

Paternal Attachment, Role Identity, and Father Involvement in Parenting

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Abstract

This study examined the structural relationship among a father's attachment to parents, a father's role identity, and father involvement in parenting. A total of 174 fathers with 3-5 aged child participated in this study. To examine the hypothesized model, structural equation modeling was used. Data were analyzed with SPSS and AMOS programs. The results suggested that a father's attachment to his parents is associated with a father's role identity and father involvement in parenting. Father's role identity positively related to father involvement in parenting. Father attachment to his mother has an indirect effect on his involvement in child rearing via his role identity. This study highlights the importance of secure attachment experience in early childhood and preparing for fatherhood to promote fathers' involvement in parenting.

Keywords: paternal attachment to parents, father's role identity, father involvement

INTRODUCTION

The ratio of men taking paternity leave increased 42.4% from 2014 to 2016. [1] The dramatic increase in the number of mothers in paid work and the rapid decrease in the number of children has induced the father to participate in child care. As more women continue to participate in the workforce, fathers in dual-income families are forced to take care of their children. Another reason is that societal expectations for fathers have changed; Fathers were expected to be responsible for bread-winning roles in the traditional view; However, fathers are expected to be more actively involved in the care of and closely interacting with their own children in recent decades. [2] Simultaneously, the level of fathers' interest in child rearing and child education has increased [3]; Still a minority of fathers are actively and voluntarily involved in child care with pleasure.

Changes in Korean family and societal patterns have drawn attention to studies on the trends of father involvement in child rearing and on predictors of father involvement. [4] Studies have been in progress on the facilitators and barriers for fathers to promote involvement in raising their children. [5] Previous studies consistently reported that father involvement in parenting had a positive impact on their children's overall development. [6-7] In other words, child development is affected by the quantity and quality of father involvement in their care. [8] For example, children of involved fathers are

likely to show more cognitive competence [9] and to set positive attitudes toward school. [10] Also, a high level of father involvement predicted their children's well-being. [11]

Even though Korean fathers have tried to participate in child rearing lately, they have difficulty interacting and playing with their children. Since they couldn't prepare for being a father, it was not easy for them to establish their role as a father. Being a father requires a significant lifestyle shift; one's established identity as a man should be reset as a father. [12] The father's role identity means how a father sets his role as a parent. [13] Many studies show the father's role identity is associated with his own involvement in parenting. [14] A father's attitudes toward the parenting role and the job environment play an important role in determining his level of involvement in child rearing. [15] Fathers with a high level of role confidence are more likely to perceive the significance of fatherhood and value fatherhood as a satisfying experience. [16]

Also, one's secure attachment relationship with one's own parents is related to one's positive parenting. The study of the intergenerational transmission of parental attitudes and behaviors [17] reported that parents are likely to transmit their parenting behaviors to their children. Also, the studies on the links between self-reported attachment styles and parenting indicated that the parent's insecure attachment experience was related to less sensitive, supportive, and responsive parenting behavior toward their children. [18]

Furthermore, an attachment relationship with one's own parents could have a continuous impact on multiple roles as individuals become adults. For example, individuals with insecure attachment reported greater concerns about their family life, romantic relationships, and parenting than did those who experienced secure attachment relationships. [19] Secure attachment to parents was also associated with secure fathering. Fathers who rated themselves as secure had low levels of parenting stress and high levels of parenting efficacy and knowledge of child development. [20]

Based on these previous studies, this study was to examine the relationship between paternal attachment to parents, role identity, and father involvement in parenting as well as the mediating effect of the father's role identity in the relation between paternal attachment and father's involvement in parenting (See Fig 1).

