Differences in Parent-Adolescent Interaction Behaviors with First- and Later-Born Children

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Introduction

• The majority of research on adolescent autonomy development has focused on the relationship between parents and adolescents. It is believed that through a series of conflicts, adolescents negotiate with parents for greater autonomy (Smetana & Asquith, 1994).

• Recent research has also noted that the process of negotiating the boundaries of legitimate parental authority may differ for first- versus later-born children. Specifically, it has been found that later-born adolescents have greater conflicts with parents and expect autonomy at earlier ages than first-born adolescents compared at the same age (Campione-Barr & Smetana, under review).

• Research in this area has yet to investigate differences in the actual behaviors present in parent-adolescent interactions with first- and later-born children.

• The present study examined observer and family member ratings of support and involvement in laboratory interactions and investigated differences in these ratings for parent-first-born and parent-later-born interactions.

Hypotheses

1) *Hypothesis*: Later-born adolescents' interactions will be rated by the parent and observer more negatively across each measure (support, positive attitude, involvement, active listening, etc.) compared to first-born adolescents.

2) *Hypothesis*: Later-born adolescents will rate their parents more negatively than first-born adolescents.

3) *Hypothesis*: Middle adolescents' (10th graders) interactions will be rated by the parent and observer more positively than early adolescents (7th graders).

4) *Hypothesis*: Middle adolescents (10th graders) will report having more positive interactions with their participating parent than early adolescents (7th graders).

Methods

Participants

	7th Grade		10th Grade	
	First-Born	Later-Born	First-Born	Later-Born
n	25	32	32	29
Sex (females)	12	15	18	13
Age	*M* = 12.77 (*SD* = .47) years		*M* = 15.68 (*SD* = .47) years	
Ethnicity	88% European American, 9% African American, 3% Other			
Family Structure	69% 2 Biological Parents, 31% Step or Single Parents			
Income (median)	$55,000 - $69,999			

Procedures

• One parent, and the first- and second-born children in the family visited the University lab for 2 hours as part of a larger study.
• Family members completed questionnaires, sorting tasks, interviews, and video-taped family interactions.
• **Interaction Task:** Mothers and adolescents first spent 3 minutes selecting and agreeing on an issue of conflict to discuss and then spent 5 minutes discussing the issue and working toward a resolution.

Measures

***Subjective Ratings of Support and Involvement in Interactions*:** Perceptions of participants' behaviors were rated in terms of interest and involvement in the task, listening ability, positive feelings, and whether they expressed their true feelings during the discussion (Campione-Barr & Smetana, 2004). Ratings were on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all* ; 5 = *very, very much*).

***Observational Coding of Interactions*:** Interactions between participants were videotaped and then coded using a revised version of the Global Coding System (Smetana, Yau, Restrepo, & Braeges, 1991). Ratings were on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *almost never* ; 5 = *almost always*).

Ratings

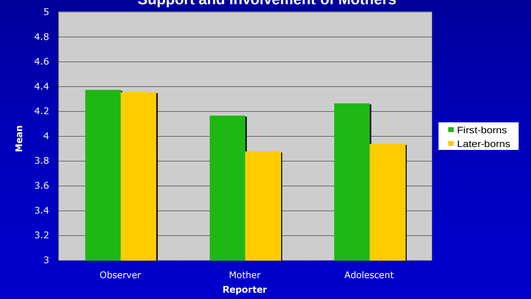
Items Included in Ratings of Mother-Adolescent Interactions

Mother		Adolescent		Observer	
Rating mother	Rating adolescent	Rating adolescent	Rating mother	Rating mother	Rating adolescent
Expressed true feelings	Expressed true feelings	Expressed true feelings	Expressed true feelings	Comfort	Comfort
Listened to other	Other listened	Listened to other	Other listened	Listened to other	Listened to other
Supportive	Supportive	Supportive	Supportive	Supportive	Supportive
Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Warmth	Warmth
Explained Position	Explained Position	Explained Position	Explained Position	Explained position	Explained position
Involved/Interested in task	Involved/Interested in task	Involved/Interested in task	Involved/Interested in task	Involved/Interested in task	Involved/Interested in task
Other free to express opinion	Felt free to express opinion	Other free to express opinion	Felt free to express opinion	Tolerates differences	Tolerates differences
αs = .88	αs = .85	αs = .77	αs = .77	αs = .69	αs = .62

