

PRIVACY INVASIONS AND PARENT-ADOLESCENT RELATIONS

Privacy invasions and their association with poor parent-adolescent relationship

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Abstract

In this study we examine whether privacy invasions are associated with poor parent-adolescent relationship. We also examined if there were differences between mothers and fathers in the frequency of their invasions, as well as the intent of those invasions. Lastly, we looked at associations between privacy invasions and parent-adolescent relationships and if these were modified by parent or adolescent gender. We hypothesized that intentional and frequent privacy invasions would have a stronger association with poor parent-adolescent relationship than accidental and infrequent invasions of privacy. The data for this study was selected from a larger database. Participants consisted of 78 adolescents, 39 girls and 39 boys. Data were collected through questionnaires that both adolescent and parent answered separately. The adolescents filled out the questionnaires at school in different classrooms. We concluded that frequent privacy invasions had a significant association with poor parent-adolescent relationship for mothers, but not fathers. Furthermore, the interaction between the frequency of privacy invasions and the intent was significant for mattering to mothers. However, no significant relations were found for fathers.

Keywords: *privacy, invasion, parent, adolescent, relationship*

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Sammanfattning

I den här studien undersöker vi huruvida integritets-inkräktande är förknippade med dålig förälder-ungdom relation. Vi undersökte också om det fanns skillnader mellan mammor och pappor i frekvensen av deras invasioner, liksom avsikten med dessa invasioner. Slutligen såg vi på associationer mellan integritets-inkräktande och föräldra-ungdoms relationer och om dessa modifierades av föräldrar eller ungdomars kön. Vi förutsåg att avsiktligt och frekvent integritets-inkräktande skulle ha en starkare förknippning med dålig förälder-ungdom relationer än oavsiktliga och sällsynta invasioner av integritet. Uppgifter för denna studie valdes från en större databas. Deltagarna i studien bestod av 78 ungdomar, 39 flickor och 39 pojkar. Uppgifterna samlades in genom flera frågeformulär som både ungdomar och föräldrar besvarade separat. Ungdomarna fick besvara frågeformulären i skolan i olika klassrum. Slutsatsen var att mängden integritets-inskränkande faktiskt hade en signifikant koppling med dålig förälder-ungdom relation för mödrar, men inte för fäder. Även interaktionen mellan mängden integritetskränkande och deras avsikt visade sig vara signifikant för mödrar. Dock fanns ingen signifikant relation för fäder.

Nyckelord: integritet, inkräktande, förälder, ungdom, relation

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Privacy invasions from parents can evoke negative feelings, confrontations, or a sense of resignation among adolescents and, be damaging to the parent-adolescent relationship (Tilton-Weaver & Trost, 2012). The aim of our study was to understand the links between parents' privacy invasions and adolescents' perceptions of their relationships with their parents. We sought to determine if the links depend on the gender of the adolescent or the parent.

Although privacy is defined in various ways, a commonality is that privacy protects the self (Margulis, 2003). Thus, revealing private information through self-disclosures is typically limited to close, personal relationships (Tilton-Weaver & Trost, 2012). According to Petronio (2002), individuals value privacy because they believe that it separates them from others and it gives them rightful ownership of information about themselves (Petronio, 2002). Privacy serves personal autonomy through defining and protecting one's self and allows regulation of emotions, as well as maintaining trust within personal relationships (Tilton-Weaver & Trost, 2012). Thus, developing a private sphere is an important developmental task that supports adolescents' emotional, psychological, and social development.

Not all adolescents are aware of what privacy is or whether their parents are invading their privacy (Tilton-Weaver & Trost, 2012). Adolescents may believe that keeping secrets is equivalent to privacy and their parents' invasive actions are parent monitoring, rather than invasions of privacy. This could be due to terminology or lack of awareness. Many adolescents state that the reason behind their parents' actions is care and concern, therefore they recognize that their parents care about them (Tilton-Weaver & Trost, 2012).

