



Who Should I Talk to About Him? Guided Cognitive Reframing with Non-Parental Sources About the Father-Child Relationship



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Abstract

Although conflict increases between parents and children in early adolescence, less is known about how adolescents interpret and cope with such conflict. Previously (Cookston et al., 2015), we found that adolescents commonly seek out non-parental figures to help them understand or reframe their relationships with their co-residential fathers/stepfathers, with mothers being the most commonly sought source. In the current study, we limited our sample to those adolescents (N = 129) who indicated they only spoke to one other reframing agent (versus multiple agents). We assessed two readily-categories along which the other sources varied: (1) age (i.e., younger sources such as siblings and friends versus older ones such as aunts and teacher) and (2) whether the source of reframing was related to the child (e.g., siblings, grandparents) or not (e.g., friends, school counselor). Both models followed a novel nine pathway solution that included a link between more frequent reframing and feeling worse about the father-child relationship after reframing. Contrary to our hypothesis, the age model did not show any differences in pathways between older and younger sources. The family relation model supported part of our second hypothesis where two pathways could not be fixed between the two categories, suggesting differences in guided cognitive reframing between related and unrelated sources.

Introduction

With the increase of family and parental-child conflict during adolescence (Granic, Hollenstein, Dishion, & Patterson, 2003; Laursen et al., 1998), understanding who adolescents seek for support might explain how adolescents cope with parental conflict through guided cognitive reframing (Cookston et al., 2015). Specifically, guided cognitive reframing is conceptualized as the more frequent a source is sought is linked to cognitions associated with whether (a) the reframing agent provides a reason for a parent's behavior and (b) an assessment of whether those behavior were justified. In turn, in guided cognitive framing, cognitions are associated with affective evaluations of (a) oneself and (b) one's parents.

The age and whether the cognitive reframing agent is related to the child are factors that can influence the adolescents' decision on who to seek for support with their conflicts with their fathers. Older individuals may seem like a more suitable fit as the chosen reframing agent for providing a secure environment for adolescents (Levitt et al., 1993) and their high perception of warmth (Chen et al., 2003). For related sources, siblings (Howe, Aquan-Assee, Bukowski, Lehoux, & Rinaldi, 2001; Ponce et al., 2010) and extended family (Frey & Rothlisberger, 1996) tend to be sources that adolescents confide in to help cope with obstacles. Although older and related individuals may be more suitable reframing agents, question remains whether these characteristics of the reframing agent could influence the guided cognitive reframing model.

Participants

Participants within this study were part the Parent and Youth Study (PAYS) and included a sample of 392 families (<http://pays.sfsu.edu>). We included the adolescents (N= 129) who indicated they had only sought one other person than their mother or resident dad/stepdad to discuss their relationship with their father/stepfather. All adolescents were in 7th grade (M = 12.5, SD = .59). Eighty of these adolescents were female (49 male). Of this sample, 66 families were married (51.2%) and 63 were unmarried, 60 of which were Mexican American and 69 were European American. The adjusted income average for this sample was \$64,482, ranging from \$9,000 to \$334,900.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to the families who participated in these projects and also to the many members of the Parents and Youth Study for the data collection and entry of these data which made this work possible. To learn more about our lab visit <http://bss.sfsu.edu/devpsych/fair/> and to learn more about the PAYS project, visit <http://pays.sfsu.edu>.

Figures

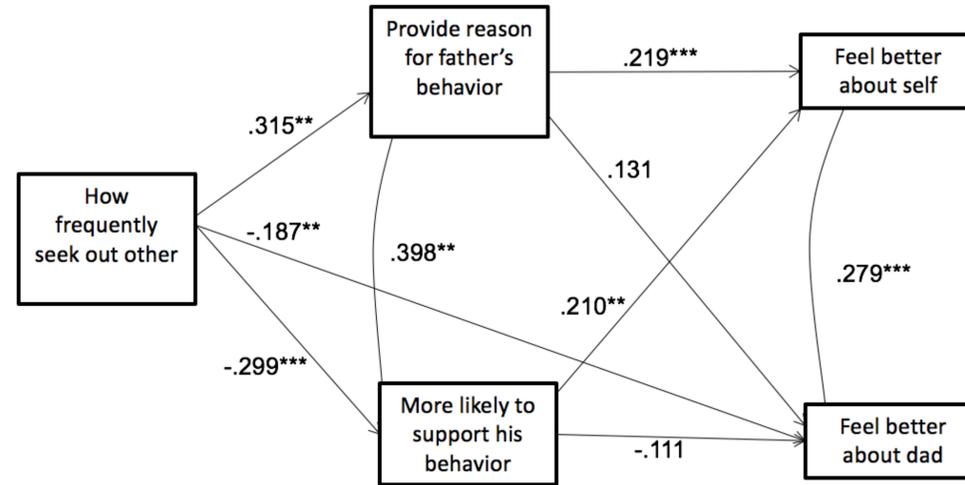


Figure 1. Path analysis model of guided cognitive reframing with other source. Single values indicate paths that were equated for younger (n = 105) and older sources of reframing (n = 24). **p < .01, ***p < .001