Analyses

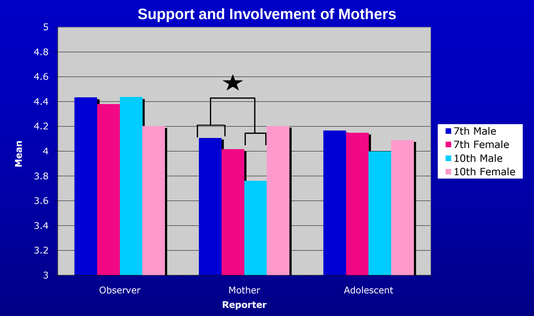
• Two separate 3 (Rater: Observer, Mother, Adolescent) X 2 (Grade: 7th v. 10th) X 2 (Sibling Ordinal Status: First v. Later) X 2 (Sex) Mixed Model ANOVAs were performed; separately for ratings of mothers' behaviors and ratings of adolescents' behaviors.

Results

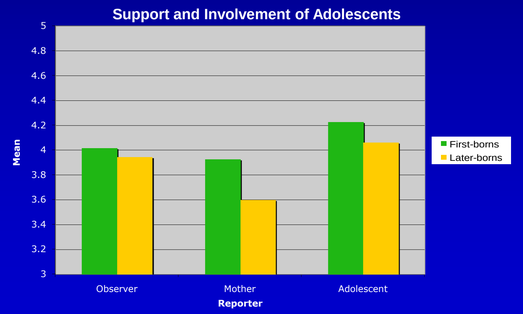


***Sibling Ordinal Status*, $F(1, 109) = 6.60$, $p < .05$**
Across all three raters, mothers of first-borns interacted more positively than mothers of later-borns.

***Reporter*, $F(2,218) = 13.12$, $p < .001$**
Observer rated mother more positively than she rated herself.
Observer rated mother more positively than adolescent rated mother.
Mother and adolescent ratings about mother were not significantly different.

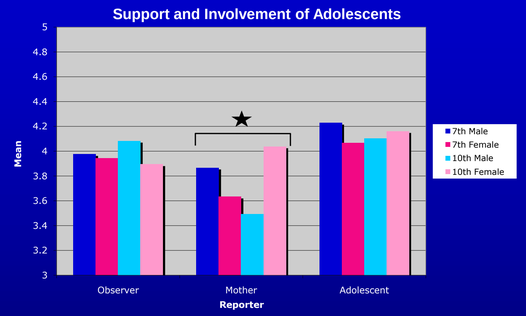


***Reporter X Grade X Sex effect*, $F(2, 218) = 3.32$, $p < .05$**
Mothers of 7th grade boys reported themselves as more positive than mothers of 10th grade boys.



***Sibling Ordinal Status*, $F(1, 109) = 4.11$, $p < .05$**
Across all three raters, first-borns interacted more positively than later-borns.

***Reporter*, $F(2, 218) = 14.52$, $p < .001$**
Adolescent rated themselves as most positive than either observer and mother. However, observer rated adolescent as more positive than mother.



***Reporter X Grade X Sex effect*, $F(2, 218) = 5.42$, $p < .01$**
10th grade females' interactions with mother, were rated by mother as most positive and 10th grade males as least positive.
7th grade males and females fall in-between with 7th grade males being rated by mothers as more positive than 7th grade females.

Discussion

1) *Hypothesis 1*: The present results showed that in this sample of 118 adolescents and one of their parents, mothers' and observers' ratings of participating adolescents were consistent with our hypotheses. In addition, the mothers of the same later-born adolescents displayed more negative behaviors during interactions than did mothers of first-borns. The present study also found that observers rated mothers more positively than both mothers and adolescents rated mother. Observers also rated adolescents as more positive than mothers. These findings suggest that outsiders perceive family interactions more positively than its members (participants).

2) *Hypothesis 2*: First- and later-born adolescents differed in their support and involvement during interactions with their mothers. The findings of sibling ordinal status were consistent with our hypotheses. These findings may be related to the previous research by Campione-Barr and Smetana (under review), which showed that later-born adolescents had earlier expectations of autonomy and reported more conflict with their parents than same-age first-borns. In the present study, the findings of more negative interactions may be due to conflict and negotiation between parents and adolescents over autonomy related issues. The present study also found that adolescents rated themselves as most positive compared to observers and mothers, suggesting adolescents' egocentric view of themselves in regards to their participation in family interactions.

3) *Hypotheses 3 & 4*: The current study's findings partially support the hypotheses of support and involvement differences between male and female, 7th and 10th graders. The findings show that 10th grade females' interactions with mother were rated as most positive and 10th grade males as least positive. 7th grade males and females fell in-between with 7th grade males' interactions with mother were rated by mother as more positive than 7th grade females. There were no main effects of grade to support the hypotheses.

References

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