Toward an understanding of mother–daughter identification using concept analysis

Mother–daughter identification was analyzed using a concept analysis strategy proposed by Walker and Avant. This strategy was selected because of its utility in clarifying a concept requiring refinement. It was toward this goal that the concept analysis of mother-daughter identification was initiated. Rogers's conceptual model was used to add a new dimension to past conceptualizations of mother-daughter identification, one that allows the concept to be added to a nursing perspective.

Carol Boyd, MSN, RN
Lecturer & Doctoral Applicant
College of Nursing
Wayne State University
Detroit, Missouri

IT IS NOT uncommon in a mental health nursing practice to hear such statements as, "The problem with Miss H is that she has an unhealthy relationship with her mother; she identifies too much with her." This type of comment seems grounded in the assumption that "identification" is a process that can be characterized on a continuum with "no identification" being at one end and "excessive identification" on the other. The notion of "healthy" or "normal" identification and where it might fall on this hypothetical continuum seems assumed, but has never been well delineated.

Nurses have always been concerned with the health of women and their families. Mother–daughter dyads represent a uniquely feminine unit within the family system to study. Developing nursing theory for mother–daughter identification will further nurses' understanding of women's health and also their understanding of family health.

Toward this end, Walker's and Avant's[1]

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strategy for concept analysis was adopted. After selecting concept and determining the purpose of the analysis, Walker and Avant recommend (1) a literature review, (2) determination of all possible uses of the concept, (3) selection of defining attributes, (4) identification of antecedents and consequences, and (5) construction of model and alternate cases.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past four decades, the term *identification* has become increasingly nebulous. Freud[2] was one of the first to develop the concept. He believed identification to be a process whereby one ego is assimilated into another. This assimilation caused the person doing the identifying, in many instances, to behave like the other person. Freud suggested that identification is a very important form of attachment and that both attraction and attachment are elements in the modeling that occur throughout the identification process. He believed the mother is the first source of primary identification for all infants.

Influenced by Freud's works, Lynn defined identification as the "internalization of personality characteristics and role behaviors of another person or a group of people."[3(p197)] He distinguished between parental identification and sex-role identification. Parental identification refers to the internalization of the characteristics

and unconscious reactions to a parent's personality, while sex-role identification refers to the incorporation of a sexually determined social role and the unconscious reactions that accompany that role.[4]

While not specifically addressing mothers and daughters, Lynn[3,4] examined the nature of parental identification with male and female children. He believed that the early closeness of the child to his or her same-sexed parent is one of the child's earliest learning experiences and this closeness probably has a lifelong impact. Furthermore, one of the major differences in the boy's sex-role identification, as compared with the girl's, is that the boy must switch his initial identification with his mother to a masculine role model. The girl, however, keeps her mother as both her model for initial identification and for feminine identification.

Winch and Gordon[5] suggest that there are three types of psychological identification:

1. *Similar identification* is where one person's behaviors and attitudes are similar to another.
2. *Opposite identification* is where, due to repulsion, one person's behaviors and attitudes are the opposite of another.
3. *Reciprocal identification* is where a dependent person identifies with a caretaker.

Winch's and Gordon's work gives insight into the use of the term identification as it pertains to relationships, specifically modeling relationships.

Chodorow[6,7] contends that, compared with men, women are more likely to maintain certain portions of their primary relationship with their mother. She attributes

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this to the fact that the mother is usually the early socializer and primary source of identification for both boys and girls. However, while a young daughter's personal identification with her mother persists through her life, preparing her for a maternal social role, a boy's identification with his mother is broken in early childhood and is shifted to his father. A boy begins positional, rather than personal, identification with his father, an identification that will prepare and reinforce him for a social position in adult life.[7] Chodorow[6] also believes that, since a mother views her son as a male opposite, she treats her son as differentiated from herself and as an object outside herself. Daughters, on the other hand, are viewed by mothers as extensions of herself, enveloped within the mother's own boundary.

