Adolescents’ and Mothers’ Perceptions of the Family and Mothers’ Psychological Adjustment

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• Adolescents view the family more negatively in comparison to their parents (De Los Reyes, Ohannessian, & Laird, 2016; Ohannessian & De Los, Reyes, 2014).

• Research has shown that such discrepancies in adolescents’ and their parents’ perceptions of the family are associated with adolescent psychological adjustment (Cordova et al., 2016; Leung, Shek, & Li, 2016; Ohannessian, 2012).
To date, research examining adolescents' and parents’ perceptions of the family in relation to outcomes has focused on adolescent outcomes. The lack of research focusing on parental adjustment is a key gap given that according to family systems theory, family members intrinsically are connected to one another, and the behavior of all individuals in the family influences the behavior of all other family members (Bowen, 1991; Minuchin, 2002).
Research Questions

- During late adolescence, do adolescents have more negative perceptions of the family than do their mothers?

- To what degree are adolescents’ and their mothers’ perceptions of the family correlated with one another?

- Do differences and/or similarities in adolescents’ and their mothers’ perceptions of the family predict mothers’ psychological symptomatology?
Participants

- The sample included 141 adolescents (56% girls) and their mothers

- Mean age = 15.99 years, SD = .70 (range = 15-18)

- 75% of the adolescents were White, 12% were Black, 7% were Hispanic, and 2% were Asian American

- Most of the adolescents (72%) lived with both of their biological parents
Link to full-text article available!

Posted on October 20, 2017

The AAP article entitled, "BMI z-scores and weight status predict conduct disorder symptoms in adolescents" is available online in the Journal of Adolescent Health until December 9, 2017. Be sure to check it out!
Procedure

- Public high schools in Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Maryland were invited to participate in the study.
- 10th and 11th grade students from participating schools, who provided assent and parental consent, completed a self-report survey in school.
- The survey took approximately 40 minutes to complete. Adolescents were given a movie pass for their participation.
- Parents were mailed a survey packet and a $20 gift card upon receipt of their completed survey.
Measures

The Adolescent-Parent Communication Scale (Barnes & Olson, 2003)

- Administered to both adolescents and mothers
- Includes 10-item subscales that reflect open communication and communication problems
- Respective sample items are “I find it easy to discuss problems with my child/mother” and “I don’t think I can tell my child/mother how I really feel about some things.”
- Response scale ranges from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree
- Cronbach’s alpha coefficients = .78-.92
Measures

Family Satisfaction Scale (Olson & Wilson, 1989).

- Administered to adolescents and mothers
- Includes 7 items that are summed
- A representative item is “How satisfied are you with how close you feel to the rest of your family?”
- The response scale ranges from 1 = dissatisfied to 5 = extremely satisfied
- Separate scores were calculated for adolescents and mothers
- Cronbach’s alpha coefficients = .90 for the adolescents’ reports and .83 for the mothers’ reports
Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) (Derogatis, 1993)

- Administered to mothers to assess their psychological distress
- The 53 BSI items were summed to create a Global Severity Index reflecting overall psychological distress
- A sample BSI item is “How much were you distressed by feelings of worthlessness?”
- The response scale ranges from 0 = not at all to 4 = extremely
- Cronbach’s alpha coefficient = .95
Analytic Plan

- Paired-samples $t$-tests were conducted to assess mean-level correspondence between adolescents and mothers.
- Polynomial regression analyses were used to test whether adolescent-mother congruence in reports of family communication or satisfaction predicted mothers’ psychological symptoms. In a series of models, each mother outcome was regressed on adolescent and mother reports of each family functioning variable and the two-way multiplicative interaction between adolescent and mother reports.
Analytic Plan

- The interaction term(s) tested the fundamental discrepancy hypothesis that associations between mother outcomes and reports of family functioning provided by mothers varied as a function of reports of family functioning provided by adolescents.

- Post-hoc probing of significant interaction terms, via simple slopes analyses and plotting, was conducted to determine whether mothers’ psychological symptoms were most common (a) when adolescents and mothers disagreed on family functioning regardless of level or (b) when adolescents and mothers agreed that family functioning was poor.
Paired-samples $t$-tests

- Mothers reported more open communication than did adolescents, $t(117) = 4.46, p<.001$.
- Adolescents reported more communication problems than did mothers, $t(122) = -7.16, p<.001$. 
Results

Polynomial Regression Analyses

Predicting mothers’ reports of their psychological problems using adolescent and mother reports of open communication

- The interaction between adolescent and mother reports of open communication predicted mothers’ psychological problems. The linear slope for mother reports of open communication was negative at low levels of adolescent-reported open communication, but flat at high levels of adolescent-reported open communication. Mothers reported the most psychological symptoms when adolescents and mothers agreed that communication was low.
Figure 1 - Mother's Reports of their Psychological Symptoms Regressed on Mother-Reported Open Communication at High and Low Levels of Adolescent-Reported Open Communication

- Low (-1SD) A-R Open Communication: $B = -14.73, SE = 6.05, p = .015$
- High (+1SD) A-R Open Communication: $B = 1.64, SE = 6.34, p = .796$
Results

Polynomial Regression Analyses

Predicting mothers’ reports of their psychological problems from adolescent and mother reports of communication problems

- The interaction between adolescent and mother reports of communication problems predicted mothers’ psychological problems. The linear slope for mother reports of communication problems was positive at high levels of adolescent-reported communication problems, but not at low levels of adolescent-reported communication problems. **Mothers reported the most psychological symptoms when adolescents and mothers agreed that they had a high level of communication problems.**
Figure 2 - Mother’s Reports of their Psychological Symptoms Regressed on Mother-Reported Communication Problems at High and Low Levels of Adolescent-Reported Communication Problems

- **Low (-1SD) A-R Communication Problems**
- **High (+1SD) A-R Communication Problems**

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- $B = 12.08, SE = 4.03, p = .003$
- $B = .73, SE = 3.66, p = .84$
Predicting mothers’ reports of their psychological problems from adolescent and mother reports of family satisfaction

• The interaction between adolescent and mother reports of family satisfaction predicted mothers’ psychological problems as well. The linear slope for mother reports of family satisfaction was negative at low levels of adolescent-reported satisfaction, but not at high levels of adolescent-reported satisfaction. Mothers reported the most psychological symptoms when adolescents and mothers both reported low levels of family satisfaction.
Figure 3 - Mother’s Reports of their Psychological Symptoms Regressed on Mother-Reported Family Satisfaction at High and Low Levels of Adolescent-Reported Family Satisfaction

Low (-1SD) A-R Family Satisfaction

High (+1SD) A-R Family Satisfaction

$B = -15.80, SE = 5.27, p = .003$

$B = 1.45, SE = 5.08, p = .776$
Conclusions

- Recent work indicates that patterns of divergence and convergence between adolescent and parent reports of family functioning may be important for predicting adolescent psychological problems. Our findings extend this work to demonstrating that these patterns of multi-informant reports also have implications for predicting mothers’ psychological problems.

- These findings emphasize that the amalgamation of adolescents’ and parents’ perceptions of family functioning may serve as an important marker for both adolescent and parent psychological functioning.
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