

# **Attachment Scripts in Adult Men and Adolescent Males**

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## ABSTRACT

Although research efforts have produced a wealth of knowledge about such important assessments as the Adult Attachment Interview, relatively little is known about potential differences in attachment representations among females and males. With the introduction of new script-based methodology for assessing attachment representations, there is an opportunity to explore gender-based differences.

The current study assessed the presence of a secure base script in adult males and adolescent males using the attachment script assessment introduced by Waters & Rodrigues (2001). Adult males with a clear secure base script also had higher coherence scores on the Adult Attachment Interview. At the same time there was some evidence that different scenarios might be more likely to prompt a secure base script in males and females. Adolescent males, as do females, show evidence of *Me and Mom*, *Me and Dad*, and *Mom & Dad* secure base scripts. At the same time the correlations among these scripts vary across gender suggesting different mom and dad influences on the construction of a more generalized secure base script.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the move to representation in the 1980's, a wide range of methodologies have been developed to tap into internal working models in both young children and adults. The research efforts have produced a wealth of knowledge about the correlates of such important assessments as the Adult Attachment Interview. Most of the developmental work has focused on mother-child correlates, establishing for example, a clear link between mother's attachment status and the security of her child (van Ijzendoorn, 1995). Relatively less research has been conducted examining fathers' attachment representations & their correlates. To some degree this has been due to matters of economy and ease of recruiting participants. Mothers are generally more available as research participants.

The net effect of this research bias in favor of females, is less information about gender similarities or differences in attachment representations. With the introduction of new script-based methodology for assessing attachment representations, it seems appropriate to examine male secure base scripts as well as females. Less is understood about the contents of secure attachment representations, and the script approach can offer important insights into potential gender differences. The present study compares patterns of correlations with female and male script data at two ages, adulthood and adolescence.

## **Adult Males**

Thirty adult men from the Stony Brook Relationship Project were recruited. They were asked to complete the H.Waters & Rodrigues (2001, SRCD) narrative assessment of generalized attachment scripts. They had also completed the Adult Attachment Interview and the Henmon-Nelson Test as a measure of general intellectual ability.

## **Adolescent Males**

Forty adolescent males (11th grade) were asked to complete our adolescent battery of personal/family (Me and Mom, Me and Dad, Mom and Dad) attachment narratives - see Steiner, Arjomand, H.Waters from this symposium. GPA and English grades served as measures of general intellectual functioning.

## **Script Scoring**

All narratives were scored on secure base scriptedness using a 7-1 scale by two independent scorers. Alphas ranged from .71 to .92.

## **Baby's Morning - Secure Base Script - produced by adult male**

One day a new mother was getting together things to get her baby dressed in the morning. The baby was very cute. It was just a brand new baby, just a few months old. The mother and the baby were playing together. The mother took the blanket and was playing peek-a-boo with the baby. The baby loved that. The mother was giving the baby lots of hugs. The baby would smile whenever the mother hugged her. Even though she was very little the mother said, "I'm going to tell the baby a story. This will be the first story that I've told the baby because she's young enough to start, old enough now to start learning stories". The mother thought of a story and she said, "maybe I'll even act it out a little bit". So she pretends to be in the story. She took a teddy bear, which the baby loved, and she was showing it to the baby. The mother couldn't think of a story so she remembered one from when she was a little girl about how she lost her teddy bear. She said. "this is the teddy bear and the teddy bear got lost". She put the teddy bear behind her back and she looked very concerned for the baby. The baby wondered where the teddy bear was. Then she said, "but I happened to find my teddy bear" and she took the teddy bear out and gave it to the baby. The baby laughed when the mother found the teddy bear. The baby was so happy with playing that she went right to sleep and took a nap.

## **Doctors Office – Secure Base Script – produced by adult male**

Tommy went out one Saturday morning. It was a beautiful day to ride his bike. He went outside by himself and before going out his mother told him that he had to go out and make sure he wore his helmet. So Tommy went on his bike and, like all 3-4 year olds will say, he started riding around and he got hurt when he fell off his bike through some rocks on the floor. His mother, being nearby, ran over in a hurry to see if he was OK. At first Tommy seemed fine but he noticed that he could not move his wrist and he kept saying, "Mommy, my wrist hurts". So Mommy called up Dad at his office and explained what happened. And Dad told Mom that you better take Tommy to the doctor to see and make sure that everything's OK. So they went to the doctor's office and when they arrived Tommy was still crying. He continued to cry up to the point where they met with the doctor. The doctor said. "let me go see and let me see if we can take an x-ray to make sure that everything's OK". Now Tommy, having been to the doctor many times before, always associated the fact that if you went to the doctor he was gonna get a shot. But his mother, being the Tommy type, was able to calm Tommy down and reassure him that this was just going to be a simple x-ray and that they're not going to get a shot today and if you're a good boy we will go and get a toy on the way home. So Tommy, of course, very excited about getting a toy, stopped crying. And after the x-ray, was advised that everything was fine and was very happy when he picked up his new toy teddy bear and was able to hold it all the way home and did not let go of it that whole night.