Conflict and ambivalence seem to be part of the identification process that Freud,[2] Lynn,[3,4] and Chodorow[6,7] describe. The conflicts seem to stem from daughters' recall of, and preoccupation with, their early and extended primary relationship with their mother, a relationship where personal separation was neither necessary nor fostered. Popular writings by Broner,[8] Friday,[9] and the more recent publishing of letters between mothers and daughters[10] all reflect the potential for strong attachment as well as the equally strong potential for conflict within this dyad. However, within the context of this relationship, issues relevant to both attachment and conflict, issues such as intimacy, affection, and influence, have not been well developed in the literature.

Research in the area of mother-daughter relations, though limited, indicates that, compared with other close dyads, a unique identification process[11] occurs. While it is unclear whether aggression is transmitted across generations[12] (between grandmothers, mothers, and daughters), there is evidence to support similarities in mother and daughter sexual attitudes[13] and mother and daughter sexual behavior.[14] Studies by Lifshitz[15] and Parnell[16] show lack of similarities in the anxiety levels and femininity attributes of this dyad; however, more research is needed in this area. There is some empirical support for the belief that mothers and daughters generally feel intimate[17,18] and that feelings of closeness change throughout the life cycle.[19] Generally, research in this area tends to focus on the mother's influence on her daughter.

It is appropriate to note how "one-sided" the concepts of identification between parent and child seem to be, particularly as the identification is compared with nursing's more dynamic view of relationships.[20,21] Huston[22] noted that few researchers have examined the bidirectional influence between parents and their children. He states that only recently have there been efforts to discover how parents' personalities change while interacting with their children. Hence, identification seems to be theoretically characterized as a process where children identify with their mothers, but little is said about how much mothers identify with their children.

POSSIBLE USES

Interestingly, the nursing model of Rogers[20] provides nurses with a framework in which to examine mother-daughter identification as it differs from previous efforts. Using Rogers's conceptual model, the process of identification can no longer be

hypothesized as only going from parent to child. If identification is a characteristic of the mother–daughter relationship and if humans are characterized as continuously exchanging and evolving energy fields, then within the Rogerian framework the mother and daughter would be both influenced and affected by the identification process. It would not be a unidirectional interaction. Therefore, Rogers's view of human field interaction adds a new dimension to past conceptualizations of mother–daughter identification—a dimension that allows the concept to be added to, and reformulated within, a nursing perspective.

DEFINING ATTRIBUTES/ANTECEDENTS/ CONSEQUENCES

The defining attributes, as well as the antecedents to and consequences of the concept, emerged from the literature review and from clinical experience. In order for mother–daughter identification to occur, all of the critical attributes must be present.

Antecedents are the incidents that occur before mother–daughter identification takes place and the consequences are the result of the identification. Walker and Avant[1] noted that through the delineation of the antecedents and consequences, the defining attributes become clearer, and further refinement may be facilitated. Obviously, a defining attribute can be neither the antecedent or consequence of itself.

I is used to symbolize the person doing the identifying and P is used to symbolize the person to whom the identification is directed. In this study, mother and daugh-

ter can function as either I or P at different or simultaneous points in the relationship. Furthermore, the term *behavior* encompasses thoughts, values, beliefs, and actions regarding self or others. The defining attributes that emerged included:

- I, upon perceiving herself in the role of P, responding or behaving as I believes P will respond or would have responded in a similar situation; or
- I, upon perceiving herself in the role of P, avoiding behaving as I believes P would behave because I feels that she will become like P if she does not avoid P's behavior.

Antecedents

The antecedents to mother–daughter identification include:

- I's belief that P is her mother (or her daughter);
- recognition by I that P is separate from herself;
- potential for similarity with P must be recognized by I;
- during the life of this dyad and over at least a period of several months, I and P having frequent contact in a variety of situations;
- I and P feeling an attraction (positive or negative) toward one another; and
- I's conscious or unconscious knowledge of the purpose, intent, or meaning of P's behavior (when P and I are in contact with each other).

