

Subjective and Observer Ratings of African American
Mother-Adolescent Interactions

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Author Notes

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Introduction

Family members can have both unique and shared views of the family, and this recognition has led to increased interest in individuals' subjective understanding of family interactions (e.g., Powers, Welsh, & Wright, 1994). Subjective reports are important in understanding the meaning of the interaction to participants and therefore may be more, or differentially, predictive of family processes than objective observers' ratings. These interpretations also may change over time. For instance, as adolescents strive to obtain more autonomy from their parents, their subjective understanding of their interactions may become increasingly negative, and more differentiated than others' (e.g., parents' or observers') views of the same interactions. We examined subjective and observer ratings longitudinally from early to middle adolescence in a sample of middle class African American families. We also examined the longitudinal effects of divergent perspectives on family relationship processes, including conflict and communication.

3 Aims of Current Study

1) To examine the differences in observersí, mothersí, and adolescentsí views of their interaction.

Hypothesis 1: Observers will differ from mothers and adolescents in their ratings of support and involvement.

Hypothesis 2: Over time, adolescentsí ratings of interactions with mothers will become less positive than mothers ratings.

Hypothesis 3: Adolescent malesí and their mothersí reports will show greater differences than those of adolescent femalesí and their mothersí reports.

2) To determine the influence of subjective understanding on predicting several family processes.

Hypothesis 4: Early adolescentsí views of their mothers during a structured family interaction task will influence ratings of conflict intensity and number of conflicts in middle adolescence, after controlling for observersí ratings and mothersí ratings of themselves during early adolescence.

Hypothesis 5: Both mothersí and adolescentsí views of each other in early adolescence will have a significant influence on middle adolescentsí ratings of trust/communication, after controlling for the observersí ratings of support and involvement in early adolescence.

3) To examine the moderating role of adolescent gender.

Hypothesis 6: Adolescent gender will moderate the relationship between subjective ratings of the interaction and mother-adolescent conflict severity, number of conflicts, and trust and communication.

Methods

Participants

	Time 1	Time 2
N of Mother-Adolescent Dyads	93	83
Adolescent Age (Years)	13.14 (1.29)	15.05 (1.28)
% Intact Family	53%	51%
Adolescent Gender	47 males; 46 females	41 males; 42 females
Mom Education (Years)	14.88 (SD) = 2.27	
Family Income	42% = \$25,000 - \$50,000; 48% = \$50,000 +	

Procedure

- ï Mothers and adolescents participated in a 10-min. Family Interaction Task (FIT).
- ï Videotapes of FITs rated by trained observers with high reliability.
- ï Mothers and adolescents rated interactions on 5-pt. scales of support and involvement following the task.
- ï Adolescents also rated trust and communication with mothers and both mothers and adolescents rated the intensity and number of their everyday conflicts at two time points.

Ratings of FIT (Time 1 and Time 2)

Objective observer coding: 6 ratings of support and involvement: listened to other, supportive, warmth, explained position, involved/interested, tolerates differences.

Obsv. → Mom

Obsv. → Teen

Subjective family member ratings: 4-7 ratings of support and involvement: discussed true feelings, listened to other, supportive, positive, explained position, involved/interested, other free to express opinions.

Mom → Mom

Mom → Teen

Teen → Teen

Teen → Mom

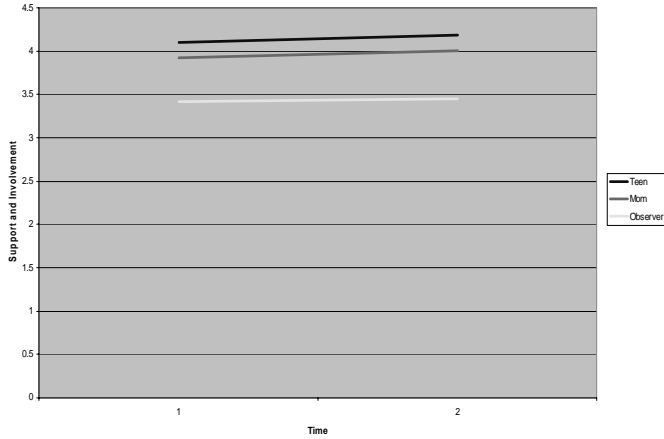
Ratings of Family Processes (Time 1 and Time 2)

Family Conflict: Issues Checklist rated by both mother and adolescent (Prinz, Foster, Kent, & O'Leary, 1979; Robin & Foster, 1989).