Change in privacy boundaries occur when individuals chose to disclose information that is not previously known or chose not to reveal information to individuals who were previously included in private matters (Petronio, 2010). Within the family, adolescents' boundaries are

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restructured as they become individuated from their parents and develop personal relationships inside (e.g., with siblings) and outside of the family (e.g., with friends and romantic partners). Sometimes the changes bring parents into shared boundaries, for example when an adolescent reveals a conversation with a friend or a problem with a romantic partner. Other times the changes exclude parents. Parents may be excluded when adolescents feel the need to have private space or when friends have agreed to share information with each other, but not others. It is developmentally appropriate, then, for adolescents to redefine privacy boundaries within the family, as part of the process of individuation and developing personal relationships (Kennedy-Lightsey & Frisby, 2016). This task is impeded when parents violate adolescents' privacy.

Relevant studies suggest that parents invade their adolescents' privacy for a number of reasons (Marshall & Tilton-Weaver, 2015; Tilton-Weaver & Trost, 2012; Tilton-Weaver, 2015). One reason is that the privacy boundaries adolescents and parents once shared are in flux and parents stray into adolescents' privacy when they look for information or ask questions about issues or events that they have previously been included in (Tilton-Weaver & Trost, 2012). Another reason is that parents feel that their invasions are justified because of worries or concerns regarding their children's whereabouts (Tilton-Weaver, 2015). It is easy to imagine that when parents get used to receiving information, they grow to believe that their adolescents' private lives are always open to them. In these cases, invasions are likely unintentional.

In many cases, invasions are intentional. When parents intentionally invade their adolescents' privacy, they are taking away their children's ability to deny them access to their private lives. This could have a negative impact on parent-adolescent relationships. Research suggests that adolescents lose trust when their parents invade their privacy (Tilton-Weaver & Trost, 2012) and respond by limiting parents' access to information about their lives through hiding information (Hawk, Keijsers, Frijns, Hale, Branje & Meeus, 2013). Logically, this could

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create a negative cycle in which parents who believe their children are lying resort to more snooping, leading to adolescents withholding more information. It is easy to imagine, then, that parent-child relationships would suffer since this cycle of crossing boundaries and lying can lead to distrust within relationships.

The reactions of adolescents to their parents' privacy invasions suggest that the relationship with parents is damaged. It is possible that this is the perspective of parents as well. If a parent feels left out of their adolescents' lives because their adolescents respond to invasions by closing boundaries, this could also have a negative impact on parent-adolescent relationships.

Parents' invasion of adolescents' privacy is associated with several indicators that adolescents respond poorly, such as: negative emotions, poor mental health, closing parents out of privacy boundaries through withholding, concealing information, and lying (Tilton-Weaver & Trost, 2012). These reactions would likely compromise the parent-adolescent relationship as the adolescents' report feeling upset, less trust, and less ability to express disagreement with parents (Tilton-Weaver & Trost, 2012).

One of the gaps in this body of research is an understanding of gender issues. Many studies did not examine gender differences between either parents or adolescents. It is possible that there are differences in how female and male adolescents respond to invasions and their responses could depend on whether the invasion was made by a father or a mother.

Generally, fathers and daughters have a weaker relationship than mothers and daughters (Starrels, 1994). Starrels (1994) found that sons often experience a more equal relationship with their mothers and fathers than daughters do; daughters were in most cases closer to their mothers than to their fathers. Fathers also reported to be less involved with their daughters and experienced a closer bond with their sons. Additionally, both sons and daughters generally identify themselves with the same-sex parent (Starrels, 1994). It is easy to imagine,

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then, that most of the invasions would happen within these specific dyads: mothers towards daughters and fathers towards sons. In other words, mothers would invade their daughters' privacy more than their sons due to their close relationship and fathers would possibly invade their sons' privacy more than their daughters.