## **GENDER RELATED HYPOTHESES**

- H1:** Adult males have secure base scripts similar to those of adult females.
- H2:** Adult male script scores will correlate with coherence scores from the Adult Attachment Interview as well.
- H3:** Adolescent males have secure base scripts similar to those of females, at least for the personal/family scripts (Me & Mom, Me & Dad).
- H4:** Patterns of correlations among personal/family scripts may differ for male and female adolescents due to differing influences of mothers & fathers.
- H5:** General intellectual functioning will not correlate with script scores at either age.

**Correlations Among Script Scores, Coherence (AAI)  
and IQ - Adult Males (N=30)**

	AAI Coherence	IQ
<b>Mother/Child Script Scores</b>	<b>.54**</b>	<b>.30</b>
<b>Adult/Adult Script Scores <sup>a</sup></b>	<b>.51**</b>	<b>.13</b>
<b>Composite Scores</b>	<b>.60***</b>	<b>.29</b>

<sup>a</sup> Camping Trip Story Only

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$



## **Correlations Among Script Scores, Coherence (AAI) and IQ - Adult Females (N=40)**

	AAI Coherence	IQ
<b>Mother/Child Script Scores</b>	<b>.52***</b>	<b>.27</b>
<b>Adult/Adult</b>	<b>.51***</b>	<b>.14</b>
<b>Composite Script Scores</b>	<b>.55***</b>	<b>.23</b>

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

# Adolescent Male and Female Correlations Secure Base Script Scores

	<u>Males</u>	<u>Females</u>
<b>Personal Scripts*</b>		
Within “Mom” Stories	.66***	.67***
Within “Dad” Stories	.41**	.73***
Within “Mom/Dad” Stories	.47**	.49***

\* Me and my Mom; Me and my Dad; My Mom and Dad

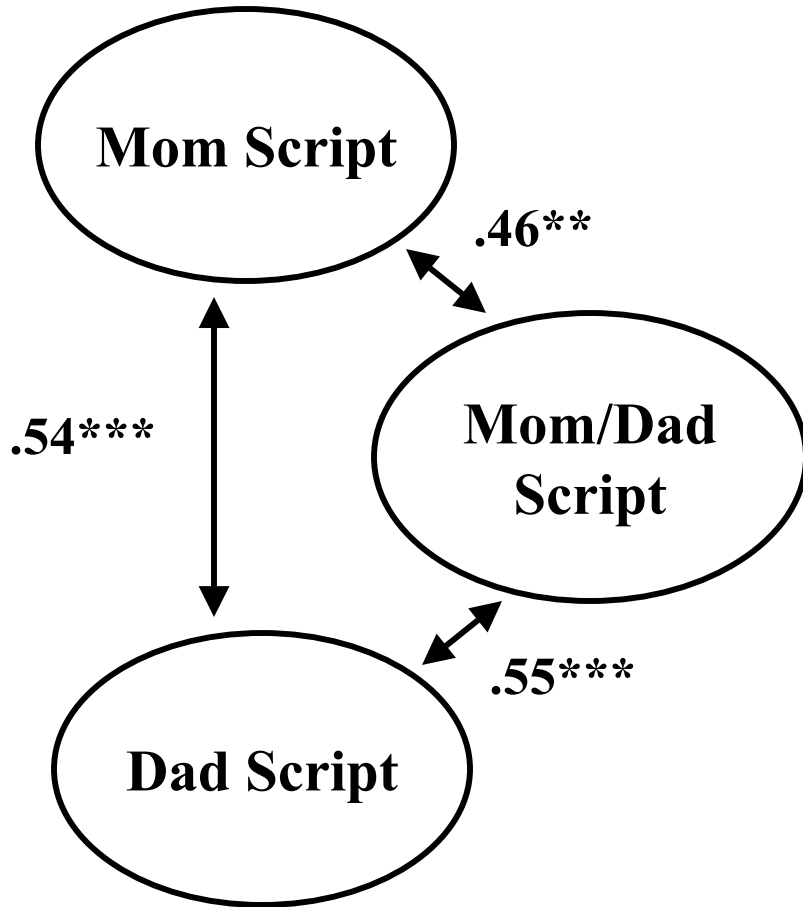
\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

