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Empathic Communication During Mother-Adolescent Conflict Management

By

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Abstract

Empathic Communication During Mother-Adolescent Conflict Management
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Interpersonal conflict management is a context in which empathy and emotion regulation can be both challenging and of vital necessity. The present study examined the effects of empathic communication on conflict management between mother-adolescent dyads ($N = 50$). Mother-adolescent dyads engaged in a 10-minute discussion of a topic of frequent conflict in their relationship. Following the discussion, mothers and adolescents independently completed a post-conflict discussion questionnaire to assess their satisfaction with the discussion. Emotional behaviors during the discussion were coded using the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF). Empathic communication was coded as (1) validation and (2) interest in the other's perspective and feelings. The present study explored several questions related to (1) adolescent age differences in mother and adolescent empathic communication and conflict management, and (2) relations between empathic communication and conflict management. Notably, older adolescents and their mothers displayed more validation than younger adolescents and their mothers. Furthermore, mother's validation was marginally positively correlated with adolescents' satisfaction with the discussion, and this relation was mediated by the degree to which adolescents perceived that their mother understood their point of view and feelings during the discussion. Findings indicate that empathic communication in response to adolescent negative emotion plays a unique role in effective conflict management between mothers and adolescents. Implications for research on empathy and interventions targeted at facilitating effective conflict management between parents and adolescents are discussed.

Acknowledgments

Dedication

"We always did feel the same
We just saw it from a different point of view"

~Bob Dylan

To my parents

There are many definitions of empathy, but most characterize empathy as a primarily intrapsychic phenomenon and focus on the affective match between the empathizer and the target (e.g. Decety & Jackson, 2004; Eisenberg et al., 1998). However, these standard definitions fail to illuminate the relational functions of empathy. Specifically, little theoretical work on empathy has discussed how people communicate empathy to others and how individuals' receptiveness to others' empathic communication affects interpersonal interactions. Furthermore, current empirical work on empathy falls short in elucidating our understanding of the *effect of empathic behaviors upon the emotional behavior of others.*

The present study sought to enrich current understandings and conceptualizations of empathy by utilizing a relational approach examining the effects of empathic communication on the emotional behavior of others in an ecologically valid context. Specifically, mother-adolescent dyads were observed as they engaged in a discussion about a source of conflict in their relationship. These discussions were coded for specific emotional behaviors, including empathic communication, exhibited by the mother and the adolescent, and these behaviors were evaluated in relation to the mothers' and adolescents' perceptions of how effectively the conflict was managed. The present investigation will explore the real-time consequences of empathic responding in an interpersonal setting.

Empathy

Traditional approaches to the study of empathy. Many approaches to the study of empathy emphasize the intrapsychic feeling states associated with empathy and the subsequent motivational consequences assumed to be involved in these feeling states. One clear theoretical approach to the arousal processes of affective empathy and their development comes from Hoffman (2000). In this view, empathic distress (i.e., feelings of distress in response to another's distress or situation) serves the function of motivating the empathizer to help the person in distress. Hoffman uses a series of studies demonstrating that empathy is correlated with helping behavior, precedes helping behavior, and the feeling of empathic distress decreases once one helps to support his theoretical perspective. Additionally, facial and physiological indices of empathy are associated with prosocial behavior in children (Eisenberg, 2000). Therefore, in this view, the function of empathy (at least in response to others' distress) is to motivate prosocial behavior.

Researchers commonly draw a distinction between different types of empathy-related responses, most notably empathy, personal distress, and sympathy (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987). The first researchers to make this distinction were Batson, Fultz, and Schoenrade (1987), who argued that empathy (conceptualized as "sympathy" by Eisenberg and Strayer) and personal distress are two qualitatively distinct emotions with different motivational consequences. They proposed that the motivation of personal distress is to reduce one's own discomfort in response to another's distress (i.e., a self-focused reaction), while the motivation of empathy (or sympathy) is to reduce *the other's* distress. Batson et al. (1987) considered the former an egoistic motive and the latter an altruistic motive. Through a series of quasi- and true experimental studies, Batson et al. provide convincing evidence that these two empathy-related emotions are qualitatively distinct and have functional differences. This research supports Hoffman's (2000) distinction between empathic distress and sympathetic distress, the latter of which is considered a more "mature" form of empathy that may begin with feelings of empathic distress that are "transformed" into concern for the other. Eisenberg and Strayer (1987) argued that this transformation from empathy to sympathy might occur through emotion regulatory processes, with sympathy reflecting a "well-regulated" empathic response that allows the empathizer to

maintain a focus on the other. Eisenberg (2000) argues that sympathy may not always begin as empathy, but may arise out of a purely cognitive understanding of the other's situation.

      Limitations of traditional approaches. While investigations into the processes through which empathy and empathy-related responses are aroused is an important area of inquiry, far less attention has been paid to whether (1) empathy is effective or adaptive in particular contexts, (2) how empathy is communicated to others, and (3) the subsequent effect of empathic behaviors on other individuals during social interaction.

      The traditional conceptualization of empathy as affect matching may be problematic in certain contexts. For example, Levenson and Gottman (1983) found that greater physiological linkage (i.e., having the same level of physiological arousal as one's partner) during a marital conflict discussion was associated with poorer marital satisfaction. Interestingly, Levenson and Ruef (1992) found that physiological linkage between married couples was correlated with empathic accuracy (i.e., correctly labeling the partner's emotions). Taken together, these findings suggest that while having a similar level of physiological arousal as one's partner can contribute to one's ability to correctly label another's emotions, it is also associated with poorer relationship outcomes (e.g., more conflict, lower relationship satisfaction). Assuming that individuals who display empathic behaviors (irrespective of contextual considerations) will invariably have better social outcomes is misleading. Additional research is needed that examines the effects of empathy-related behaviors on outcomes (see Eisenberg, 2000; Moreno, Klute, & Robinson, 2008). However, most studies that examine outcomes of empathy do so irrespectively of context.

      One reason why affect matching and empathic accuracy may not be associated with positive relationship outcomes is because individuals high on these abilities may not understand *why* the social partner is feeling the way he does (Halpern, 2001). Additionally, individuals with low marital satisfaction may have difficulty communicating empathy to their social partner. While empathy may tap on constructs like emotional contagion (see Hatfield, 1994), affective matching (Feshbach & Roe, 1968), and empathic accuracy (Ickes, 1993), there are likely other types of "empathies" that are appropriate in certain contexts. These different facets of empathy may relate uniquely to interpersonal outcomes because each may serve a distinct function. For example, validation of another's feelings may demonstrate an understanding of why someone is experiencing a particular emotion. On the other hand, validation may also be maladaptive because there is an assumption about the other person's perspective that may or may not be accurate (Halpern, 2001). Thus, validation may be appropriate when the empathizer has sufficient information about the other, but when he/she does not, curiosity or interest may be more appropriate. I conceptualize empathy as *a genuine interest in and curiosity about another's perspective in personally significant situations and behaving in a way that shows an understanding of or an effort to understand the other's goals* (for a similar definition, see Halpern, 2001).

      Furthermore, little research has been conducted on how empathy is communicated in social contexts. Research examining empathy in the context of dynamic social interaction (rather than relying on self-report, vignettes, and responses to films) will enrich our understanding of empathy by revealing how empathy is communicated in the real world. Relatedly, most research examining empathic behaviors (e.g., helping behavior) has looked at the behavior of the empathizer, but not on how these behaviors affect the individual being empathized with (Hollan & Throop, 2008). Empathy is not an instantaneous phenomenon – it involves dynamic emotional attunement in real time (Halpern, 2001). In order for an individual to behave empathically, he or she must draw on the correct skill at the correct time and behave in a way that is congruent with the other's goals. Indeed, the use of corrective feedback is crucial to the empathy process (Halpern, 2001). To my

knowledge, no studies have looked at how individuals use corrective feedback to respond prosocially. For instance, if one strategy for alleviating the other's distress does not work, can the individual flexibly switch to another strategy through a process of corrective feedback?

In summary, although extensive research has been conducted to study the process of empathic arousal and links between this arousal and prosocial tendencies, most empathy researchers have not fully considered the role of context. Studies of helping behavior (e.g. Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992) rarely manipulate contextual features to examine whether the child uses empathy-related skills to respond appropriately. For example, helping an individual who values independence above all else would be anything but sensitive to that individual's goals, and thus quite unempathic despite the overt manifestation of "prosocial" behavior. Questions of contextual relevance and interpersonal outcomes are rarely explored in empathy research. However, researchers in the field of emotion regulation acknowledge that certain emotion regulation strategies cannot be viewed as adaptive or maladaptive irrespective of context (Campos, Walle, Dahl, & Main, 2011; Gross & Thompson, 2007). I believe that applying this approach to research on empathy will contribute to our understanding of the construct.