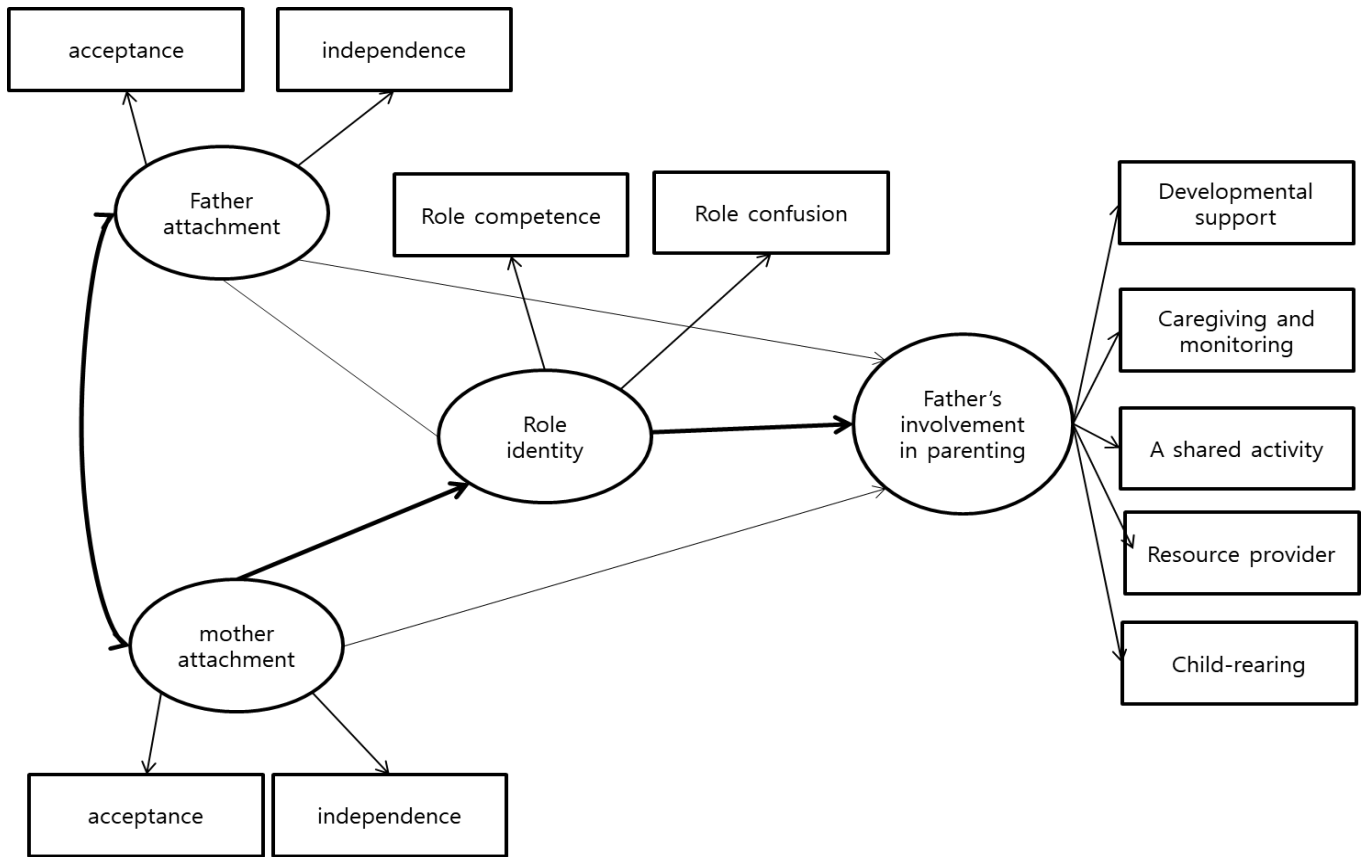


Figure 1. Hypothesized model

METHODS

Participants

Participants were 200 fathers with 3-5 aged children. The data were collected via structured questionnaires. Participants agreed to participate in the study, and 174 of them were analyzed except for 26 incomplete questionnaires.

Measurement

Attachment to parents

To measure father's representations of parenting received, The Mother-Father-Peer Scale (MFP, [21]) was applied. The original Mother-Father-Peer Scale consisted of 30 items, however, 21 items was used after translating and testing factor analysis. [22] MFP scale measures the extent to their childhood relationships with each parent. The MFP Scale assesses the degree to which parents are reported to have been independence/ encouraging versus overprotecting (for example, when I was young, father (mother) encouraged me to make my own decisions), the degree to which parents have been reported to be accepting versus rejecting (for example, when I was young, father (mother) made me feel that I was a burden to her). All items were measured on a five-point. Increasing scores indicate memories of greater acceptance, and independence-encouragement. The Cronbach's α for father was 0.94 and for mother was 0.95.

Role identity

The Paternal Role Inventory [23] was utilized to measure the father's role identity. Paternal role identity is composed of two subscales and 15 items; role confidence and role confusion. Role confidence assessed paternal confidence and satisfaction, sense of accomplishment as a paternal role, such as "I am proud of being a father". Role confusion assessed confusion of role identity which included pressure of responsibility and role ambiguity such as "I feel discouraged or have a conflict when I need to give up my life for my children". All items were measured on a five-point. The Cronbach's α was 0.94.