Where differences in rates of privacy invasions are concerned, studies suggest that mothers are more invasive than fathers (Marshall & Tilton-Weaver, 2015). Mothers seem to engage in more control and solicitation towards their adolescent children than fathers and they also tend to invade privacy when they are worried about their adolescents (Hawk, Hale, Raaijmakers & Meeus, 2008; Marshall & Tilton-Weaver, 2015). By contrast, fathers' invasive behaviors have been linked to adolescents' problem behavior, which include secrecy, antisocial behaviors, and substance use (Marshall & Tilton-Weaver, 2015). However, mothers worrying seems to increase the negative effects of privacy invasions (Tilton-Weaver & Marshall, 2017). Negative effects such as, secrecy or poor mental health (Tilton-Weaver & Trost, 2012). Logically, mothers worrying, and these negative effects of privacy invasions would lead to declines in the perceived quality of parent-adolescent relationships.

Adolescents' response to invasions and their perceived quality of parent-adolescent relationship differ between genders (Keijsers, Branje, Frijns, Finkenauer & Meeus, 2010). For example, daughters' secretive behaviors with parents regarding their whereabouts tends to be related to poorer parent-adolescent relationships over time; for sons this association was much weaker (Keijsers et.al., 2010). This suggests that the link between adolescents' secretive behaviors and their perceptions of their relationships with their parents differs by gender, with the negative link being stronger for daughters than for sons. This might be due to daughters generally having a more intimate relationship with their parents than sons do (Starrels, 1994). It is easy to imagine then, that if daughters perceive their relationship with parents more intimate,

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then parental invasions and daughters' secretive behavior would possibly lead to a series of negative outcomes. In other words, if daughters experience a closer relationship with their parents than sons do, then they would also be more likely to experience decrease in relationship quality more than sons would.

Taking these issues into account, we first asked if there were differences between mothers and fathers in the frequency of their invasions, as well as the intent of those invasions. Our hypothesis was that mothers would invade more than fathers. This was based on previous research already mentioned that mothers are usually more prone to invade and behave more controlling towards adolescents than fathers do (Marshall & Tilton-Weaver, 2015; Hawk et.al., 2008). Second, we examined if the frequency or intent of invasions depended on the gender of the adolescents. We expected that mothers would invade daughters' privacy more than sons'. In addition, we expected that invasions of daughters would be more intentional than invasions of sons. We based this on the research that has found that mothers usually have a closer relationship with their daughters than with their sons. This could lead to more frequent invasions of daughters' privacy than sons' (Starrels, 1994). We had no strong ideas about whether fathers would invade sons or daughters more but explored gender as a possible source of differences.

Finally, we asked if privacy invasions, both frequency and intent, were related to poor parent-adolescent relationships, and if the associations between privacy invasions and parent-adolescent relationships were modified by parent or adolescent gender. We hypothesized that intentional and frequent privacy invasions would have a stronger association with poor parent-adolescent relationship than accidental and infrequent invasions of privacy. We also explored the possibility that the association between privacy invasions and parent-adolescent relationships would be modified by both parent and adolescent gender. We examined both linear associations

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and whether intent moderated the association of privacy invasions and parent-adolescent relationships.

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were a sample from a larger study consisting of 645 adolescents from six schools in a small city in southern Sweden. The sample for this study was selected from the larger database by only including participants who answered all questions in the measures used. This created a sample consisting of 78 adolescents; 50% girls and 50% boys. These adolescents were between 12 and 16 years old ($M=14.71$, $SD=.90$) and most of them reported Swedish as their origin (97%) and 95% of the participants reported being from a two-parent household. 1.3% reported living with only their mother, 1.3% only with their father and 2.6% reported living sometimes with their mother and sometimes with their father. Specifically, 36 girls reported living with both their mother and father, 1 girl lived with only their mother, 1 girl with only their father and, 1 girl reported living with sometimes their mother and sometimes their father. 38 boys reported living with both their mother and father and 1 boy reported living sometimes with their mother and sometimes with their father. Most of the participants (73%) reported to have about the same amount of money as other families and 20.3% reported to have a little less money than other families.

