examined the correlation between young adult marital attitudes and their relationships with their parents.

Parent-child relationships

Regarding emerging adults' marital attitudes, Risch, Jodl, and Eccles (2004) employed attachment theory and social learning theory to focus on the influence of parent-child relationships and found that adolescent sons who felt emotionally close to their fathers were confident in the longevity of their future marriages. However, daughters' emotional closeness to their fathers did not significantly relate to their attitudes about divorce.

Also based on attachment theory, Jensen, Willoughby, Holman, Busby, and Shafer (2015) confirmed that young adults who negatively perceived the quality of the family of origin were worried about getting married and

they feared divorce. However, Risch et al. (2004) did not consider children's emotional closeness to their mothers and Jensen et al. (2015) combined children's attitudes towards both parents to measure family of origin quality.

Studies that separately analysed emerging adults' relationships with their fathers and mothers found inconsistent effects on marital attitudes. Carnelley and Janoff-Bulman (1992) revealed that undergraduates whose mothers did not encourage independence during childhood displayed anxious/ambivalent attachment styles that led to pessimism about a future marriage. However, relationships with fathers did not significantly influence attachment styles or marital optimism. Conversely, Willoughby, Hersh, Padilla-Walker, and Nelson (2015) found that young adults who perceived paternal and maternal warmth had positive marital attitudes.

One reason for these diverse findings might be that sons' and daughters' attitudes towards their fathers and mothers differently influence their marital attitudes. According to social learning theory, children learn gender roles by identifying with their same-sex parents (Parsons & Bales, 1955), and they develop masculinity and femininity by modeling their same-sex parents (Crouter, Manke, & McHale, 1995). Thus, fathers are important role models for sons and mothers are important role models for daughters (Lamb, 1987; Snyder, Velasquez, Clark, & Means-Christensen, 1997). Following Risch et al. (2004), it was hypothesised that sons with positive attitudes towards their fathers and daughters with positive attitudes towards their mothers have positive marital attitudes.

Attitudes towards the gendered division of labour

In addition, the present study focused on attitudes towards the gendered division of labour, which was measured by responses to the following item:

‘The husband should work outside the home and the wife should keep the house.’ (see Suzuki, 2017, for a review). Suzuki (2017) pointed out that attitudes towards a gendered division of labour might relate to marital aspirations, but that relationship has not fully been confirmed. However, if there is a correlation, then attitudes towards a gendered division of labour might vary by gender. Men, married or not, can fulfill their gender role of working outside the home. However, women’s roles change when they get married, after which they are expected to fulfill their gender role and not work outside the home; women who do not marry cannot fulfill their gendered role regarding a family and household. Thus, women who embrace the gendered division of labour aspire to marriage so that they can fulfill their gender role. Therefore, this study hypothesised that, among women, the extent of support for the gendered division of labour positively relates to marital aspirations, but this correlation is not present among men.

Method

The research was conducted by way of a survey among 267 undergraduates who were 18–22 years old, unmarried, born and raised in Japan, and their native language was Japanese. The participants completed self-report questionnaires. The hypotheses were tested using the results of the analysis of 196 answers from participants whose parents were married couples and all lived together.

Variables

Hypotheses were formed on a dependent variable: 'Marital attitudes' and three independent variables: 'Attitudes towards the Gendered Division of Labour', 'Attitudes towards their Fathers', and 'Attitudes towards their Mothers'.

'Marital attitudes' were assessed by a Japanese version of Marital Attitudes ('Child rearing and social support survey', Cabinet Office, 2015): 'Would you like to get married or live with your partner in the future?'. Respondents registered their attitudes on a 3-point scale ranging from 0 (No, I have no intention to get married or living with someone.), 1 (Yes, sometime in the future.), to 2 (Yes, within two or three years/as soon as possible.). The scores ranged from 0 to 2, with higher scores indicating that respondents had more positive attitudes.

'Attitudes towards the Gendered Division of Labour' were assessed by a Japanese version of Attitudes towards the Gendered Division of Labour ('Child rearing and social support survey', Cabinet Office, 2015): 'Choose only one answer closest to your feelings about the idea, 'The husband should work outside the home and the wife should keep the house.'. Respondents registered their attitudes on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (disagree) to 4 (agree). The scores ranged from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating that respondents agreed more.