Consequences

The consequences of mother–daughter identification include:

- similarity of behaviors between I and P;

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- permanently altered identity of *I* by knowledge of *P*;
- periodic conflict or ambivalence regarding fears related to differentiation; and
- behavior of *I* influencing behavior of *P*, and behavior of *P* influencing behavior of *I*.

MODEL CASES

The four model cases described represent examples of mother–daughter identification. Each case incorporates the defining attributes previously discussed, although each case focuses on a different example of identification. Each case assumes the antecedents to identification have already taken place.

Case 1

A 10-year-old girl who lives with her mother, father, and infant brother dresses up in her mother's clothes and plays house with her brother. When her brother cries, she picks him up, goes to her mother's rocking chair, and rocks him to sleep. When her mother walks in the room, the girl says, "Shhh, our baby is asleep."

Case 2

On her 30th birthday, a young woman is admitted to a hospital for psychiatric evaluation. She states that she is afraid of having a heart attack. Ironically, her cardiac fears seem unwarranted given the healthy condition of her heart. Further evaluation reveals that this woman's mother died in her early thirties when the daughter was quite young, the daughter

stated that, after her father died, her mother "died of a broken heart."

Case 3

A middle-aged woman who has never gambled before refuses to go to a bingo game at her church. Like her parents, she believes it is very important to support church activities. However, she refuses to go to the game, even with her friends. She states that she will never let herself gamble because once she starts, she will never be able to stop. Further discussion reveals that the woman's mother was a compulsive gambler.

Case 4

A mother of a 24-year-old woman had the opportunity to go to Europe for the summer, a trip her daughter had taken several years earlier. Just before her trip, the mother discovered that her daughter was unable to complete her graduate schooling because she lacked funds. The mother cancelled her trip to Europe and gave her daughter the money stating, "As you know, I always wanted to go to graduate school."

ALTERNATE CASES

By developing borderline cases of the concept, a theorist can examine cases containing only one or two of the defining attributes of mother–daughter identification. Frequently, a case will be borderline because all of the antecedents to the concept have not occurred. This then may limit the number of defining attributes included in the case, thereby rendering it a borderline case.

Borderline case

A young adult woman has never met her biological mother. However, her father always told her about her mother. The father frequently tells the daughter how much she looks, acts, and thinks like her mother. The daughter is pleased by his observations and continues to approximate her mother's behaviors.

This case exemplifies only portions of mother–daughter identification as defined by the critical attributes previously mentioned. The daughter neither interacted with her mother nor could have developed personal knowledge of her mother's behavior. Thus she is unable to consciously or unconsciously surmise how her mother would respond or behave. Rather she is influenced by the image of her mother created by her father. Therefore, two of the antecedents are not met. This creates a problem with the attributes since the antecedents must be met before I can incorporate P's behavior. This appears to be a case of imitation rather than identification. The daughter approximates her mother's behaviors without understanding the significance or meaning of the mother's behaviors.

Contrary case

After constructing model and borderline cases, it is often useful to develop deviant cases. The following is a case that does not characterize mother–daughter identification because it contains none of the defining attributes.

A well-to-do widow learns that her only daughter has lost her job and is without food. The mother replies, "Let her go to the bank and get some money like the rest of us."

Related cases

Related cases are developed for concepts that are similar to the one under investigation. Concepts such as imitation, possession, socialization, impersonation, and internalization are a few that are related to mother–daughter identification. For this study, related cases were not provided for these concepts. However, it should be noted that the knowledge of related concepts, as well as the creation of related cases, can be extremely helpful in analyzing a concept.