Measures

Parent's privacy invasions. Adolescent's reported on the frequency of their parents' invasive behaviors using a 21-item scale including items by Hawk and Tilton-Weaver (2012). They reported on their mothers and fathers separately, being asked if either parent had invaded their privacy in the last year. Items included "asked you a lot of questions?", "tried to eavesdrop when you were talking with friends?", and "rooted (snooped) through your things when you

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were not home?”. The adolescents responded using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = It has never happened, 2 = It has happened a few times, 3 = It has happened quite a lot, 4 = It happens all the time). Mothers’ privacy invasions ranged from 1 - 2.75 and fathers’ privacy invasions frequencies was reported from a minimum value of 1 to maximum value of 3.11. Cronbach’s alpha for reports on mother was .78; on fathers was .84.

After reporting on whether their parents invaded their privacy, the adolescents were also asked 18 questions about their perceptions of their parents’ intent. Three options for each item was provided: by accident; on purpose; or sometimes on purpose, sometimes by accident. Only the first two categories were used. By accident was coded as 0 and on purpose was coded as 1. Mothers’ and fathers’ intent both ranged from a minimum value of 0 to a maximum value of 18. We used a count of the number of invasions adolescents reported were on purpose and a count of invasions that were accidental.

Mattering to parents. Adolescents report on how they perceived they matter to their parents. This measure consisted of 4 items: “I am important to my mother /father,” “I am missed by my mother/father when I am away,” and “I matter to my mother/father.” They responded using a 5-point Likert scale anchored by “not so much” (1) and “a lot” (5). The reports on mattering to mothers ranged from minimum 1 to maximum 5 and equal minimum and maximum values were reported for mattering to fathers. The Cronbach’s alphas for mothers = .86 and fathers = .85. We interpreted mattering as an indicator of the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship, as several studies have indicated that mattering overlaps considerably with relationship quality indices (Demir, Özen, Doğan, Bilyk, & Tyrell, 2011; Marshall, 2001; Mak & Marshall, 2004).

Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researchers responsible for the study received ethical

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approval from the Uppsala Ethics Board. All participants were informed about the study and their rights prior to their participation, including assurances that their information would be protected and handled confidentially, their right to end their participation at any time or to choose not to answer some questions. The data were collected from different classrooms. Collection took approximately 2 hours with a break included after the first hour. During this break, the participants were offered refreshments. Each classroom was monitored by two research assistants. All participants in the study were given vouchers for one cinema ticket (approximately 100 Swedish krona) as compensation.

Statistical analyses

To examine gender differences in privacy invasions, we conducted paired sample t-tests to see whether boys and girls differed in their perceptions of their mothers' and fathers' privacy invasions. We tested both the frequency and the intent of perceived invasions. We then ran two independent sample t-tests to examine gender differences in mothers' and fathers' invasions.

To address our second set of questions, as to whether privacy invasions were related to the parent-adolescent relationship and whether these associations differed as a function of the parents' or adolescents' gender, we conducted two sets of hierarchical regressions (one for reports on mothers, one for reports on fathers). This was conducted to test whether (1) the frequency or intent of privacy invasions was related to parent-adolescent relationships and (2) if the association of invasions frequency with relationship quality was moderated by intent, and (3) if the associations of invasion frequency and intent were moderated by parents' or adolescents' gender. Each interaction was tested separately and probed using the PROCESS module for SPSS (Hayes & Preacher, 2014).

Results

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We calculated the descriptive statistics and correlations of all study variables (see Table 1). We found several significant correlations. Mattering to mother and the frequency of mothers' privacy invasions had a weak, but significant negative correlation ($-.24, p < .05$). This suggest that there is an association between frequencies of invasions and mattering to mothers, either when number of invasions increase, the feeling of mattering to mothers decreases or vice versa.