Father identity

The Generative Fathering Scale [24] was used to assess father's involvement in parenting. Generative fathering scale includes parental involvement of fathers (e. g. Developmental support, Caregiving and monitoring, and Shared activity) and parental responsibility (e.g. Responsibility as a resource provider, responsibility as a child-rearing). This scale was composed of 40 items (e.g. "I help my child to solve the problems by himself (herself)", "I play with my child such as folding origami"). Respondents rated each item on a 5-point. The Cronbach's α was 0.82.

Data analysis

The hypothesized model and alternative model were examined by structural equation modeling. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Version 18.0) and the Analysis of Moment Structures statistical software programs (Version 18.0) were used for data analysis. Means and Standard Deviations were calculated. A hypothesized and an alternative models were examined by structural equation modeling. To evaluate the fit of structural models to the data, the standard chi-square index of statistical fit, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) were used. RMSEA values below .06 show a close fit to the data, whereas TLI and CFI values greater than .90, and preferably greater than .95, are considered moderate support for the fit of a model to data [25]. The model was estimated along with direct, indirect, and total effects, and the mediation effect was examined.

RESULTS

Participants

Participants were 174 fathers with a 3-5 aged child. The average age of the fathers was 38.14 ± 4.11 years, with a range from 29 to 48 years. Socioeducational Status of father’s was as follows: five percent were high, 85% were middle, and 11% were low. Regarding the number of child gender, 108 were boys and 66 were girls.

Descriptive statistics for variables

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for father’s attachment to his parents, role identity, and father’s involvement. The level of father attachment to his mother and father is as follows; the level of Mother Acceptance is 3.71 ($SD = .51$), the level of Mother Independence is 3.59 ($SD = .59$), the level of Father Acceptance is 3.53 ($SD = .58$), and the level of Father Independence is 3.36 ($SD = .63$). The level of Role Confidence and Role Confusion is 3.81 ($SD = .55$) and 1.96 ($SD=.64$) each. Father involvement includes 5 subscales; Developmental support is 3.70 ($SD = .58$), Caregiving is 3.85 ($SD = .62$), Shared activity is 3.67 ($SD = .53$), Resource provider is 3.70 ($SD = .66$), and Child-rearing is 3.74 ($SD = .54$).

Correlations among main variables are shown in Table 2. Fathers’ mental representation of his father and mother as warm and accepting was positively related to father’s involvement in parenting and its subscales (developmental support, $r = .25-.29, p < .001$; Caregiving, $r = .25-.29, p < .001$; a shared activity, $r = .38-.42, p < .001$; resource provider, $r = .22-.29, p < .001$; child-rearing, $r = .20-.30, p < .001$). A father who perceives his parents as warm and accepting in his childhood is likely to have more time with his own child and actively participate in child care. Fathers’ mental representation of his father and mother as encouraging independence was positively related to father’s involvement in

Table 1. Mean and SDs of variables

Variable	Category	Mean (SD)
Attachment to parents (1~5)	Father acceptance	3.53 (.58)
	Father independence	3.36(.63)
	Mother acceptance	3.71(.51)
	Mother independence	3.59 (.59)
Role identity (1~5)	Role confidence	3.81 (.55)
	Role confusion	1.96 (.64)
Father involvement (1~5)	Developmental support	3.70 (.58)
	Caregiving and monitoring	3.85 (.62)
	A shared activity	3.67 (.53)
	Responsibility as a resource provider	3.70 (.66)
	Responsibility as a child-rearing	3.74 (.54)