Emotion Regulation

Empathy researchers are not alone in their tendency to study inherently social phenomena at the level of the individual. While studies of infancy and early childhood tend to use relational methods (e.g., how mothers soothe their children), as children grow older most research on the topic of emotion regulation examines the construct at an intrapersonal level. For example, the typical emotion regulation paradigm examines how an individual uses a particular emotion regulation strategy (e.g., reappraisal) to alter one's experience of emotion, including, but not limited to, feeling (as measured by self-report), facial expression, and physiological arousal (e.g., Gross, 1998). However, less research has studied the interpersonal aspects of emotion regulation. In fact, since 2001, out of the 564 peer-reviewed empirical articles published on emotion regulation in adults and adolescents, only 12% included methodologies that provided participants the opportunity to interact with another person or studies in which the participant believed they were interacting with another individual (Campos et al., 2011). Therefore, emotion regulation research has largely favored the study of the *intra*personal rather than the *inter*personal.

*Intra***personal approaches to the study of emotion regulation.** The *intra*personal approach to the study of emotion regulation often uses emotions as independent variables to judge the effectiveness of instructional sets (i.e., emotion regulation strategies imposed by the experimenter) upon a particular behavior (the dependent variable). The intrapersonal approach is problematic because (1) it assumes a 1:1 relationship between the stimulus and the emotional response of the participant, (2) creates artificial goals for the participant (e.g., reappraisal v. suppression), (3) limits the ways a participant can respond and researchers' interpretations of such behavior, and (4) imposes a temporally rigid structure for studying the emotion regulation process. This temporally rigid structure only allows for emotion regulation to occur at a certain point that is manipulated by the experimenter, despite the fact that theoretical work acknowledges that emotion regulation can occur at any stage in the emotion process and individuals often use more than one emotion regulatory strategy in a given episode (Gross & Thompson, 2007).

*Inter***personal approaches to the study of emotion regulation.** Alternatively, in the *inter*personal view (Campos et al., 2011), emotions can serve as both independent and dependent variables in empirical research. This relational approach emphasizes the use of ecologically valid and personally significant contexts to arouse emotions and prompt naturalistic emotion regulation in order to understand how emotion regulation operates in real life (Campos et al., 2011). This

approach can lead to variability in the stimulus *between* individuals (i.e., what is personally significant to one person is quite different from what is personally significant to another), while maintaining stimulus consistency *within* individuals. Participants are allowed flexibility in the ways in which they respond to personally significant situations as well as the temporal aspects of their responding. Most importantly, the relational approach to the study of emotion regulation emphasizes utilizing interpersonal contexts to study emotion regulation, which is important given the fact that 98% of reported instances of emotion regulation occur in social settings (Gross, Richards, & John, 2006).

I believe that an interpersonal approach to the study of emotion and emotion regulation that underscores the roles of emotions in social interactions is crucial to providing a more complete understanding of the role of emotions in real-life contexts (Campos et al., 2011). One real-life context in which emotion serves to regulate others' behaviors is in the case of empathic communication during situations of conflict.

Empathy and Emotion Regulation during Conflict Management

Previous research examining relations between empathy and emotion regulation have focused on the conceptual distinction between individual differences in sympathy (i.e., regulated empathy with a function of alleviating the others' distress) and personal distress (i.e., poorly regulated empathy with a function of alleviating one's own distress) (Batson et al., 1987; Eisenberg et al., 1989), and how these responses may differentially predict prosocial behavior. However, empathy may also have a positive effect on regulating others' emotions in social interaction, particularly in the ways in which one communicates empathy to others. For example, empathy in response to another's feelings and point of view is likely to prevent the escalation of negative affect (Della Noce, 1999). Indeed, empathic communication may serve as a "critical event" in social interaction that alters the subsequent course of the emotional quality of the interaction (Levenson, personal communication, September, 2011).

A context in which empathy can be both immensely challenging and of vital necessity is during interpersonal conflict. Although some researchers studying conflict have pointed toward the important role of empathy in effective conflict resolution (Broome, 1993; Della Noce, 1999; Halpern, 2007), to my knowledge there has been no empirical work on the topic.

Some definitions of empathy as "feeling what someone else is feeling" could lead one to assume that empathy would exacerbate conflict if one partner were angry, such as in the case of emotional contagion (Hatfield, 1994). However, other definitions more clearly indicate the potentially beneficial effects of empathy on conflict management by promoting an individual's ability to more clearly see issues from the other's perspective (Halpern, 2001). For example, one's empathy during a conflict may contribute to a better understanding of another individual's position, thereby inhibiting destructive behaviors and promoting constructive behaviors (Davis, 1994).

Because successful conflict management inherently involves divergent viewpoints (which are likely to arouse negative emotions) and cooperative efforts to resolve such differences, emotion regulation is crucial to this process (Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gillies, & Fleming, 1993). John Gottman and colleagues conducted several studies investigating emotional communication and dyadic emotion regulation during conflict interactions among married couples. These studies are exemplars in emotion regulation research because they consider the stream of emotional transactions in an ecologically valid context (Campos et al., 2011). For example, Carstensen, Gottman, and Levenson (1995) used sequential analyses of emotions to examine dyads' behaviors in a conflict discussion. The authors found that negative continuance (i.e., negative affect in one partner followed by negative affect in the other) predicted marital dissatisfaction. Looking at

emotional contingencies within interpersonal interactions allows the researcher to infer the function a particular emotion serves and how the other interprets such communication in real-time. Although these studies are impressive in predicting marital satisfaction from micro-level interactions, they have not addressed (1) how empathic behaviors affect the proceeding emotional behavior of the dyad, and (2) how these processes affect conflict management. Furthermore, to my knowledge, there are no studies examining these processes in parent-child relationships.

Parent-Adolescent Conflict

In considering empathic communication and the temporal unfolding of emotion in conflict, it is important to note aspects that characterize and distinguish the parent-adolescent relationship from other relationships (e.g., romantic partners). Empathic communication is important to study in the context of parent-adolescent relationships because adolescents are at a developmental transition in which social relationships become more salient. Furthermore, adolescents' desire to achieve autonomy in the parent-child relationship becomes central, and parents and adolescents often have difficulty seeing eye to eye on the issues that arise. The following paragraphs will outline some of the developmental changes in parent-child conflict and conflict management that occur during adolescence, with a focus on the role of emotion in these negotiations.

Frequency and source of conflict. A developmental transition in the parent-child relationship occurs in early adolescence in which the relationship, previously characterized by parental control, shifts to being more egalitarian. Autonomy seeking by adolescents often clashes with parents' expectations surrounding the timing of such transitions, which has the potential to cause conflict in the relationship (Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O'Connor, 1994, Steinberg, 1990). These violations are more likely to occur in adolescence than at other points in the lifespan (with the exception, perhaps, of infancy) because the adolescent undergoes rapid changes physically, psychologically, and socially. However, in spite of adolescence often being conceptualized as a period of "storm and stress," it is important to note that empirical research generally does not support this notion. In fact, a meta-analysis showed that the majority of parent-adolescent relationships are relatively harmonious, with problematic relationships usually reflecting perseverative patterns from earlier in childhood (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998).

Parent-adolescent conflict management. While the majority of research on parent-adolescent conflict has examined developmental changes in the types of conflicts in which parents and adolescents engage (e.g., Smetana, 1991), more recent work has focused on how conflict management and resolution strategies change over the course of adolescence. For example, older adolescents tend to use compromise and negotiation more than younger adolescents (Cicognani & Zani, 2010). Conflict resolution strategies may have more implications for healthy parent-adolescent relationships than frequency of conflict alone (Van Doorn et al., 2011). Conflict can serve a positive function if managed appropriately (Collins & Laursen, 1992) and some conflict is better than none at all (Lichtwarck,-Aschoff, Kunnen, & van Geert, 2009). This is consistent with earlier psychoanalytic theories that have posited that low levels of parent-adolescent conflict symbolize enmeshment of the relationship and too much dependence by the adolescent on the parent. The process of individuation, according to this view, brings with it inevitable conflict (Mahler, 1975).

