

Discrepancies in Adolescent-Mother Perceptions of the Family and Adolescent Anxiety Symptomatology

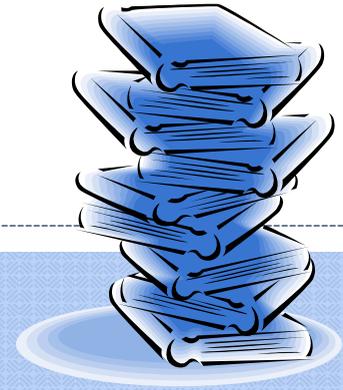
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Background



- We (Ohannessian et al., 2000) have found early adolescents to report lower levels of family cohesion and family satisfaction than their parents. Adolescents also report lower levels of parental monitoring and more communication problems in comparison to their parents (De Los Reyes et al., 2013; Laird & De Los Reyes, 2013).
- Currently, there is disagreement among scholars in regard to whether these differences in adolescent and parent perceptions of the family are adaptive for the adolescent and/or the family.

Discrepant Perceptions as Adaptive



- Adolescent–parent disagreements may serve key developmental functions such as the development of adolescent autonomy and the realignment of family relationships.
- In a study examining 10-to-14-year-old adolescents with type I diabetes (Butner et al., 2009), discrepancies between adolescents' and parents' perceptions of the adolescent's competence in caring for his/her diabetes were associated with increased levels of adolescent autonomy and parental encouragement of independence.

Discrepant Perceptions as Maladaptive



- Research also shows that in the short term, differences in perceptions may be associated with increased levels of conflict and stress within the family.
- Discrepancies in adolescents' and their parents' perceptions of family have been associated with adolescent depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem, externalizing behaviors, and substance use.

Limitations of the Literature – Statistical Issues



- Most studies that have examined adolescent-parent discrepancies in perceptions have used methodologically limited methods for measuring discrepancies such as difference scores.
- A more appropriate approach for examining discrepant perceptions is to use statistical tests of moderation between family members' reports (Laird & Weems, 2011). Moderation tests examine whether the interaction between two informants' reports yields new information beyond the main effects of the individual informants' reports.

Limitations of the Literature – Sample Considerations



- The majority of studies examining discrepancies in adolescent–parent perceptions have focused on young adolescents.
- It would be important to examine older adolescents given that theories relating to adolescent autonomy suggest that discrepancies in adolescent–parent perceptions should increase as the adolescent pushes for more autonomy (e.g., Baltes & Silverberg, 1994).



Limitations of the Literature – Need to Address Gender Differences



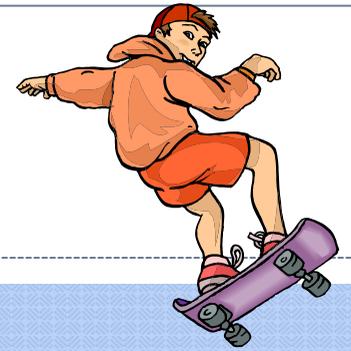
- Research conducted on discrepant adolescent–parent perceptions also has not adequately addressed gender differences. This is unfortunate since girls have closer relationships with their family and are more sensitive to disruptions and conflict in their family environment in comparison to boys.
- Because girls are more engaged in the family than are boys during adolescence girls may be more negatively affected by disagreements, conflict, and problems occurring within the family.

Research Questions



- Do adolescents have more negative perceptions of the family than their mothers during late adolescence?
- Do perceptions of the family (adolescent or mother) predict later adolescent anxiety symptomatology?
- Do discrepancies in adolescents' and their mothers' perceptions of the family predict adolescent anxiety symptomatology?
- Do these relations differ by the gender of the adolescent?

Sample and Procedures



- The sample included 145 15-18 year-old adolescents (mean age = 15.98, SD=.70; 75% Caucasian; 56% girls) and their mothers.
- The adolescents attended a public high school in Delaware, Pennsylvania, or Maryland and were in the 10th or 11th grade at the start of the study.
- Surveys were administered in high schools in the Spring of 2007 (Time 1) and 2008 (Time 2). Mothers were mailed surveys to complete at home.

Adolescent-Parent Communication



- The 20-item Adolescent-Parent Communication Scale (Barnes & Olson, 2003) was used to measure communication between adolescents and their mothers.
- A sample item is “There are topics I avoid discussing with my mother/child”. The response scale ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.
- Separate total scores were calculated for adolescents and their mothers (α coefficients ranged from .88-.91).

Family Satisfaction



- The Family Satisfaction Scale (FSS; Olson & Wilson, 1982) was completed by adolescents and their mothers to assess their satisfaction with the family.
- A representative item is “How satisfied are you with how close you feel to the rest of your family?” The response scale ranged from 1 = *dissatisfied* to 5 = *extremely satisfied*.
- Separate total FSS scores were calculated for adolescents and mothers (α coefficients ranged from .83-.91).

Adolescent Anxiety



- The Screen for Child Anxiety Related Disorders (SCARED; Birmaher et al., 1995) was administered to the adolescents to assess their anxiety.
- Items were completed in reference to the past 3 months. A representative item is “I get really frightened for no reason at all.” The response scale ranged from 0=*not true or hardly ever true* to 2=*very true or often true*.
- The 41 items were summed to reflect total overall anxiety symptomatology (α coefficients ranged from .93-.94).