parenting and its subscales (developmental support, $r = .22, p < .001$; Caregiving, $r = .22-.23, p < .001$; a shared activity, $r = .37-.38, p < .001$; resource provider, $r = .25, p < .001$; child-rearing, $r = .23-.26, p < .001$). Father’s role confidence positively related to father’s involvement and its subscales (developmental support, $r = .51, p < .001$; caregiving, $r = .52, p < .001$; a shared activity, $r = .62, p < .001$; resource provider, $r = .56, p < .001$; child-rearing, $r = .58, p < .001$). A father who perceives his parents as promoting independence in his childhood is more likely to actively participate in child care. Also, the father’s role confidence is related to father’s involvement in parenting and its subscales (developmental support, $r = .51, p < .001$; Caregiving, $r = .52, p < .001$; a shared activity, $r = .62, p < .001$; resource provider, $r = .56, p < .001$; child-rearing, $r = .58, p < .001$). A father with higher role confidence is more likely to actively participate in child care. However, father’s role confusion was negatively associated with a father involvement and its subscales (developmental support, $r = -.45, p < .001$; Caregiving, $r = -.40, p < .001$; a shared activity, $r = -.47, p < .001$; resource provider, $r = -.40, p < .001$; child-rearing, $r = -.45, p < .001$). A father with higher role confusion is less likely to actively participate in child care.

Model Fitness

Table 3 shows the summarized results of the hypothesized model. The path from the father’s attachment to his mother to father’s role identity and the path from father’s role identity to father involvement were significant, however the paths from the father’s attachment to his parents to father involvement were not significant. This result partially supports the model.

The analysis of the hypothesized model indicated proper fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 42.97$, $df = 36$, $p = .37$, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.33) (See Table 4). An alternative model was tested to improve the model fit. An alternative model (see Fig. 2) did not have the path from father's attachment to his mother and father to father involvement within the hypothesized model. The alternative model showed a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 43.68$, $df = 38$, $p = .24$, CFI = .99, TLI = .99,

RMSEA = 0.29) and all paths in alternative model were significant except for the path from father's attachment to his father to role identity (see Table 5). Comparing the hypothesized model with the alternative model ($\Delta \chi^2_{df=2} = .71$, $p > .05$), the alternative model resulted in a better fit to the data (see Table 4). The final model accounted for 54 % of the variance in the father's involvement in parenting (see Fig. 3.).

Table 2. Correlation among main variable

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	.83***	.81***	.71***	.40***	-.40***	.25***	.25***	.38***	.22***	.20***
2	1	.72***	.85***	.39***	-.37***	.22***	.23***	.37***	.25***	.23***
3		1	.84***	.46***	-.37***	.29***	.29***	.42***	.29**	.30***
4			1	.42***	-.36***	.22***	.22***	.38***	.25**	.26***
5				1	-.62***	.51***	.52***	.62***	.56**	.58***
6					1	-.45***	-.40***	-.47***	-.40**	-.45***

1: father acceptance 2: father independence 3: mother acceptance 4: mother independence 5: role confidence, 6: role confusion, 7: developmental support, 8: caregiving and monitoring, 9: shared activity, 10: responsibility as a resource provider, 11: responsibility as a child-rearing

*** $p < .05$.

Table 3. Regression weights of hypothesized model

	Estimate (Unstandardized)	Estimate (Standardized)	SE	CR
Attachment to father → role identity	.12	.15	.13	.87
Attachment to mother → role identity	.37	.43***	.15	2.45
Role identity → father's involvement	.80	.76***	.12	6.54
Attachment to father → father's involvement	-.09	-.12	.12	-.82
Attachment to mother → father's involvement	.66	.07	.13	.49

*** $p < .001$. SE=Standard error. CR= composite reliability.

Table 4. Model fitness index for hypothesized model and alternative model

Model	χ^2	df	p	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	$\Delta \chi^2$
Hypothesized model	42.97	36	.20	0.99	0.99	0.33	-
Alternative model (Full mediation model)	43.68	38	.24	0.99	0.99	0.29	.71