'Attitudes towards their Fathers' (e.g. 'I have affection towards my father') and 'Attitudes towards their Mothers' (e.g. 'I have affection towards my mother') were assessed by a Japanese version of the Positive Affect Index (PAI; Bengtson & Schrader, 1982). Respondents registered their attitudes on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (does not describe very

well) to 6 (does describe very well). After reliability was checked: $\alpha = .88$ (towards fathers) / $.88$ (towards mothers), the scores were averaged on five items, ranging from 1 to 6, with higher scores indicating that respondents had more positive attitudes.

Results

Respondents

The mean age of respondents was 19.01 ($SD = 1.00$) years old. The respondents comprised 65 sons (33.16%) and 131 daughters (66.84%).

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for each variable. Sons agreed with the idea of gendered division of labour more than daughters ($t(194) = 3.09, p < .01$). Emerging adults had more positive attitudes towards their mothers than fathers ($F(1,194) = 44.94, p < .001$).

Multiple Regression Analysis

The present study used multiple regression analyses to estimate the relations among emerging adults' attitudes towards the gendered division of labour, attitudes towards their parents, and their marital attitudes (Table 2). The results indicated that sons' attitudes towards their fathers did not significantly relate to their marital attitudes, but sons with positive attitudes towards their mothers had positive attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation. Regarding daughters, although their attitudes towards their mothers did not significantly relate to their marital attitudes, daughters with positive attitudes towards their fathers tended to have

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

	<i>Mean (SD)</i>		
	All	Sons	Daughters
<i>N</i>	196	65	131
Marital Attitudes	1.06 (0.41)	1.06 (0.39)	1.05 (0.42)
Attitudes towards the Gendered Division of Labour	2.31 (0.84)	2.57 (0.90)	2.18 (0.78)
Attitudes towards their Fathers	3.49 (1.01)	3.42 (1.17)	3.52 (0.93)
Attitudes towards their Mothers	3.96 (0.91)	3.96 (0.91)	3.96 (0.91)

positive attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation.

Furthermore, daughters who supported the gendered division of labour had positive attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation, but sons' attitudes towards the gendered division of labour did not significantly relate to their marital attitudes.

Discussion

First, young adults' marital attitudes were influenced by their attitudes towards their opposite-sex parents, refuting this study's hypothesis. Risch et al. (2004) implied that young adults' marital attitudes correlated with their attitudes towards same-sex parents in support of social learning theory. However, Bowlby (1973) had previously argued from the perspective of attachment theory that internal working models comprised of self-images and other-images and subsequent studies (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994) have demonstrated that young adults' attachment styles were classified under four categories created by combining self-image (positive/negative) with

Table 2
Marital Attitudes

Marital Attitudes	β		
	All	Sons	Daughters
<i>N</i>	196	65	131
Sex (0. Sons/ 1. Daughters)	.03	-	-
Attitudes towards the Gendered Division of Labour	.18*	.12	.24**
Attitudes towards their Fathers	.04	-.25	.17 †
Attitudes towards their Mothers	.10	.33*	.01
R^2	.03	.07	.07

Note. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

other-image (positive/negative). Because marriage is about the self and the other, both types of images are essential to marital attitudes. Therefore, sons with positive images of their mothers and daughters with positive images of their fathers would have positive images of their spouses and, consequently, positive marital attitudes. This reasoning might explain the correlation between emerging adults' marital aspirations and their attitudes towards their opposite-sex parents. Future studies should include measures or indicators of attachment style in investigations of these correlations.

Second, young adults' attitudes towards the gendered division of labour significantly related to marital attitudes, but only among the daughters, as hypothesised. This finding suggests that a decline in the number of women who support the gendered division of labour decreases marital aspirations, actual marriage rates, and fertility. However, considering the present study's finding that young adults' positive relationships with their

opposite-sex parents positively related to marital aspirations, despite the daughters' lack of support of gendered labour roles, it was suggested that they might aspire to marriage if they have positive relationships with their fathers.

Finally, this study could not explain the variance of emerging adults marital attitudes sufficiently. Hence, future studies would benefit by specifying additional factors that predict young adults' marital aspirations.

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