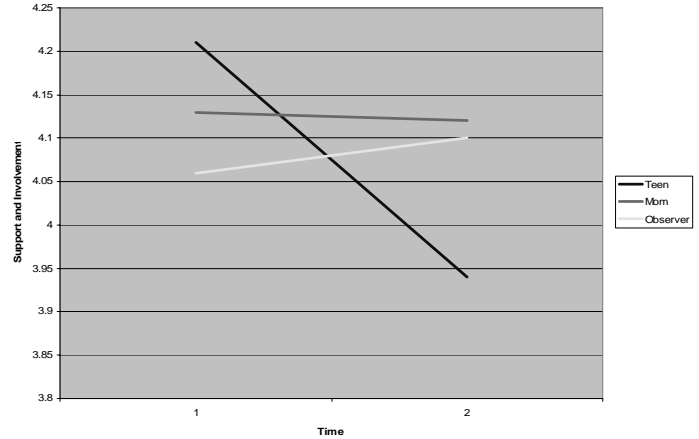
Attachment to Mothers: Trust and Communication subscales of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment as rated by adolescents (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

Results

Aim 1: Subjective understanding over time.
Ratings of Teen



Ratings of Mom



Hypothesis 1: Teen > Mom > Observer in ratings of Teen Support & Involvement

Hypothesis 2: Adolescents' view of their mothers became less positive over time.

Hypothesis 3: No gender effects found.

Aim 2: Effects of subjective understanding on family processes.

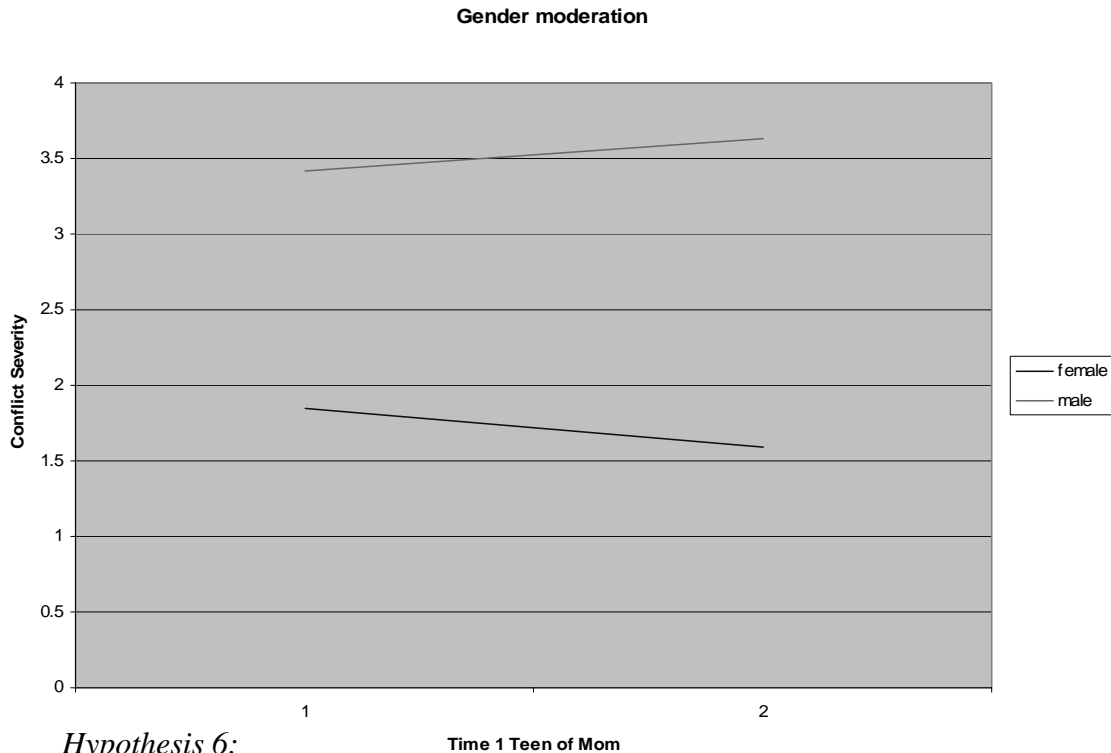
Regression

Controls	→ Control for Obsv. →	Sub. Ratings	→ Interaction	Family Process
<u>Sex, Mom's Ed</u>	<u>O → M; O → T</u>		<u>Sex X Sub. Rate</u>	
NS	NS	T → M: NS M → M: NS	t(75) = 2.38, p < .05 t(75) = -2.54, p < .05	Conflict Intensity
NS	NS	T → M: NS	NS	# of Conflicts
p < .10	p < .10	T → M: F(8,78) = 5.09, p < .05 M → T: NS	NS	Trust/Communication