Table 1

Construct	<i>M</i> ^a	<i>SD</i>	α	Correlations						
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Mattering to mother	4.60	.69	.86	-	.71**	-.24*	.10	.01	.05	-.1
2. Mattering to father	4.49	.75	.85	.71**	-	-.24*	.15	.01	.04	-.14
3. Privacy invasions frequency mothers	1.58	.34	.78	-.24*	-.24*	-	.51**	.30**	.27*	-.18
4. Privacy invasions frequency fathers	1.37	.31	.84	.10	.15	.51**	-	.26*	.32**	.02
5. Privacy invasions intent mothers	3.37	4.03	.89	.01	.01	.30**	.26*	-	.67**	-.04
6. Privacy invasions intent fathers	2.64	4.84	.96	.05	.04	.27*	.32**	.67**	-	.12
7. Adolescent gender ^a	1	-	-	-.15	-.14	-.18	.02	-.04	.12	-

Note. $n = 78$.

^aThe mean is reported for continuous variables, mode for categorical variables. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Is there a difference between mothers and fathers in the frequency of their invasions, as well as the intent of those invasions?

We performed a paired t-tests to see whether boys and girls differed in their perceptions of their mothers' and fathers' privacy invasions. We tested both the frequency and the intent of perceived invasions. We then ran two independent sample t-tests to examine gender differences in mothers' and fathers' invasions. Our results show that mothers invaded privacy ($M = 1.58, SD = .34$) more than fathers ($M = 1.37, SD = .31$), $t = 4.95, p < .001$. However, our results showed no significant support in differences between mothers' intentional invasions ($M = 3.37, SD = 4.03$) and fathers ($M = 2.64, SD = 4.84$), $t = -1.75, p = .09$.

Our computed variables for privacy invasions intent also showed that fathers invade on

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purpose 28% of the time and by accident 18%. Mothers invaded on purpose 35% of the time and 20% of the time adolescents reported the invasions to be by accident.

Does the frequency or intent of invasions depend on the gender of the adolescents?

Our t-tests showed that mothers did not invade their daughters ($M = 1.64, SD = .39$) more frequently than they invaded their sons ($M = 1.52, SD = .29$), $t = 1.60, p = .12$. Neither did mothers intentionally invade their daughters ($M = 3.54, SD = 4.16$) more than their sons ($M = 3.21, SD = 3.95$), $t = .36, p = .72$. Moreover, fathers were not found to invade sons ($M = 1.38, SD = .36$) more than their daughters ($M = 1.37, SD = .26$), $t = -.13, p = .90$. Likewise, fathers did not intentionally invade their sons ($M = 3.23, SD = 5.67$) more often than they did their daughters ($M = 2.05, SD = 3.82$), $t = -1.08, p = .29$.

Table 2

Regression Model Estimates

Outcome and model	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	$R^2 / \Delta R^2$	$F / \Delta F$	<i>p</i>
Mattering to mother								
Block 1						.09	1.73	1.54
Invasions, frequency	-.56	.24	-.28	-2.33	.023			
Invasions, on purpose	.01	.02	.08	.71	.48			
Adolescent gender	-.14	.16	-.10	-.87	.39			
Block 2: interaction						.06	4.96	.03
Invasion frequency x intent	.14	.07	1.54	2.20	.03	.03	2.29	.14
Block 3: interaction						.00	.02	.88
Invasion frequency x gender	.82	.48	1.02	1.70	.09			
Block 4: interaction								
Invasion frequency x intent x gender	.01	.02	.12	.35	.73			
Mattering to father								
Block 1						.05	.91	.46
Invasions, frequency	.36	.30	.15	1.21	.23			
Invasions, on purpose	.00	.02	.01	.11	.91			
Adolescent gender	-.21	.18	-.14	-1.18	.24			
Block 2: Interaction						.00	.30	.59
Invasion frequency x intent	.05	.10	.57	.55	.59	.00	.30	.59
Block 3: interaction								
Invasion frequency x gender	.33	.61	.39	.55	.59			
Full model						.00	.02	.88
Block 4: interaction								
Invasion frequency x intent x gender	-.00	.02	-.07	-.15	.88			