Emotions and parent-adolescent conflict management. Recent research has also investigated the emotional quality of parent-adolescent conflict management (e.g., Branje, van Doorn, van der Valk, & Meeus, 2009), specifically, the emotional climate of parent-adolescent conflict and how it relates to various outcomes. Kobak et al. (1993) looked at the relation of adolescents' Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1996) classification

and patterns of emotional communication in the context of parent-adolescent conflict. They examined specific behaviors such as dysfunctional versus functional anger (i.e. whether the function of the anger was to disrupt the relationship versus communicate one's dissatisfaction), support/validation, avoidance of problem solving, and maternal dominance. The authors found that secure adolescents were characterized by less dysfunctional anger and less avoidance of problem solving. Attachment showed a curvilinear relation with maternal dominance, suggesting that securely attached adolescents maintained a balance of assertiveness with their mothers. Adolescents classified as deactivating (i.e., those that disengage from conflict with their mothers) engaged in discussions characterized by high levels of maternal dominance and dysfunctional anger. These findings suggest that it is not negative affect per se that defines the effectiveness of conflict management, but the goal of specific emotions within the context (e.g. to disrupt or maintain the relationship).

Other researchers have argued that it is not specific emotions expressed by either member of the dyad, but negative continuance that predicts negative outcomes (Levenson & Gottman, 1983). Kim at al. (2001) applied this principle to the study of parent-adolescent conflict, finding that negative continuance in early adolescence predicted higher negative continuance in later adolescence. The authors also found that negative continuance in adolescence predicted negative interactions with a romantic partner in early adulthood. However, the mechanisms explaining why some dyads are prone to negative continuance while others are not remain unclear. It is possible that negative continuance occurs as a function of one's perception of what the social partner is communicating. For example, one's criticism of another individual may cause the interactional partner to feel attacked and subsequently express defensiveness. However, individuals with greater willingness and/or ability to listen to and understand another's perspective may be less likely to engage in such a "knee-jerk" reaction, and instead respond in a way that is more other-oriented and less characterized by negative emotion. Many researchers have emphasized the importance of emotional and behavioral flexibility in the context of conflict management (see Holmbeck, 1996). Using dynamic systems theory, Lichtwark-Aschoff et al. (2009) found that there is an inverted U relationship between adolescent girls' emotional variability and the amount of conflict they have with their mothers. This suggests that moderate levels of conflict (which are most adaptive) are associated with high amounts of emotional flexibility, whereas no conflict or high conflict is associated with emotional rigidity.

In summary, research demonstrates that conflict management strategies characterized by compromise, negotiation, and lower negative continuance are associated with better relationship outcomes as well as psychosocial adjustment outcomes among adolescents. However, the mechanisms through which adolescents and parents learn to engage in these strategies and the role that dyadic co-regulation plays in facilitating effective conflict management are poorly understood. Researchers have only begun to scratch the surface in understanding the challenges that adolescents and their parents face and how families negotiate these challenges in constructive ways. I believe that empathic communication plays a crucial role in effective conflict management through its facilitation of co-regulation of emotions between conflicting individuals. Because conflicts often arise between parents and adolescents due to differing views on the nature of the issue (i.e. conventional v. personal – Smetana, 1991), one's utilization of validation and curiosity/interest to understand the other's perspective is likely crucial to this process. The present study seeks to understand how empathic communication is related to conflict management during parent-adolescent interactions and to explore developmental differences in these processes.

Primary Aims

The present investigation examined the role of empathic communication in facilitating successful conflict management between mothers and adolescents. Additionally, using a cross-sectional design, this study examined how these processes change from early to late adolescence. The primary aims of the present investigation were as follows:

Aim #1. Examine differences in the frequency of empathic communication behaviors displayed by mothers and adolescents during the conflict discussion as a function of adolescent age. Because adolescents become better at taking others' perspectives as they get older (Eisenberg, Zhou, & Koller, 2001; van den Bos et al., 2010), I hypothesized that older adolescents would display more empathic communication than younger adolescents.

Aim #2. Examine differences in mothers' and adolescents' satisfaction with the conflict discussion as a function of adolescent age. Realignment of the parent-adolescent relationship that may be the root of many conflicts tends to occur in early adolescence and often becomes relatively resolved by late adolescence (Steinberg, 1990). Therefore, I hypothesized that older adolescents and their mothers would be more satisfied with the discussion than younger adolescents and their mothers.

Aim #3. Examine whether the frequency of empathic communication behaviors displayed by mothers and adolescents was related to mother and adolescent satisfaction with the conflict discussion. Empathy has been theorized to play an important role in effective conflict resolution (Broome, 1993; Della Noce, 1999; Halpern, 2007). Therefore, I hypothesized that adolescents whose mothers displayed more empathic communication would report higher satisfaction with the discussion than adolescents whose mothers displayed less empathic communication. Likewise, I hypothesized that mothers whose adolescents displayed more empathic communication would report higher satisfaction with the discussion than mothers whose adolescents displayed less empathic communication.

Aim #4. Investigate the role of empathic communication expressed by the mother and the adolescent in regulating negative emotions during the conflict discussion. Based on research on emotional communication during marital interactions (e.g., Carstensen et al., 1995), I hypothesized that negative emotions initiated by the adolescent followed by negative emotions displayed by the mother (i.e., negative continuance) would negatively predict adolescents' satisfaction with the discussion. Conversely, I hypothesized that negative emotions followed by empathic communication behaviors (i.e., validation and interest) would positively predict satisfaction with the discussion. I did not expect an association between negative emotions followed by other positive emotions (i.e., affection, enthusiasm, and humor) or neutral affect to be associated with satisfaction with the discussion.

Method

 Participants

Participants in the present study included 50 mothers and their adolescent children (30 female). Mothers and adolescents were recruited from local schools and communities in the San Francisco Bay Area. Adolescents were recruited from two age ranges: 13-14-years-old ($N = 29$) or 17-18-years-old ($N = 21$). All participating mothers were the biological ($N = 44$) or adoptive ($N=6$) mothers of the participating adolescent. The ethnic breakdown of the families was as follows: 62% Caucasian, 16% African American, 10% Asian, and 12% other. Mothers' education ranged from a high school degree to an advanced graduate degree, and the median highest degree

obtained was a Bachelor's Degree. Families' income ranged from < $25,000 per year to > $150,000 per year, and the average family income was $90,000 per year.

  The sample was recruited using a variety of methods, including recruiting through schools, teen after school programs, parenting groups, and parent and teen newsletters. During recruitment, the project was described as a research study on how mothers and adolescents talk about conflict. Eligibility was based on the following criteria: (1) the adolescent was 13-14 or 17-18 years old at the time of testing; (2) the adolescent lived at least 5 days a week with his or her biological or adoptive mother; (3) the mother and adolescent were able to understand and speak English.

Procedure

  The mother and adolescent participated in a 1-hour laboratory visit consisting of questionnaires and a parent-adolescent conflict discussion. The data was collected by a graduate student researcher and trained undergraduate research assistants. Mothers were paid $20 for participation and adolescents were given a $20 gift certificate.

  After obtaining written permission from the mother (if the adolescent was under 18), the mother and adolescent separately completed a series of questionnaires. Mothers completed a demographics survey, a questionnaire asking about her teen's pubertal development (only mothers of 13-14-year-old adolescents completed this questionnaire), and an issues checklist to identify the topics to be discussed. Adolescents completed the pubertal development questionnaire (only 13-14-year-old adolescents) and the issues checklist. Once both the mother and adolescent completed the issues checklist, the mother and adolescent were reunited. Using the ratings from the issues checklist, the graduate student researcher helped the dyad decide on a topic to discuss during the interaction portion of the study. The researcher interviewed each dyad about the topic chosen to help focus the dyad on the key area(s) of disagreement. The inclusion of this interview is essential to ensure that the discussion is personal and concrete (Carstensen et al., 1995). All interactions were videotaped for behavioral coding.

  Identification of conflict topics. A modified version of the Issues Checklist (Prinz, Foster, Kent, & O'Leary, 1979) was completed by both mothers and adolescents (see Appendix A). The checklist is designed to identify common sources of conflict between parents and adolescents. For each of the issues, the mother and adolescent separately rated (1) whether the issue was an issue between the mother and adolescent, and (2) if yes, how upsetting the issue was on a scale of 1 (slightly upsetting) to 5 (very upsetting). The mother and adolescent subsequently identified the 2 topics that were most upsetting. The original 44-item Issue Checklist has been found to have adequate test- re-test reliability (Robin & Foster, 1984), as well as internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Gonzales, Cauce, & Mason, 1996).

  Conflict discussion. Each dyad discussed a topic for 10 minutes without a researcher present. The mother and adolescent sat across from one another (approximately .9 meters apart) at a small table. Two visible video cameras (one facing each participant) captured the participants from the top of the head to mid-chest. The conversations were monitored via one-way mirror. When 10 minutes had elapsed, a researcher re-entered the room.