Results



- Paired-samples t -tests were conducted, by adolescent gender, to examine mean differences in the family variables for adolescents and their mothers.
- At Time 1 and Time 2, both adolescent girls and boys reported significantly less positive communication than their mothers.
- At Time 1, adolescent girls reported significantly less satisfaction with their family in comparison to their mothers . At Time 2, difference in family satisfaction between adolescents and their mothers were not observed.

Regression Analyses



- Multiple hierarchical regression models were conducted to examine the relationship between adolescent-mother discrepancies in perceptions of the family and adolescent anxiety.
- The SCARED total score was the dependent variable. Standardized adolescent and mother reports of communication/satisfaction (assessed at Time 1) were each entered in the first step as independent variables. In the second step, the interaction between standardized adolescent and mother reports of communication/satisfaction was entered.

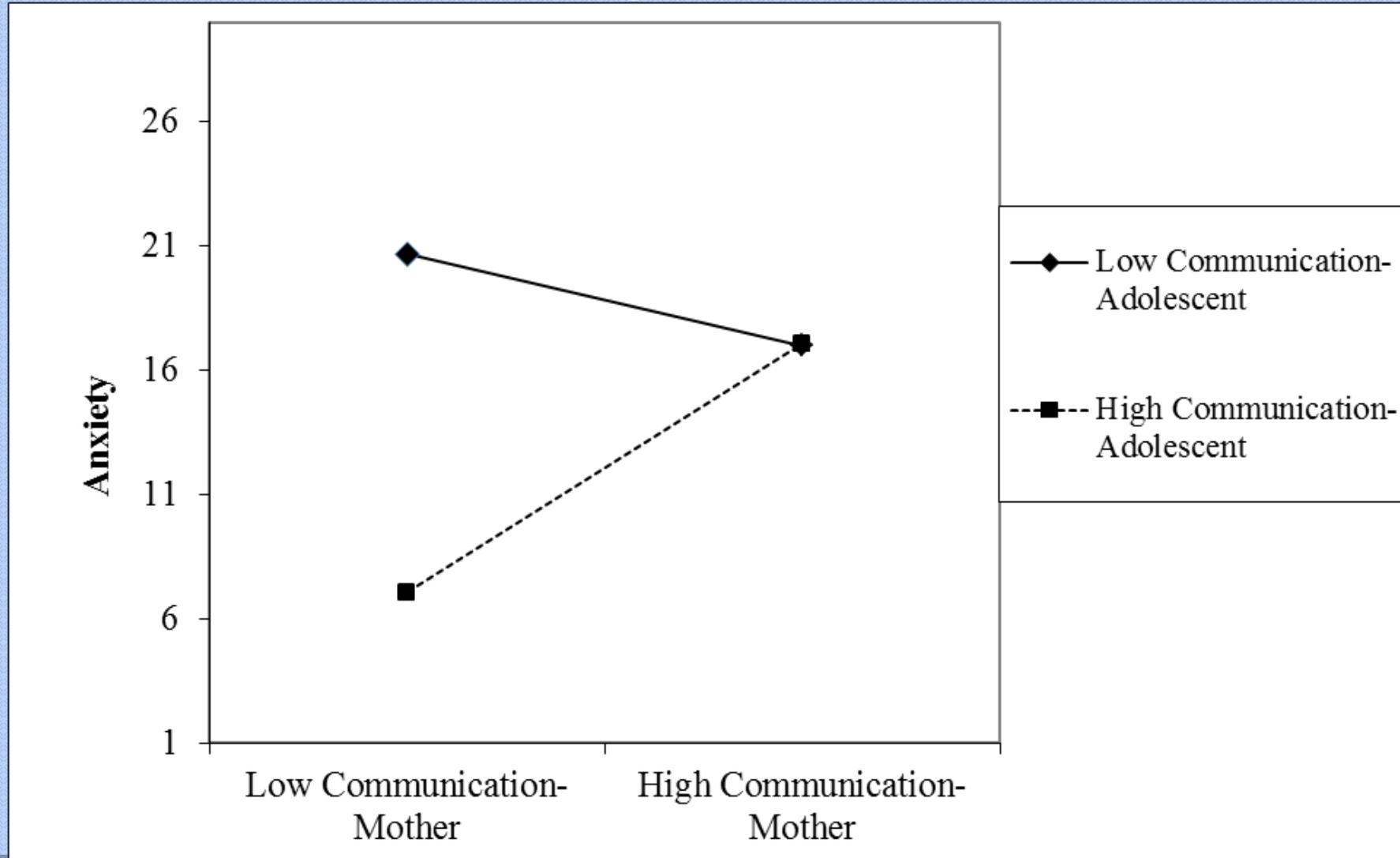
Results – Communication



- For girls, a significant main effect for adolescent communication was found, with girls reporting less positive adolescent-mother communication reporting higher levels of anxiety one year later ($\beta = -.34, p < .05$).
- This relationship depended on mother reported communication - there was no relationship between adolescent reported communication and adolescent anxiety symptoms at high levels of mother reported communication. However, at low levels of mother reported communication, a significant relationship between adolescent reported communication and adolescent anxiety symptoms was found.