Invented case

The last case of mother–daughter identification is the invented case. The development of this type of case requires the theorist to move outside reality and create an event that exemplifies the concept.[1] The following invented case portrays mother–daughter identification, with all of the defining attributes, as well as the antecedents and consequences, being present.

One day in the garden, a beautiful red rose noticed a new flower that had sprung up from her own roots. The red rose noticed that, like herself, her new flower was a rose; she drank water and flourished in the sun. However, the red rose also noticed that the new rose's stem grew independent from her own and that her petals were a different color.

As the red rose interacted with the new rose, she grew to like the new rose's deep yellow color and her independent stance, but there were times she wished that the yellow rose would turn red and grow closer. The yellow rose knew this.

Little by little, as the red rose observed the yellow rose, she began to change. Half of the rose's petals turned yellow and the

84　other half remained red. It was as if her own red petals had mysteriously pulled some of the yellow from the yellow rose. And simultaneously, the yellow rose began to change. Her petals grew to be a beautiful peach color, just as if the red and the yellow had been mixed by an artist and returned to her young petals.

The red rose was lovelier than ever with her red-yellow petals and the peach rose was most unique. Even if either had desired (and there were times each did), neither rose could return to its original color.

EMPIRICAL REFERENTS

The final step in concept analysis is the defining of empirical referents. This is one of the most difficult steps, particularly when the concept under consideration is as abstract as mother–daughter identification. The crucial question to be asked at this stage of concept analysis is "How is mother–daughter identification to be measured?"

The empirical referents of a concept are events that demonstrate the existence of the concept.

It must be remembered that the antecedents of the concept should have occurred before the empirical referents are appealed. The following list provides the empirical referents for mother–daughter identification:

- I's statement that she is influenced by P;
- I's statement that her behavior frequently resembles P;
- I's statement that P thinks the way I does;
- I's statement that she and P have

feelings of conflict over perceived differences;
- Report from family members that
  I and P are mutually influenced by each other,
  I and P frequently resemble each other in their behavior,
  I and P think like each other and share many of the same values and ideas, or
  I and P periodically appear in conflict with each other over perceived differences.

DISCUSSION

All children are thought to identify initially with their mothers. This is believed to be primary identification. However, while boys are socially differentiated from their mothers (and develop male role models early in life), daughters continue to socially and personally identify with and model their behavior, ideas, and attitudes after their same sexed parent. This process is augmented by the western tradition of child-rearing whereby the mother is the predominant caregiver. Mother and daughter spend more time together than father and daughter, especially as the daughter is growing up. It is hypothesized that this continual mother-daughter contact and identification may make intra-dyadic differentiation painful, but developmentally normal. If fathers took a more

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active role in child-rearing, the mother-daughter identification process might be less intense.

Theoretically, mother–daughter identification refers to that unique process whereby the identity between mother and daughter is embedded. Mother–daughter identification is augmented by both the mother's rearing of a same-sex child and the mutually shared knowledge that each woman may play the other's role at different points in the life process. No other relationship includes such a unique potential for mutual identification.

From an operational standpoint, mother–daughter identification can be observed when each person role models the other by adopting their values, attitudes, and behaviors. The effective component of this identification occurs when one imagines oneself in the role of the other and responds as one imagines the other would. However, unlike other identification, ambivalence and avoidance may be experienced by both women throughout the life cycle since psychological separation is difficult.

Tanner noted that once we look seriously at women's roles, "we are embarrassed to find how often they are significant and how frequently they are overlooked. As we begin to investigate women's roles in earnest, we shall find that in all societies they are more interesting and more important than previously assumed. . . ."[23(p131)]

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In the future, both refinement and validation of the concept of mother–daughter identification are needed. This analysis represents an initial step. Since the process of concept analysis is iterative, there is always the opportunity to expand and refine. It is hoped that this work will lead the way to new levels of theory development and research. Mother–daughter theories will need to be developed within the wider context of family, community, and culture to provide direction for nursing research and clinical practice in the areas of women's and family health.

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