  Post discussion questionnaire. After completing the discussion, mothers and adolescents separately filled out a 10-item questionnaire asking them about their reaction to the discussion (see Appendix B). The questionnaire asked two questions about each individual's satisfaction with the discussion ("How satisfied with you with the outcome of the discussion?" and "How satisfied were you with the way the discussion went?"). Additionally, the questionnaire asked (1) to what degree the conversational partner understood the respondent's point of view and

feelings, (2) to what degree the conversational partner *tried to* understand the respondent's point of view and feelings, (3) to what degree the respondent understood the conversational partner's point of view and feelings, and (4) to what degree the respondent *tried to* understand the conversational partner's point of view and feelings. The mother and adolescent also completed an open-ended response to the discussions in which he/she was instructed to write a few sentences describing their reaction to the discussion (see Appendix B).

Behavioral Coding

        The Specific Affect Coding System. The Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989) was used to code specific emotions displayed by the mothers and adolescents during the conflict discussion. The SPAFF is divided into positive, negative, and neutral speaker and listener codes, with specific emotions within each broad dimension. Uniquely, the SPAFF considers the gestalt of verbal content, voice tone, context, facial expression, gesture, and body movement, and treats the stream of behavior as continuous, allowing for codes to be assigned at any time. The most noteworthy innovation of the SPAFF is that it allows observers to code emotions at the construct level (i.e., the functional level), instead of at the level of discrete bits of behavior. This allows coders to use observed behaviors in the service of describing generalizable human affective behavior (Coan & Gottman 2007). There is an emphasis in the SPAFF on the *meaning* the emoter is trying to convey to the conversational partner. For example, a question could convey Interest if the function of the question was to obtain information about the other's perspective or feelings. On the other hand, if the question had a predetermined answer, the function would be to exert control over the other person, and would be more appropriately coded as Domineering. Version 4.0 of the SPAFF was used in the present investigation. In the present investigation, the codes "Validation" and "Interest" were operationalized as empathic communication codes. See Appendix C for a complete list of SPAFF codes.

        Reliability checks. Reliability for the SPAFF was based on second-by-second concordance of observers' codes throughout the 10-minute interaction period. Cohen's kappa was used to calculate interrater reliability, which controls for agreement by chance alone. Coders were undergraduate research assistants trained by a graduate student researcher to reach 75% agreement prior to coding. Each interaction was coded twice, once by each coder, as recommended by Coan and Gottman (2007). Weekly calibration checks and discussions were held to minimize coder drift. Reliability was checked for each participating dyad, and a minimum of 75% agreement was required. The mean Cohen's kappa for mother codes was .77 (range = .62 - .88), and the mean Cohen's kappa for adolescent codes was .75 (range = .62 - .82).

<center>**Results**</center>

Descriptive Statistics

        The means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis statistics of the SPAFF codes are presented in Table 1. These statistics are presented separately by adolescent age. Variables were screened for normality. Using the cutoffs of 2 and 7 for skewness and kurtosis, respectively (West, Finch, & Curran, 1995), all the study variables were normally distributed with the exception of Adolescent Interest, which was positively skewed and kurtotic (suggesting that many younger adolescents did not display any Interest codes). A natural log transformation for this variable was conducted and this transformed variable was used for all subsequent analyses.

        Pairwise correlations among study variables (mother and adolescent empathic communication, and mother and adolescent satisfaction with the discussion) and demographic variables are reported in Table 2. The demographic variables assessed in the present study were

family income, primary caregiver education, primary caregiver age, number of children in the household, whether the participating adolescent was the biological or adopted child of the participating mother, and adolescent sex. There were no significant relations between demographic variables and study variables, though family income was marginally positively correlated with Mother Interest.

The top three topics chosen using the Issues Checklist (see Appendix A) by mothers and adolescents are presented in Table 3. The top three topics chosen by mothers of younger adolescents were cleaning up room, how to spend free time, and fighting with siblings. The top three topics chosen by younger adolescents were largely consistent with the issues chosen by mothers. The top three topics chosen by mothers of older adolescents were drugs/alcohol, how to spend free time, and fighting with siblings. The top three topics chosen by older adolescents were largely consistent with the issues chosen by mothers, with the exception of drugs/alcohol. This may be because this is a more sensitive topic than the others and adolescents did not always feel comfortable discussing this topic. Notably, older adolescents and their mothers were more likely than younger adolescents and their mothers to choose the "Other" category, writing in such issues as "communication style" and "respect." The top three topics discussed by mothers and adolescents were helping out around the house, fighting with siblings, and how to spend free time. However, there was considerable variability in the types and intensity of the issues.

Aim #1. The first aim of the present study was to examine whether there were differences in the frequency of empathic communication behaviors displayed by mothers and adolescents during the conflict discussion as a function of adolescent age. To test this aim, four independent-sample t-tests were conducted comparing younger and older adolescents and their mothers (0 = younger, 1 = older) on the amount of Validation and Interest displayed by mothers and adolescents (measured by frequency counts of each code during the interaction). Older adolescents ($M = 2.14$, $SD = 2.83$) displayed more Interest than younger adolescents ($M = .07$, $SD = .27$), $t(46) = -3.33$, $p = .003$, $d = 1.03$. Older adolescents also displayed more Validation ($M = 8.00$, $SD = 8.48$), $t(47) = -2.96$, $p = .007$, $d = .90$ compared with younger adolescents ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 3.35$) (see Figure 1A). Mothers of older adolescents displayed more Validation ($M = 10.33$, $SD = 7.42$) compared with mothers of younger adolescents, ($M = 6.11$, $SD = 5.86$), $t(46) = -2.20$, $p = .033$, $d = .63$ (see Figure 1B). There were no significant differences in the amount of Interest displayed by mothers as a function of adolescent age.

Aim #2. The second aim of the present study was to examine whether there are differences in mothers' and adolescents' satisfaction with the discussion as a function of adolescent age. To test this aim, four independent-sample t-tests were conducted comparing younger adolescents and their mothers with older adolescents and their mothers on their reported satisfaction with the discussion (measured by a composite of the first two items on the post discussion questionnaire – see Appendix B). Older adolescents ($M = 4.10$, $SD = .83$) were marginally more satisfied with the discussion compared with younger adolescents ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.04$), $t(48) = -1.66$, $p = .09$, $d = .63$ (see Figure 2). Although mothers of older adolescents had higher mean levels of satisfaction compared with younger adolescents, these differences were not significant. Because there were no significant differences in mother and adolescent satisfaction with the discussion as a function of adolescent age, all subsequent analyses examining post discussion satisfaction as a dependent variable were collapsed across adolescent age.

Aim #3. The third aim of the present study was to examine whether the frequency of empathic communication behaviors displayed by mothers and adolescents was related to mother and adolescent satisfaction with the discussion. To test this aim, zero-order correlations were

computed between the frequency of empathic communication behaviors displayed by mothers and adolescents and mothers' and adolescents' reported satisfaction with the discussion. Adolescent Validation was marginally correlated with mother satisfaction with the discussion ($r = .27$, $p = .064$), and significantly correlated with adolescents' own satisfaction with the discussion ($r = .32$, $p = .028$) (see Table 1). Mother Validation was marginally correlated with adolescent satisfaction with the discussion ($r = .27$, $p = .064$). Adolescent Interest was not correlated with mother satisfaction with the discussion, but was marginally correlated with adolescents' own satisfaction with the discussion ($r = .26$, $p = .073$). Mother Interest was not correlated with either adolescent or mothers' own satisfaction with the discussion ($r = .17$, $p = .251$).

Aim #4. The fourth aim of the present study was to investigate the role of empathic communication expressed by the mother in regulating adolescents' negative emotions during the discussion. To test this aim, the following steps were taken. First, for each dyad, the instances of adolescent expression of negative emotion (see Appendix C) were identified. Next, the emotion expressed by the mother immediately following the adolescent's negative emotion was identified. For each dyad, four proportions were calculated: (1) The proportion of times the adolescent expressed a negative emotion that the mother followed with a negative emotion; (2) the proportion of times the adolescent expressed a negative emotion that the mother followed with a positive emotion (i.e., Affection, Enthusiasm, or Humor); (3) the proportion of times the adolescent expressed a negative emotion that the mother followed with Neutral affect; and (4) the proportion of times the adolescent expressed a negative emotion that the mother followed with Empathic Communication (i.e., Validation or Interest). These proportion scores were then correlated with the adolescents' satisfaction with the discussion. Results indicated that when mothers responded to their adolescents' negative emotions with negative emotion, adolescents were less satisfied with the discussion ($r = -.33$, $p = .038$) (see Table 2). Conversely, when mothers responded to their adolescents' negative emotions with empathic communication, adolescents were more satisfied with the discussion ($r = .32$, $p = .042$). These relations were nonsignificant when mothers responded with positive emotions ($r = .07$, $p = .576$) or neutral affect ($r = .20$, $p = .217$).