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Invasion frequency x intent x
gender

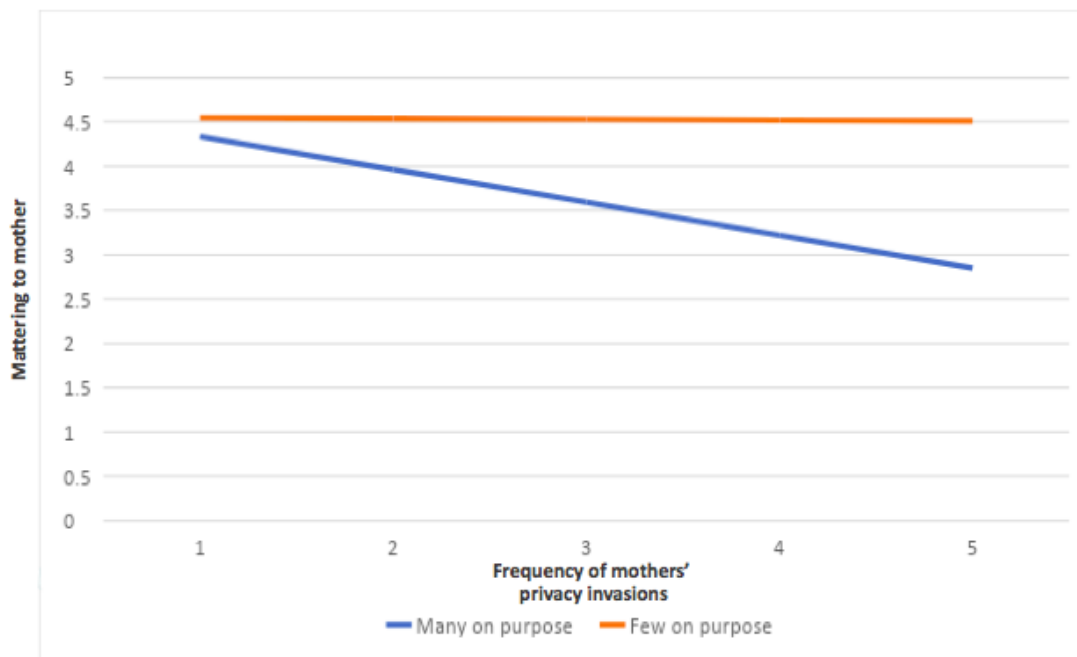


Figure 1. Interaction of frequency of mothers' privacy invasions to mattering to mother, plotted at many and few times of intentional invasions.

Are privacy invasions related to poor parent-adolescent relationships, and is the association between privacy invasions and parent-adolescents' relationships modified by parent or adolescent gender?

In the second part of our analysis, we conducted a hierarchical regression to test if mattering to mothers were predicted by privacy invasions frequency, privacy invasions intent, and gender of adolescent. We also tested if the association of privacy invasions frequency with mattering was moderated by a) intent or b) the gender of the adolescent. The results showed that block 1 was not significant (see Table 2). We tested the interactions of invasion frequency with adolescent gender and with parents' intent but found only one significant interaction.

Specifically, the frequency of maternal privacy invasions by intentional invasions explained

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approximately 6 % of the variance in the model, over and above the linear model ($R^2_{change} = .06$, $F_{change} = 4.84$, $p = .03$).

We probed the interaction (see Figure 1), which shows that when mothers intentionally invaded, the more they invaded, the less adolescents perceived they mattered to their mothers. No significant association emerged between frequent invasions and perceptions of mattering at low levels of intent.

We tested the same model for fathers, however, no significant results were found in mattering to fathers predicted by privacy invasions frequency or privacy invasions intent in block 1 (see Table 2). Neither did we find any significant support that the association between frequency and mattering was moderated by either intent or adolescent gender for any of the interactions tested (see block 2, 3 and 4 in Table 2).