Hypothesis 4: Conflict intensity and number of conflicts = NS

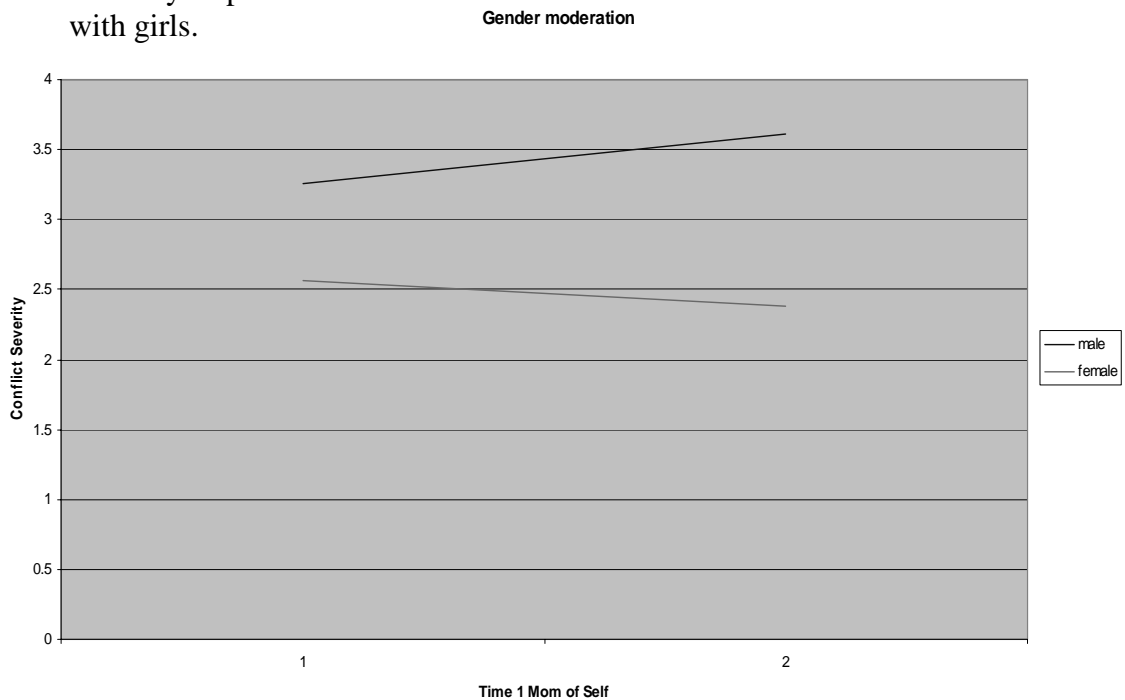
Hypothesis 5: Adolescents' ratings of mothers' support and involvement at Time 1, significantly predicted trust and communication at Time 2, after controlling for observer ratings

Aim 3: Gender as a moderator.



Hypothesis 6:

- ï When adolescents' ratings of mothers' support and involvement in a dyadic task is low, there are no gender differences in families' ratings of conflict intensity two years later.
- ï When adolescents' ratings of mothers' support and involvement is high, families with girls report more intense conflicts in middle adolescence than do families with boys.
- ï When mothers' ratings of their own support and involvement is low, there are no sex differences in families' ratings of conflict intensity two years later.
- ï When mothers' ratings of their own support and involvement is high, families with boys report more intense conflicts in middle adolescence than do families with girls.



Discussion

- 1) African American adolescents' perceptions of their mothers' support and involvement in a family interaction task became more negative from early to middle adolescence, while mothers' and observers' views of mothers' behavior during those interactions did not change significantly over time. The transition from early to middle adolescence may be an especially important time in terms of adolescents' individuation from their parents, and these changes in adolescents' perceptions of their mothers may reflect this process.
- 2) Across time, observers viewed adolescents' support and involvement towards their mothers as more negative than did mothers or adolescents, and mothers viewed adolescents' behavior more negatively than adolescents did themselves. This supports our hypothesis that adolescents' and mothers' views are closer to each other than to objective observers' views of the interaction. Our findings suggest that family members have a shared reality that may differ from outside observers' views.
- 3) Adolescents' perception of trust and communication during middle adolescence were influenced by adolescents' perceptions of their mothers' behavior during a dyadic interaction task two years earlier. Adolescents' ratings influenced their perceptions of trust and communication with mothers, even after controlling for the effects of observers' ratings of both mothers' and adolescents' behaviors. This finding suggests that adolescents' interpretations of their mothers' actions have a unique influence on their perceptions of closeness with mothers that researchers cannot assess by observations alone.
- 4) When adolescents' perceptions of support/involvement in a dyadic task is high, African American families with girls show greater conflict intensity with their mothers than do families with sons. This exemplifies previous work by Youniss and Smollar (1985), which showed that adolescent daughters and mothers are both closer and more conflictive than sons with either parent.

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