Mediation Analysis of Adolescent Satisfaction. The Baron and Kenny (1993) approach was used to test whether the effect of Mother Validation on Adolescent Post Discussion Satisfaction was mediated by the Adolescent's Belief that the Mother Understood His or Her Point of View and Feelings During the Discussion. The Adolescent's Belief that the Mother Understood His or Her Point of View and Feelings was calculated by creating a composite score of items #4, #6, #8, and #10 on the adolescent post discussion questionnaire (see Appendix B). The relation between Mother Validation and Adolescent Post Discussion Satisfaction was found to be marginally positively significant ($\beta = .31$, $p = .27$). Second, the relation between Mother Validation and the Adolescent's Belief that the Mother Understood his or her Point of View and Feelings was found to be positively significant ($\beta = .39$, $p = .004$). Third, the relation between the Adolescent's Belief that the Mother Understood His or Her Point of View and Adolescent Satisfaction with the Discussion was found to be positively significant ($\beta = .82$, $p = 000$). However, controlling for the degree to which the Adolescent Believed the Mother Understood his or her Point of View and Feelings caused the effect of Mother Validation on Adolescent Satisfaction with the Discussion to disappear (see Figure 3). This suggests that Mother Validation only predicted Adolescent Satisfaction with the Discussion when adolescents believed that their mothers understood their point of view and feelings.

Discussion

The present study sought to enrich our understanding of empathy by examining how communication of empathy during mother-adolescent conflict discussions was related to the perceived effectiveness of conflict management. Several aims were tested with regard to age differences in empathic communication between mothers and adolescents, as well as relations between empathic communication and successful conflict management.

First, empathic communication of mothers and adolescents varied as a function of adolescent age. Specifically, older adolescents displayed more interest and validation compared with younger adolescents. Also, mothers of older adolescents displayed more validation than younger adolescents, but there were no differences in mother interest as a function of adolescent age.

Second, there were marginal age differences in adolescent satisfaction, with older adolescents being marginally more satisfied with the discussion than younger adolescents. While mothers of older adolescents were more satisfied with the discussion compared with younger adolescents, this difference was not significant.

Third, mother empathic communication was marginally associated with adolescents' satisfaction with the discussion. Specifically, mother validation was marginally positively correlated with adolescents' satisfaction with the discussion, but mother interest was not. Adolescent validation was marginally correlated with mothers' satisfaction with the discussion, but adolescent interest was not.

Fourth, mother empathic communication in response to adolescent negative emotions was associated with adolescents' satisfaction with the discussion. Specifically, when mothers responded to their adolescents' negative emotions with empathic communication, adolescents were more satisfied with the discussion than when their mothers responded to their negative emotions with negative emotion, positive emotion (affection, enthusiasm, or humor), or neutral affect.

Finally, adolescents' belief that the mother understood their point of view and feelings mediated the relation between mother validation and adolescent satisfaction with the discussion. This suggests that it is not enough for the mother to validate or be interested in her adolescent's perspective; the validation and interest must be recognized and *interpreted* as empathic by the adolescent to positively affect adolescent's discussion satisfaction.

Age Differences in Mother-Adolescent Empathic Communication and Conflict Management

Findings from the present study indicate age differences in (1) the frequency of mother and adolescent empathic communication behaviors and (2) adolescents' satisfaction with the discussion. Older adolescents and their mothers displayed more validation and interest and were more satisfied with the discussion than the younger mother-adolescent dyads. The finding that older adolescents displayed more empathic communication than younger adolescents is consistent with research that has shown that adolescents' empathy and ability to take the perspectives of others increases across adolescence (Eisenberg et al., 2001; van den Bos et al., 2010). Although previous research has shown that conflicts tend to decrease in frequency from early to late adolescence (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998), this is the first study to my knowledge that has tested developmental differences in perceived quality of discussions of conflict during adolescence. The present study lends support to the conclusion that parents and adolescents are better able to manage conflicts constructively as children transition from early to late adolescence. This may be because issues surrounding autonomy and negotiation of egalitarianism in the parent-child relationship have become more or less resolved by late adolescence (Steinberg, 1990).

Anecdotal evidence from discussions with mothers of older adolescents and review of their open-ended responses indicate that mothers of older adolescents found their adolescents easier to talk with and believed they had matured greatly since early adolescence. This supports the interpretation that older adolescents' concerns may have been easier for mothers to validate, which in turn led to better perceptions of conflict management. It is possible that parents' validation of their children's concerns facilitates confident transitions in their children's ability to process social, emotional, and cognitive information, which in turn may lead to adolescents' ability to articulately voice concerns that their parents in turn find valid. An interesting future direction would be to examine this mechanism more systematically and understand its directionality.

As an exploratory step to answer this question, mothers' and adolescents' open-ended responses to the discussion were analyzed to identify the responses of the most satisfied and dissatisfied dyads (mothers' and adolescents' satisfaction scores that were 1 standard deviation above or below the mean). Several common themes emerged from the open-ended responses.

Generally, highly satisfied mothers and adolescents emphasized an understanding of the other's point of view and a sense of closeness. Specifically, satisfied mothers believed the discussions were productive (i.e., a resolution was reached), noticed an improvement in communication since their adolescent was younger, and gained a greater understanding of the adolescent's perspective during the discussion. For example, one mother wrote: "It was helpful to explain what is behind my worry or anxiety, then she could explain what my anxiety…made her feel." Satisfied adolescents believed that their mother understood their perspective and felt that there was a mutual honesty and closeness. One adolescent wrote: "My mom seemed to really understand what I was saying, and I felt it's made us closer." In contrast, highly dissatisfied mothers had difficulty trusting their adolescents and had trouble understanding their adolescent's point of view. For example, one mother wrote: "I think I am able to see both sides of an issue if it's *not* my daughter!" Similarly, highly dissatisfied adolescents tended to feel unsettled, worried, and less understood by the mother. One adolescent wrote: "Not too sure she fully understood how I felt…I thought her argument was…emotional/irrational. Such as how she assumes other parents are as strict as her when I know for a fact most of my friends have much more liberties."

The themes emerging from these responses suggest that it was important to adolescents that their mother understood their perspectives, while it was important for parents to feel that they understood their adolescent's perspective. Interestingly, in the present investigation, taking the perspective of the parent appears less important for discussion satisfaction. This may be because adolescents are developing a sense of autonomy and learning how to navigate interpersonal relationships, so feeling validated may have been more important to them than it was for their mothers. A more systematic examination of this question using the mothers' and adolescents' open-ended responses is underway.

Relations between Empathic Communication and Conflict Management

While there are certainly many factors involved in successful conflict management, the present investigation sought to explicitly test relations between empathic communication and conflict management effectiveness based on previous theoretical work positing the important role of empathy in conflict resolution (e.g., Broom, 1993; Della Noce, 1999; Halpern, 2007). The present study found support for this theory. Specifically, mothers' validation was marginally positively correlated with adolescents' reported satisfaction with the discussion, and adolescents' validation was marginally positively correlated with mothers' reported satisfaction with the discussion. This suggests that when individuals' thoughts and feelings are validated, they perceive

the conflict as better managed, perhaps because they feel "heard." On the other hand, interest expressed by both mothers and adolescents was not correlated with the conversational partner's satisfaction with the discussion. This may be because interest often took the form of explicit questions in the discussion context, which may have been perceived as somewhat artificial by the conversational partner and not reflecting "genuine" interest.

It is also possible that interest and validation differentially affect conflict management due to their frequency of occurrence in interpersonal interactions. Interest may be demonstrated by the parent somewhat independently of the adolescent's behavior. For example, a parent may display interest toward the expressive adolescent by demonstrating a desire to understand what the adolescent is saying (e.g., leaning in, head nodding) or by asking explicit questions when the adolescent is unexpressive. A systematic examination of verbal versus nonverbal indicators of interest is underway.

Conversely, validation, by definition, necessitates that the adolescent has expressed something to which the parent may respond. Thus, validation is likely to be more variable in its occurrence (particularly for less expressive adolescents), resulting in a more powerful effect on regulating social interactions. Systematic examination of the sequential patterns of mother interest and validation is needed to address this possibility. Differential effects of distinct forms of empathic communication (e.g., interest v. validation) should also be examined in other contexts and with additional populations to determine their unique effects during social interaction.