Discussion

We conducted this study to understand the links between parents' privacy invasions and adolescents' perceptions of their relationships with their parents we conducted this study. We also wanted to understand if the links depend on the gender of the adolescent or the parent. Our findings provided no support at the multivariate level that invasions, intent, or adolescents' gender predicted mattering to mothers or fathers. However, we found that the frequency of privacy invasions did have an association with how adolescents perceived themselves mattering to mothers. In consideration of our interpretation of mattering as an indicator of the quality of parent-adolescent relationship, this result suggests that the more mothers invade their children's' privacy, the worse adolescents rate the quality of the mother-adolescent relationships. Such an interpretation would be consistent with other research (Tilton-Weaver & Trost, 2012). However, this association could also be interpreted as meaning that the poorer the relationship, the more frequently mothers invade adolescents' privacy.

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Moreover, this linear relationship was moderated by intent. That is, intentional invasions combined with frequent invasions were related to adolescents feeling they mattered less to their mothers than less frequent, but intentional invasions. However, this type of association was not found for fathers. It is possible that mothers' invasive behaviors are more noticeable, perhaps because they are like other behaviors, where mothers engage in control and solicitation more than fathers (Hawk et al., 2008). These more noticeable behaviors are easier for adolescents to recognize, then later report as invasive behaviors.

Since this area has not been researched to the same extent as many other areas within psychology, our findings contribute to the hopefully developing area of privacy invasions and its association with parent-adolescent relationships. We believe that our findings can help both adolescents and parents in understanding these invasions as well as what the effect of these invasions could be (e.g., decrease in perceived quality of the relationship between adolescents and their parents). It is possible that our findings may give parents insight into their children's need for privacy and that their invasive behaviors, both accidental and intentional are recognized by the adolescents. This research combined with other research could contribute to developing better ways to cope with similar issues regarding privacy invasions and boundaries, especially within the family constellation.

We recognize that there are limitations to be considered in our study. One limitation is that we did not use parents' reports of privacy invasions; we used only the adolescents' reports. Using the parents' reports might have provided a different perspective because parents might claim that they do not engage in privacy invasions when their adolescents report that they do. This could have created another dimension of our study where differences in perceived invasions could have been considered. Another limitation is that our sample is quite small which decreases generalizability. The reason for this small sample size is possibly due to missing data at the item

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level. When creating the study variables, we collapsed across items only when adolescents had answered all of them. Replacing the missing data with multiple imputation would have been a less biased approach. Because we limited people, we also limited variability, which we believe increased the likelihood of Type 2 error. Creating the variables as we did may have also introduced selection bias. Lastly, our data were cross-sectional, and limits our interpretation of causal directions. We recommend future researchers study the same issues with longitudinal data. Using longitudinal data would allow researchers to see changes in development and potential directionality.

Regardless of the limitations listed above, our study has some important strengths, including the study variables. This is one of the first studies to distinguish between intentional and unintentional invasions. It is also one of the few that allowed comparisons by gender. This allowed us to examine gender differences.

For future studies, we propose that trust be included as a variable in order to see how this could be acting as a mediator in the association between invasions and poor parent-adolescent relationship. Since studies have shown that privacy invasions by parents is related to the level of trust within the parent-adolescent relationships (Tilton-Weaver & Trost, 2012), studying trust as a process linking the two would provide important insight. We recommend using longitudinal data to see if trust in the parent-adolescent relationship changes over time and the association this would have with the quality of parent-adolescent relationships. If possible, we would like to see an experimental study on the issue of privacy invasions. Vignettes, such as those used by Kakihara and Tilton-Weaver (2009) could be used, allowing glimpses into causal ordering. By differentiating the gender of both parent and adolescent in regard to privacy invasions and the association with the relationship, we believe that our study provides a new perspective to this field of research.

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In conclusion, our results support the idea that frequent intentional invasions by mothers are related to adolescents feeling they matter less to their mothers.

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