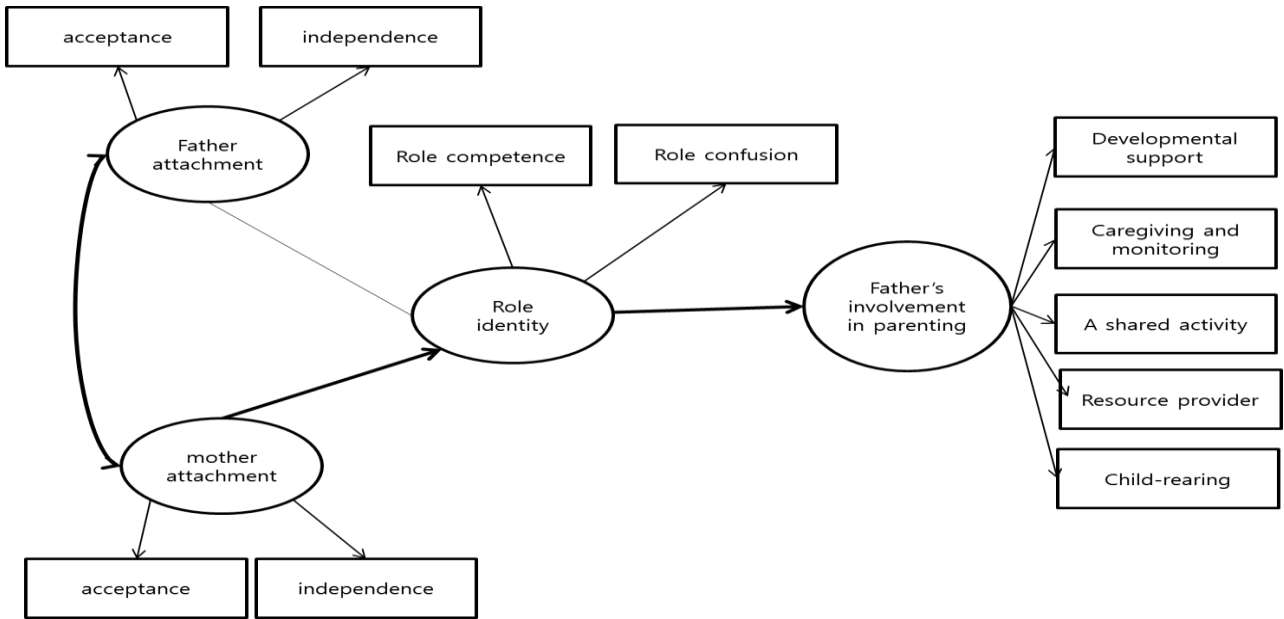


Figure 2. Alternative model

Table 5. Regression weights of Alternative model (final model)

	Estimate (Unstandardized)	Estimate (Standardized)	SE	CR
Attachment to father → role identity	.08	.12	.13	.7
Attachment to mother → role identity	.48	.45***	.15	2.63
Role identity → father's involvement	.76	.73***	.09	8.47

*** $p < .001$. SE=Standard error. CR= composite reliability.

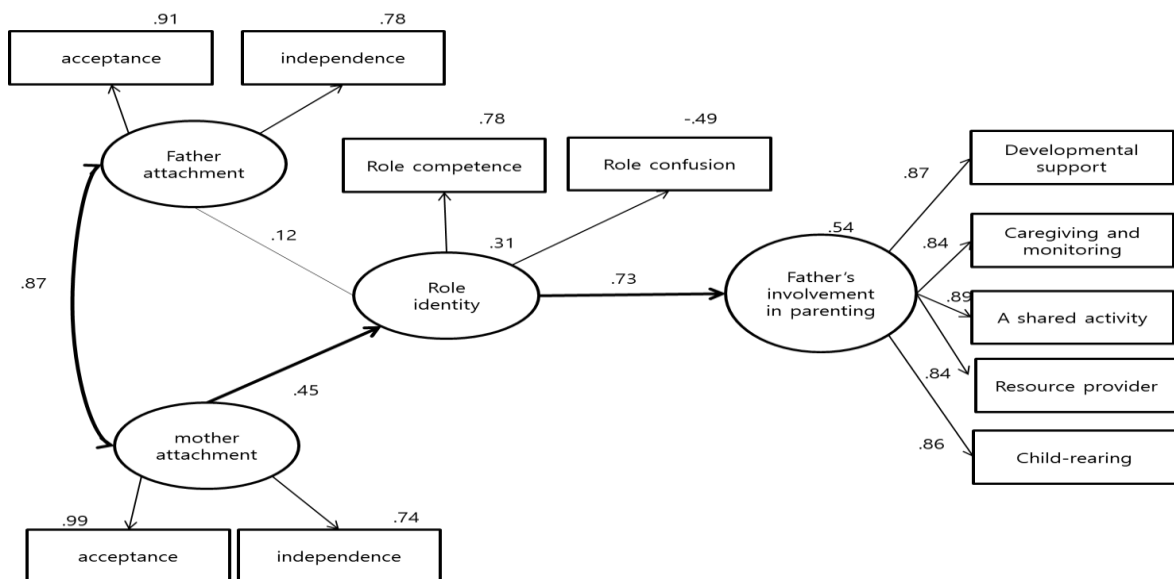


Figure 3. Final model

The estimates of the direct, indirect, and total effects of the paternal attachment to their father and to their mother on father's involvement via role identity showed in Table 6. Father's attachment to their mother had an indirect effect on father involvement via role identity ($\beta = .33, p < .001$). Fathers with secure attachment to their mother was more likely to establish a more positive role as a father, and then father with a positive role identity was likely to have more involvement in parenting. This finding highlights the importance of a father's role identity for increasing father involvement.