This study also sought to understand the emotion regulatory effects of mothers' empathic communication on adolescents' discussion satisfaction. When mothers tended to respond to their adolescents' negative emotions with negative emotion, adolescents had lower satisfaction with the discussion. However, when mothers tended to respond to their adolescents' negative emotions with empathic communication (i.e., validation and interest), adolescents had higher satisfaction with the discussion. These positive effects were not present when mothers responded to their adolescents' negative emotions with positive emotions (affection, enthusiasm, and humor) or with neutral affect. This suggests that there is a unique regulatory effect of empathic communication on negative emotions during conflict management. A next step is to investigate whether mothers' empathic communication in response to adolescents' negative emotions has an immediate regulatory effect on the adolescent (i.e., leads to subsequent adolescent positive or neutral affect), which may illuminate the mechanism through which empathic communication expressed by mothers had a positive effect on adolescents' perceived effectiveness of the conflict management.

Interestingly, although mothers' validation was positively correlated with adolescent satisfaction, these effects were driven by adolescents' perceptions that the mother understood his or her point of view and feelings. In other words, mothers who validated their adolescents, but whose adolescents did not perceive those behaviors as communicating *understanding*, did not have satisfied adolescents. This suggests that empathic communication is a two-way street. Hollan and Throop (2008) have called for an approach to empathy that is bidirectional in the sense that not only the behaviors of the empathizer be taken into consideration, but also the perceptions of the person being empathized with. The present study provides a crucial first step in understanding the dyadic nature of empathic communication and its effects on social interaction. However, additional research is required to understand the mechanisms through which parents differ in their abilities to be successful at communicating empathy to their children (e.g., interactions with child temperament, genuineness of the communication).

Limitations and Future Directions

There are some limitations in the present investigation that warrant mention. First, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the interpretation of developmental differences. A longitudinal design is required to more clearly demonstrate the changing nature of empathic communication in the context of parent-adolescent conflict management over time. Second, while mothers' and adolescents' perceptions of the effectiveness of the conflict management and the conversational partners' understanding of their point of view and feelings were measured, the present study did not ask the participants about their perceptions of *specific* empathic communication behaviors in real-time. Future research could incorporate a video playback method in which key moments in the conversation are reviewed with the participants to record individuals' perceptions of what their own and their partner's behaviors communicated (or attempted to communicate). By doing so, researchers can gain insight into the sequential nature of the interactions between behaviors and perceptions of these behaviors and their effects on conflict management. Third, the small sample size may have underpowered some of the analyses. A second conversation between the mother and the adolescent is currently being coded, the results of which may result in some marginal effects reaching significance.

Second, while the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF) captures a wide array of emotion-related behaviors and has been used with both adults and parents/adolescents, there are behaviors that may be crucial to understanding parent-adolescent conflict management that are not captured by the SPAFF. For instance, behaviors such as parental guidance, autonomy seeking by the adolescent, and adolescent disclosure may all be important for effective conflict management in this population (Allen et al., 1994; Wiebe et al., 2005). Additional coding for these behaviors using the discussions from the present study is underway to provide a more complete understanding of effective parent-adolescent conflict management.

Third, the issues discussed by the parents and adolescents in this sample varied widely by topic, emotional intensity, and personal significance. Some types of topics may be easier to resolve (Deutsch, 1973) or more open to negotiation (Smollar & Youniss, 1985) than others. Additionally, conflicts in different domains (e.g., personal, conventional, moral - Smetana, 1991) may have different implications for how these conflicts are resolved and the types of emotions expressed during their discussion. Smetana, Killen, and Turiel (1991) found that parents and adolescents reported conflicts to be most emotionally intense over issues surrounding psychosocial development, especially autonomy seeking and relationships outside the family. Additionally, the topics of conflict often change over the course of adolescence, with conflict over daily hassles decreasing, and personally-significant issues, such as alcohol and dating, becoming more frequent in later adolescence (Smetana et al., 1991). Thus, in order to provide a greater understanding of the contextual influences on parent-adolescent conflict management, a systematic analysis taking into account the conflict topic is crucial.

Finally, while the present investigation sought to understand basic developmental processes regarding emotions expressed during parent-adolescent conflict management, many of these processes are likely culturally specific and have important implications for children's outcomes. Future research should examine cross-cultural differences in empathic communication between parents and adolescents during conflict management. Additionally, one could examine how immigrant families cope with potential gaps between parent and child/adolescent values as a function of acculturation and the effect of such gaps on parent-adolescent conflict. Although stronger family ties are often reported in immigrant families, research also suggests that culture-related issues, such as family obligation, can be a source of conflict in immigrant families (Fuligni, 1998). More research is needed to understand the role of culture in parent-adolescent conflict

management. Furthermore, while parent-adolescent conflict frequency is associated with negative outcomes for adolescents (e.g., internalizing/externalizing problems, substance abuse, difficulty managing chronic illnesses), there is little know about how *management* of conflict is related to these outcomes. Future research should examine some of the processes studied in the present investigation in relation to adolescent psychological adjustment and health-related outcomes.

Implications

The present study investigated how empathy is communicated and how empathic communication is perceived in real time in an ecologically valid context. The findings underscore the importance of research on empathy and emotion that gives participants flexibility of responding in personally significant situations. Only by observing how individuals communicate empathy in real-life contexts can we gain a greater understanding of how to intervene on these processes. In addition, conceptualizations of empathy that emphasize prosocial behavior and affect matching may be appropriate in some contexts, but the communicative aspects of empathy have largely been ignored in empirical research. The present study begins to address this gap in the literature. Furthermore, this research highlights the need to not only study the behavior of those experiencing empathy, but also the reactions of the individual being empathized with. Individuals may communicate empathy, but if this communication is not appreciated, the otherwise positive effects of empathy on social interaction are lost.

The above findings also have implications for interventions with parents and adolescents struggling with conflict management. The present study demonstrated that parents who are better able to communicate empathy to their adolescents tend to have adolescents who are more satisfied with discussions of conflict. If the interactions observed in the present study are representative of patterns of the relationship as a whole, then interventions in which parents and adolescents are trained to more effectively communicate empathy and pick up on empathic communication could have long-lasting positive effects on parent-adolescent relationships. The implementation of such interventions in late childhood or early adolescence could help alleviate the often difficult negotiations surrounding autonomy and respect between parents and adolescents, leading to more well-adjusted parent-adolescent relationships, and subsequently, relationships between parents and their adult children.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Mother and Adolescent Specific Emotions by Adolescent Age

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurtosis	N	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
	Younger Adolescents					Older Adolescents				
Contempt (M)	27	.96	1.81	1.96	3.02	21	.43	.68	1.36	.76
Contempt (A)	27	2.26	4.09	2.50	6.54	21	1.00	2.26	2.74	7.88
Belligerence (M)	27	.22	.64	3.57	14.10	21	.33	.73	1.92	2.09
Belligerence (A)	27	.85	1.56	1.90	2.51	21	.57	1.21	2.83	9.05
Criticism (P)	27	.96	1.40	1.52	1.68	21	.67	1.24	1.41	.08
Criticism (A)	27	1.07	1.75	2.10	4.50	21	1.38	2.82	2.20	3.94
Stonewalling (P)	27	0	0	--	--	21	0	0	--	--
Stonewalling (A)	27	2.63	3.79	1.81	3.37	21	1.10	2.86	3.95	16.75
Defensiveness (P)	27	2.93	3.54	1.27	1.19	21	2.43	3.04	2.51	7.23
Defensiveness (A)	27	6.67	4.43	.32	-.60	21	3.67	4.10	.96	-.17
Domineering (P)	27	3.82	3.43	.44	-1.13	21	3.52	4.19	.75	-1.11
Domineering (A)	27	2.56	3.25	.96	-.57	21	1.76	2.83	1.78	2.66
Anger (P)	27	2.07	2.22	.56	-.98	21	.95	1.40	1.56	2.14
Anger (A)	27	2.19	2.62	1.30	.94	21	1.48	2.71	2.59	7.40
Sadness (P)	27	1.48	1.95	.94	-.54	21	1.29	4.21	4.13	17.74
Sadness (A)	27	1.48	2.62	2.19	4.15	21	.43	1.00	2.17	3.44
Disgust (P)	27	.04	.19	5.20	27.00	21	.05	.22	4.58	21.00
Disgust (A)	27	.11	.58	5.20	27.00	21	1.00	.44	4.58	21.00
Whining (P)	27	.04	.19	5.20	27.00	21	0	0	--	--