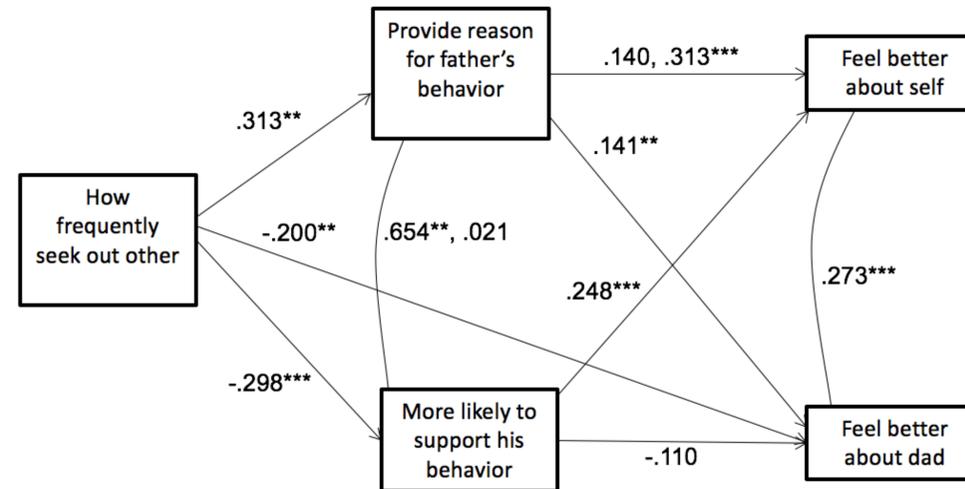


Figure 2. Path analysis model of guided cognitive reframing with other source. Single values indicate paths that were equated for related (n = 71) and unrelated sources of reframing (n = 58). When a path could not be equated, the value for the related source of reframing appears on the left and the value for the unrelated source of reframing appears on the right. **p < .01, ***p < .001

Research Question and Hypotheses

Does guided cognitive reframing differ for other sources depending on their family relation, sibling status, age, and friend relation to the adolescent?

H1: Older sources will follow a similar model as younger sources

H2: Related sources will follow the guided cognitive reframing model.

Measures

Guided Cognitive Reframing. Within the adolescent interview, adolescents were asked sixteen questions on who they sought for reframing and their experiences with guided cognitive reframing. Adolescents first indicated who they spoke to when conflict arises with their co-residential father/stepfather. Following questions assessed the constructs in the hypothetical model of guided cognitive reframing, which were frequency of reframing, cognitive consequences, and affective consequences.

Characteristics of the Other Sources. Adolescents were given fifteen options regarding whom they spoke to when conflict arises between the adolescent and their co-residential father/stepfather. The selected guided cognitive reframing agents were then divided into two categories for each characteristic: younger or older and related or unrelated.

Results

Data were analyzed using MPlus version 7 (Muthen & Muthen, 2012). The saturated model with all pathways intact observed perfect fit. In line with our earlier work, we attempted to remove the path (a) from more frequent seeking out of the other source to affective feelings about the father and (b) from more frequent seeking out of the other source to affective feelings about the self, however, model fit worsened significantly (chi-square = 12.965, df = 4, p = .01; RMSEA = .186; CFI = .906). When we returned the path to the model from more frequent seeking out of the other source to affective feelings about the self, we obtained acceptable fit (chi-square = 3.271, df = 2, p = .195; RMSEA = .099; CFI = .987).

When we compared younger and older sources of reframing, we found the nine pathway model worked best. Additionally, we were able to fix all nine pathways between older and younger sources. Figure 1 displays the equated values between the sources of reframing. Unlike the model for Cookston et al (2015) that reported results from more than one reframing agent, more frequent reframing was associated with feeling worse about the father child-relationship and not the earlier finding that support of father behavior was associated with feeling better about the father.

For the model that tested Hypothesis 2 comparing related and unrelated reframing agents, two pathways could not be fixed. If the preferred other person was unrelated to the adolescents, the link between receiving a reason for the fathers behavior and feeling better about oneself was stronger (b = .313, p < .01). However, when the reframing agent was related, there was a stronger link between receiving a reason for the father's behavior and the reframing agent supporting the father's behavior than when the reframing agent was unrelated.

Results & Discussion

Interestingly, when we narrowed our reframing agents to a single source, more frequent reframing was associated with a worse father-child relationship evaluation suggesting that when adolescents speak to unrelated sources it is because the father-child relationship is at risk. Supporting our hypothesis, when we compared older and younger sources, the associations were quite similar. However, when we compared related and unrelated sources, the results only partially supported our hypothesis. Related sources had a correlation between providing a reason for the father's behavior and criticizing his behavior. The stronger association between obtaining a reason for the father's behavior and feeling better about the self when the reframing agent was unrelated suggests adolescents might be interpreting their self-evaluations through a lens of those outside their families. It will be important to understand the content of conversations between reframing agents and adolescents as a next area of study. These results contribute to the greater understanding of how characteristics of a reframing source can influence their guided cognitive reframing.