Table 6. Standardized Direct and Indirect Effect direct effect

	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
Attachment to father → role identity	.12		.12
Attachment to mother → role identity	.45***		.45
Role identity → father's involvement	.73***		.73
Attachment to father → father's involvement		.09	.09
Attachment to father → mother's involvement		.33***	.33

*** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION

This study was to examine the relationship between paternal attachment to one's parents, role identity, and father involvement in parenting and verify the mediating effect of the father's role identified in the relation between paternal attachment and father involvement. First, the findings showed a relationship between a father's attachment to his parents and the father's role identity related to his involvement in parenting. This result is consistent with past research reporting the positive relationship between a secure attachment relationship with parents and parenting. [18] [26-27] Based on Bowlby's attachment theory, a parent's own attachment experience and representations would affect the quality of parental care-giving. [18] In other words, one's early attachment experiences are carried forward to thought and emotion in later parent-child relationships. [28] A father who received sensitive and responsive care from his parents in his childhood is more likely to form representations of self as worthy and careful; his mental representation of self makes him function as sensitive and responsive to his own offspring.

Therefore a father who had early secure attachment experience with his parents is more likely to spend more time and actively interact with his own offspring. This study reconfirmed the importance of a father's early attachment experience in promoting parental involvement. This result also suggests that fathers have to be more actively involved in parenting with pleasure if they expect their own children to have a secure attachment experience and to participate in parenting in the future.

Also, the father's role identity was found to be associated with his own involvement in parenting. This result is consistent with previous research indicating that attitudes towards the paternal role are related to father involvement in parenting. [15] [29] A father's involvement would be determined by the function of a father's view of his parenting role based on the identity theory. [14] Fathers with high confidence in parenting are more likely to have more responsibility in child care and play with their own children, but fathers with high confusion in parenting are likely to have less responsibility and interest in child care. Korean fathers are in a state of conflict in the view of setting the father's role identity. They have to be a generative worker, a sweet husband, and a friendly father at the same time. They have to be good at balancing their work and family life, even though most Korean fathers became fathers without preparing. The shift in the perception and attitude of the father's role is not easy; therefore, steady intervention and education for fathers to establish the father's role identity is needed in a long-term perspective.

Second, a father's attachment to his mother indirectly influences father's involvement in parenting via the father's role identity. However, the path from a father's attachment to his father to the father's role identity is not significant. This result is partially consistent with studies which show one's parents' attachment is associated with parenting. [14] [30]; Parents who had insecure attachment were found to be less warm and acceptive and provided less interaction with their own children. [30] The result that only a father's mental representation of his own mother influenced setting a role identity as a father and participation in parenting is interesting. As there are few studies concerning the relation between a father's attachment experience and fatherhood, some possible explanation could be addressed. Current Korean fathers have grown up with traditional parenting values. Koreans' traditional thinking and behavior have been influenced by Confucianism; men were expected to be calm and strong and undertake a productive role out of home. Also, fathers should be cool and strict toward their children. So current fathers might not have a proper image of 'a good father' growing up. As they didn't have enough time to interact with their own fathers when they were young, they couldn't learn the real meaning of 'fatherhood' and 'father's role', furthermore, how to play and interact with their own children. For these reasons, Korean fathers' attachment experience with his own father might not affect establishing their role as a father.

Results from the this study also reveal that setting a father's role identity is important to increase father involvement. Fathers with secure attachment experience were found to be more likely to have higher role confidence and lower role confusion, becoming more involved in more positive

parenting. A father's own view of parenting has to be changed, keeping pace with social change. It is not easy to shift a father's attitude and role in parenting in a short time, though. Therefore, multiple approaches to promote positive father involvement would be needed. The policy for promoting father involvement and a social atmosphere which values fathering in child development should be expanded. Considering the benefit of father involvement in child development, a preparation program for fathering and fatherhood as well as an intervention program for positive parenting should be provided.

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