Whining (A)	27	.11	.58	5.20	27.00	21	0	0	--	--
Tension (P)	27	2.52	2.64	.99	.18	21	1.14	2.85	3.95	16.73
Tension (A)	27	2.78	3.40	1.38	.82	21	1.57	2.62	1.70	1.60
Interest (P)	27	1.81	1.79	.88	-.42	21	1.54	1.17	1.05	1.07
Interest (A)	27	.02	.07	3.52	11.18	21	.54	.71	1.40	1.56
Validation (P)	27	.76	.73	1.08	.08	21	1.29	.93	.88	.95
Validation (A)	27	.28	.42	1.47	1.04	21	1.00	1.06	1.22	1.11
Affection (P)	27	1.41	1.67	1.38	1.28	21	1.52	1.83	1.33	.93
Affection (A)	27	.07	.27	3.45	10.67	21	.52	.98	2.56	7.59
Enthusiasm (P)	27	.04	.19	5.20	27.00	21	.33	.80	2.58	6.41
Enthusiasm (A)	27	.30	.54	1.70	2.28	21	.14	.48	3.53	12.58
Shared Humor	27	2.33	3.00	2.04	5.29	21	3.24	4.07	1.84	3.79

Table 2

Correlations between Demographic Variables and Study Variables

Variable	Interest (P)	Interest (A)	Validation (P)	Validation (A)	Satisfaction with Discussion (P)	Satisfaction with Discussion (A)
Primary caregiver age	-.01	-.03	.06	.18	-.21	.01
Secondary caregiver age	-.03	-.10	-.16	.04	-.23	-.08
Number of children in household	-.05	-.10	.03	-.05	.21	.05
Biological or Adopted (0 = biological, 1 = adopted)	.09	.16	-.15	-.09	.09	.19
Parent education	.10	-.03	.07	.15	.00	.09
Family income	.27†	.02	.10	.17	.16	.22
Adolescent sex (0 = male, 1 = female)	.10	.08	.04	-.01	.18	.12

Table 3

Top 3 Issues Chosen by Mothers and Adolescents by Adolescent Age

	Younger Adolescents		Older Adolescents	
Topic	Mothers	Adolescents	Mothers	Adolescents
1	Cleaning up room (8)	How to spend free time (7)	Drugs/alcohol (5)	How to spend free time (6)
2	How to spend free time (6)	Cleaning up room (6)	How to spend free time (3)	Helping out around the house (4)
3	Fighting with siblings (4)	Grades (3)	Fighting with siblings (2)	Grades (2)

Table 4

Correlations Between Specific Emotions and Post Discussion Satisfaction

	Mother Emotions		Adolescent Emotions	
	Mother Satisfaction	Adolescent Satisfaction	Mother Satisfaction	Adolescent Satisfaction
Contempt	-.38***	-.39**	-.52***	-.42**
Belligerence	-.07	-.13	-.33*	-.15
Criticism	-.46**	-.29*	-.46**	-.30*
Stonewalling	--	--	-.30*	-.22
Defensiveness	-.71***	-.49***	-.34*	-.38**
Domineering	-.25†	-.51***	-.61***	-.35*
Anger	-.33*	-.37**	-.53***	-.25†
Sadness	-.52***	-.17	-.13	.02
Disgust	.09	.14	-.32	-.18
Whining	-.37**	-.43**	-.14	-.06
Tension	-.04	-.04	.13	-.06
Interest	.17	.09	.22	.26†
Validation	.20	.27†	.27†	.32*
Affection	.24†	.27†	.20	.27†
Enthusiasm	.25†	.24	.20	.19
Humor	.31*	.31*	.31*	.31*

Note: † *p* < .10, * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001.

Table 5

Relations between Mother Response to Adolescent Negative Emotion and Adolescent Satisfaction

with the Discussion

Mother Emotion	Adolescent Satisfaction
Negative	-.33*
Empathic Communication	.32*
Positive	.07
Neutral	.20

*Note: * p < .05.*

Figure 1 (A)

Adolescent Age Differences in Frequency of Adolescent Empathic Communication Codes
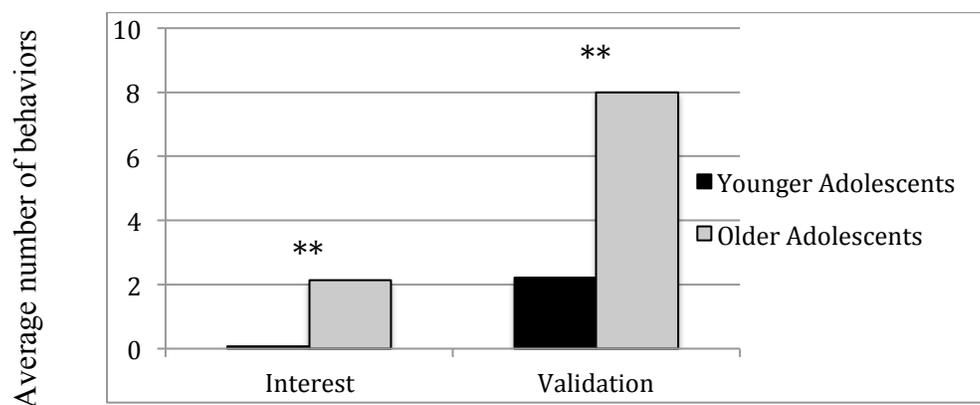
*Note: ** p < .01.*

Figure 1 (B)

Adolescent Age Differences in Frequency of Mother Empathic Communication Codes
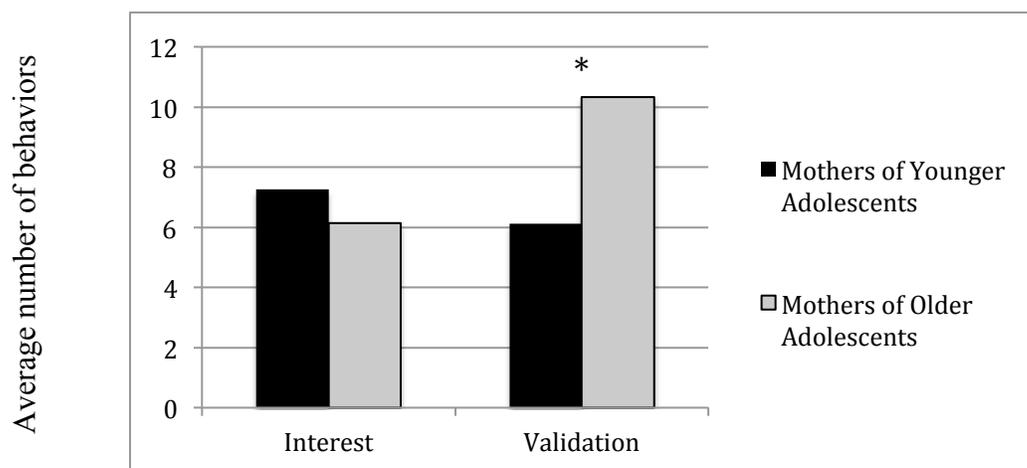
*Note: * p < .05.*

Figure 2

Mother and Adolescent Satisfaction with the Discussion as a Function of Adolescent Age
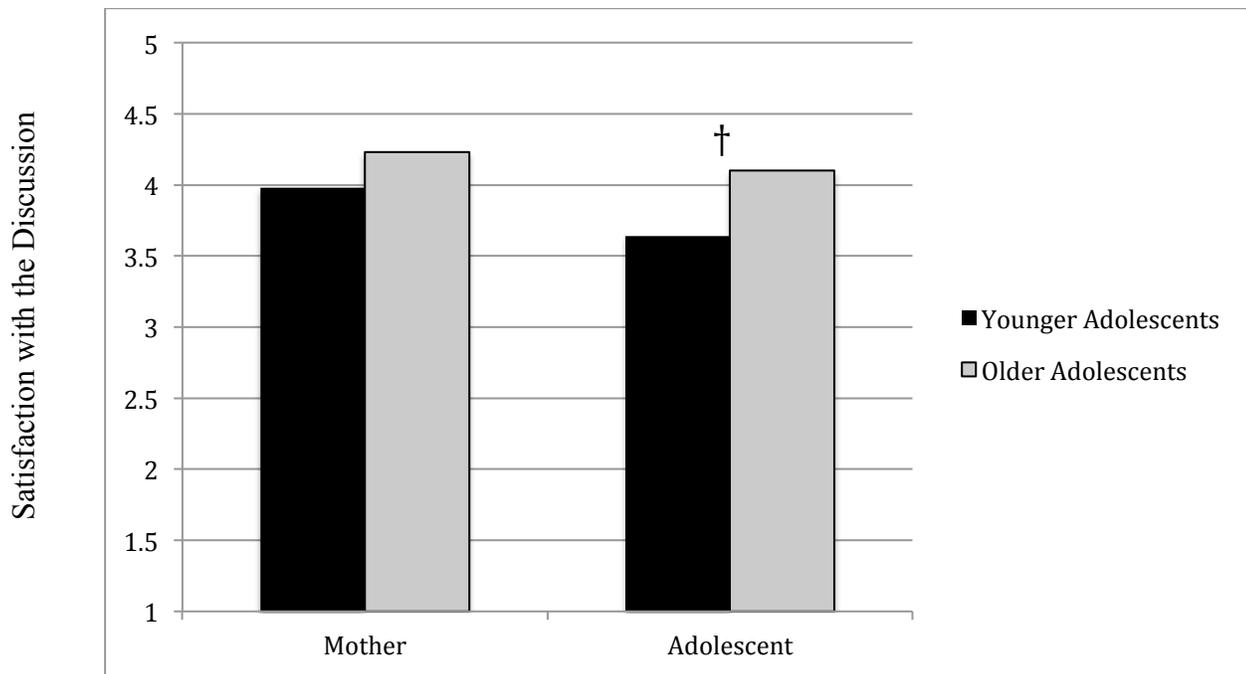
† *p* < .10