## Discriminant Validity: Correlations Between Script Scores & GPA/English Grade

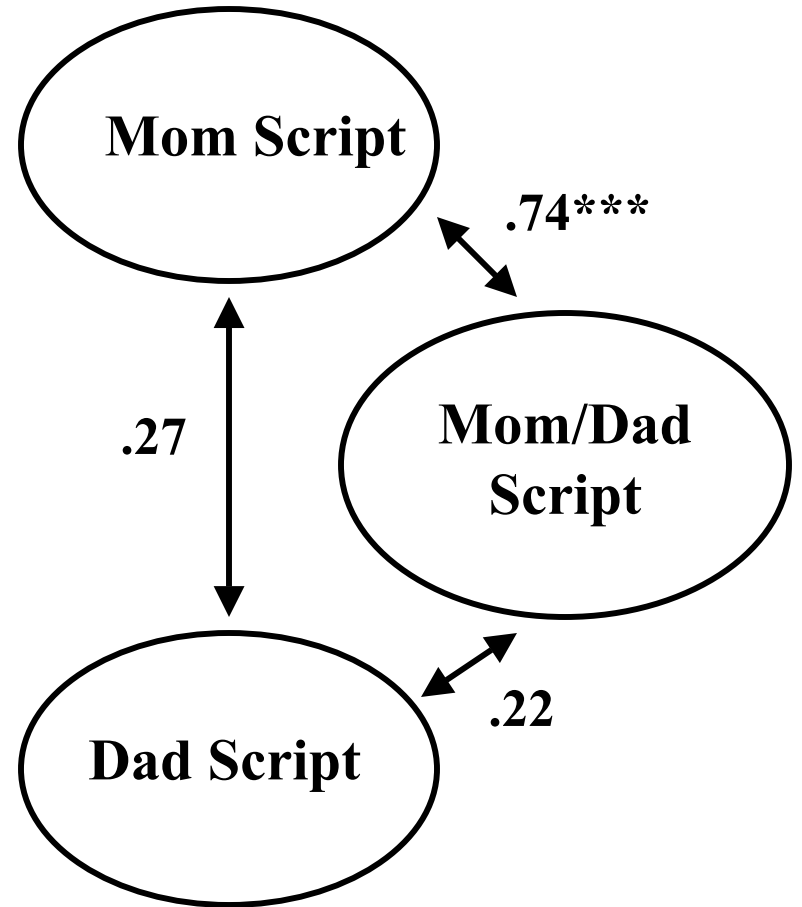
	<u>GPA</u>	<u>English Grade</u>
Averaged Script Scores		
Adolescent Males	.12	.05
Adolescent Females	.06	.31

Note: all correlations are non-significant

**11th GRADE FEMALES**  
**Pearson Correlations**



**11th GRADE MALES**  
**Pearson Correlations**



\*\* p<.01    \*\*\* p<.001

## KEY FINDINGS

- Script findings at both ages indicate that there is great deal of overlap in script representations across gender. At the same time some differences are also apparent.
- Adult male script scores correlate significantly with coherence scores from the Adult Attachment Interview. Patterns are similar to that of adult females except for one adult-adult story line, “The Accident.” That story prompts an instrumental script in males and is unrelated to coherence scores.
- Adolescent male script scores show significant within-story type correlations that provide evidence of *Me & Mom*, *Me & Dad*, and *Mom & Dad* secure base scripts.
- Different patterns of correlations among family scripts suggest that mothers and fathers have differing influences in representing the mom/dad relationship for adolescent males and females.
- Script scores were not correlated with IQ (adults) or GPA (adolescents).

## CONCLUSIONS

All in all, the present study provides evidence that both males and females have access to a secure base script at different ages, both in adolescence and adulthood. The adult male results are quite impressive. Secure base script scores correlate well with coherence scores from the Adult Attachment Interview. Adult men find it easy to fill in attachment-related story lines, even though some of them may involve mother-child script scenarios.

The adolescent results are equally impressive. As with females, adolescent males have coherent secure base scripts for the different family relationships (*Me and Mom, Me and Dad, Mom & Dad*). One thing that does differ is the relative influences of the *Mom* and *Dad* scripts upon the *Mom & Dad* script representation. Female representations are influenced by both *Mom* and *Dad* scripts, male representations primarily by *Mom* scripts. Future research will have to explore family influences on the construction of different secure base scripts.