Figure 1

The Interaction Between Adolescent and Mother Reports of Communication on Adolescent Anxiety



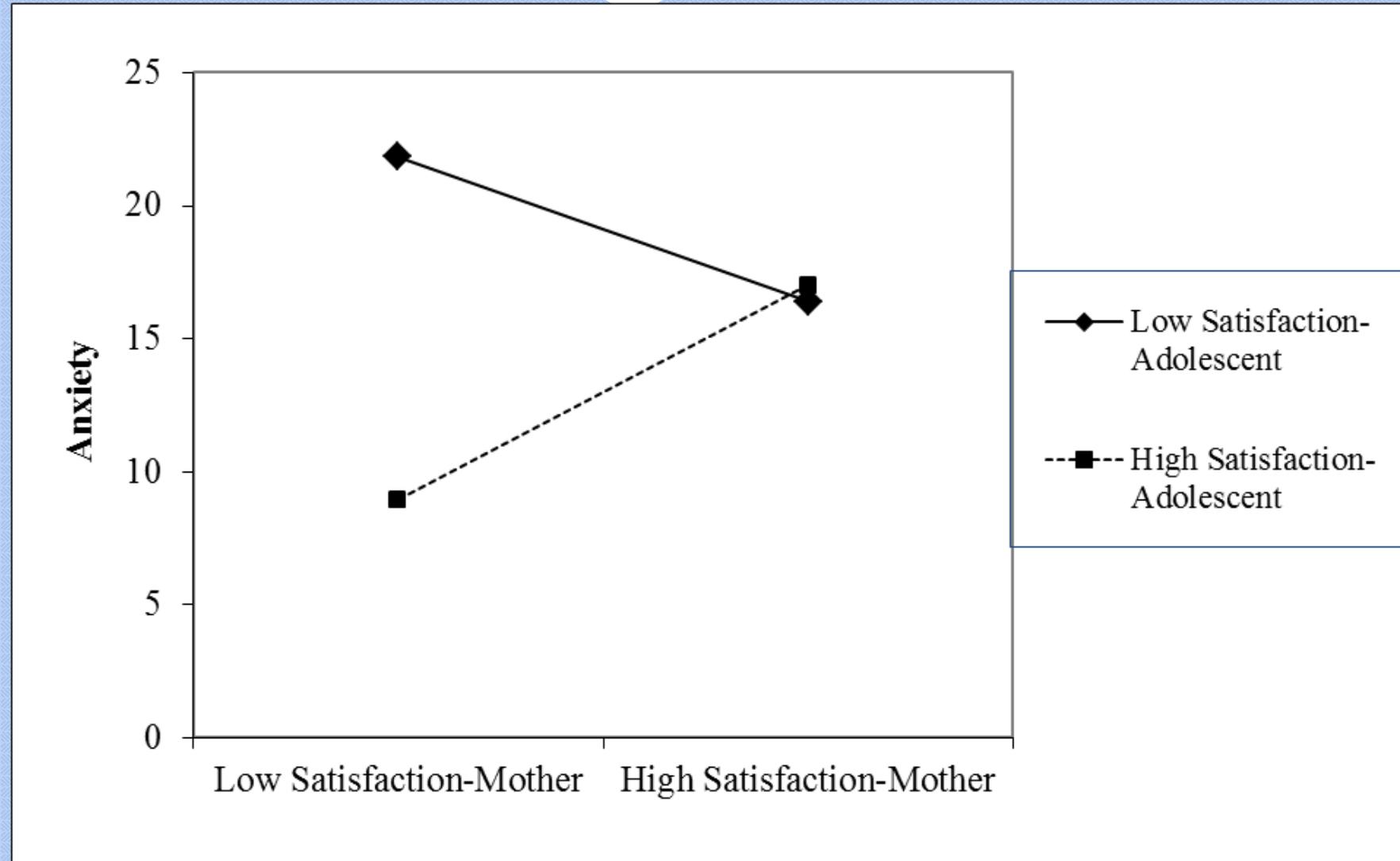
Results – Family Satisfaction



- A significant main effect for adolescent reported family satisfaction also was found, with girls reporting less family satisfaction reporting higher levels of anxiety one year later ($\beta = -.34, p < .05$).
- Again, this relationship depended on mother reported family satisfaction.
- None of the main effects or interaction effects were significant for boys.

Figure 1

The Interaction Between Adolescent and Mother Reports of Satisfaction on Adolescent Anxiety



Conclusions



- Results from this study emphasize the importance of taking both adolescents' and their parents' perceptions into account, as well as considering gender, when examining the relationship between the family and adolescent psychological adjustment.
- For girls, having discrepant perceptions of the family with their mothers appeared to protect them from anxiety if their mothers had negative perceptions of the family.

Conclusions



- Understanding the similarities and differences among family members' perspectives yields useful predictive information that cannot be obtained from studying these perspectives in isolation from each other.