Figure 3

Mediation of Mother Validation on Adolescent Satisfaction with the Discussions by Adolescent

Perception that the Mother Understood His/Her Point of View and Feelings
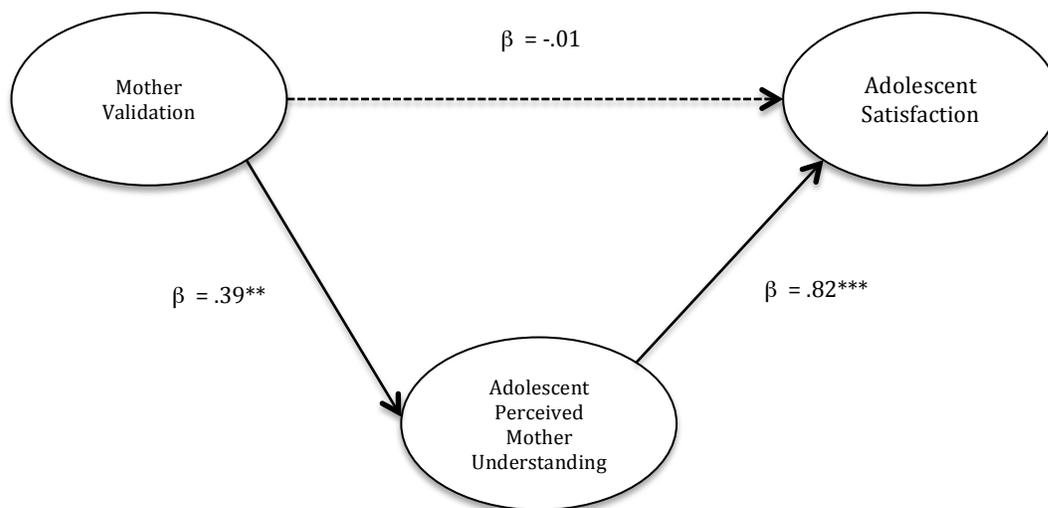
Note: *** = *p* < .001, ** = *p* < .01.

Appendix A: Issues Checklist (Mother Version)

	Is this an issue for you and your teen?	If *Yes,* how upset does it make you?					Check the *2* that make you <u>most upset</u>
Telephone calls/texting	NO YES	Not upset 1	2	A little upset 3	Very upset 4	5	
Cleaning bedroom	NO YES	Not upset 1	2	A little upset 3	Very upset 4	5	
Putting away clothes	NO YES	Not upset 1	2	A little upset 3	Very upset 4	5	
Cleanliness (washing, showers, brushing teeth)	NO YES	Not upset 1	2	A little upset 3	Very upset 4	5	
Clothes	NO YES	Not upset 1	2	A little upset 3	Very upset 4	5	
Table manners	NO YES	Not upset 1	2	A little upset 3	Very upset 4	5	
Cursing	NO YES	Not upset 1	2	A little upset 3	Very upset 4	5	
Books/movies/ video games	NO YES	Not upset 1	2	A little upset 3	Very upset 4	5	
Going places without parents	NO YES	Not upset 1	2	A little upset 3	Very upset 4	5	

		Not upset		A little upset		Very upset		
Fighting with siblings	*NO* *YES*	1	2	3		4	5	
Taking care of belongings, pets, etc.	*NO* *YES*	1	2	3		4	5	
Who friends should be	*NO* *YES*	1	2	3		4	5	
Sex/dating	*NO* *YES*	1	2	3		4	5	
Getting to school on time	*NO* *YES*	1	2	3		4	5	
Helping out around the house	*NO* *YES*	1	2	3		4	5	
Being bothered when I want to be left alone	*NO* *YES*	1	2	3		4	5	
How to spend free time	*NO* *YES*	1	2	3		4	5	
Grades	*NO* *YES*	1	2	3		4	5	
Coming home on time	*NO* *YES*	1	2	3		4	5	

Appendix B: Post Discussion Questionnaire (Mother Version)

1 = Not at all, 2 = Slightly, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Mostly, 5 = Completely

1) Were you satisfied with the way the discussion went?

1   2   3   4   5

2) Were you satisfied with the outcome of the discussion?

1   2   3   4   5

3) Did *you* understand *your teen's POINT OF VIEW* during the discussion?

1   2   3   4   5

4) Did *your teen* understand *your POINT OF VIEW* during the discussion?

1   2   3   4   5

5) Did *you* understand *your teen's FEELINGS* during the discussion?

1   2   3   4   5

6) Did *your teen* understand *your FEELINGS* during the discussion?

1   2   3   4   5

7) Did *you try to understand your teen's POINT OF VIEW* during the discussion?

1   2   3   4   5

8) Did *your teen try to understand your POINT OF VIEW* during the discussion?

1   2   3   4   5

9) Did *you try to understand your teen's FEELINGS* during the discussion?

1   2   3   4   5

10) Did *your teen try to understand your FEELINGS* during the discussion?

1   2   3   4   5

Please write a few sentences about you reaction to the discussion: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C: Specific Affect Coding System Criteria

Emotion	Function	Indicators
CONTEMPT Eye rolls, Exaggerated voice tone	Belittle, hurt, humiliate	• Sarcasm • Insults • Mockery • Hostile Humor
BELLIGERENCE Raised inflections, Jaw thrust	Provocation	• Taunting questions • Dares/challenges • Unshared humor
CRITICISM	Point out defective character/personality	• Blaming • List of complaints • Negative mind reading • "You always"/"you never" • Betrayal statements
STONEWALLING Clenched jaw, Fake neutral	Refusal to listen or respond	• Away behavior • Monitoring gaze • Rigid face and body
DEFENSIVENESS Arms folded, High-pitched/raised voice	Deflect responsibility or blame	• Yes-but statements • Minimization • Aggressive assertions • Cross-complaining • Excuses
DOMINEERING "Horns", Head/body forward, Deliberately slow speech	Control and impose compliance	• Invalidation • Low balling • Glowering • Lecturing/patronizing • Incessant speech • Threats/ultimatums
ANGER Sharp exhalations, Tight jaw/neck muscle, Thin lips, Sudden voice change	Perceived violation of autonomy, respect, and boundaries	• Frustration • Angry questions • Angry "I" statements • Commands
SADNESS Slouching, Low energy, Paused speech, Drooped head/shoulders, Trembling lips/chin	Loss, resignation, helplessness, pessimism, or hopelessness	• Sighing • Resignation • Hurt feelings • Pouting/sulking • Crying
WHINING High-pitched voice, Nasal tone	Victim stance via emotional protest	
DISGUST Nausea	Revulsion	• Involuntary reaction • Moral objection
TENSION Shallow breathing, Vocal shift,	Fear, worry, nervous anticipation, dread	• Speech disturbances • Nervous laughter

Lip biting		• Fidgeting • Nervous gestures

AFFECTION Slow, quiet speech	Facilitate closeness and bonding	• Reminiscing • Compliments • Caring statements • Common cause
HUMOR Laughter, High energy	Shared amusement	• Good-natured teasing • Imitation/exaggeration • Wit/silliness
ENTHUSIASM Intensity, Big smiles, Exclamations	Passion, eagerness, joy	• Anticipation • Positive excitement/surprise • Expansiveness
NEUTRAL	Relaxed exchange of information	• No indicators of affect • Unclear moments

INTEREST	Information and/or elaboration seeking	• Positive nonverbal attention • Clarification questions • Open-ended questions • Mirroring affect coupled with interest
VALIDATION	Openness, understanding, respect, or acceptance	• Back channels (low) • Paraphrasing • Sentence finishing • Direct expressions of understanding • Apologizing • Identification (acknowledging "sameness") • Acknowledging different point of view • Mirroring affect coupled with validation