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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED

Observed Adolescent Disclosure and Maternal Emotions During Mother-Adolescent
Conflict Discussions

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Psychological Sciences
by Janice Disla

Committee in charge:

Professor Alexandra Main, Chair
Professor Jan Wallander
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2018

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Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Abstract.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Methods.....	6
Results.....	9
Discussion	11
References	14
Appendix.....	21

List of Tables

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of study variables.....	17
Table 2. Descriptive statistics of adolescent disclosures and maternal emotions across adolescent age.....	18
Table 3. Descriptive statistics of adolescent disclosures and maternal emotions across adolescent gender.....	19
Table 4. Correlations between adolescent disclosures, maternal emotions, and discussion satisfaction.....	20

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Abstract

Observed Adolescent Disclosure and Maternal Emotions During Mother-Adolescent Conflict Discussions

by Janice Disla

For the partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychological Sciences
University of California, Merced 2018
Dr. Alexandra Main, Chair

Adolescent disclosure to parents is a positive feature of parent-adolescent relationships. Although self-reported disclosure to parents typically declines across adolescence, little is known about age and gender differences in real-time adolescent disclosures, nor about the impact that maternal emotions can have on such disclosures. The present study examined the frequency, intensity, and duration of adolescent emotional and informational disclosures to mothers in real-time. Specifically, I (1) explored gender differences in adolescent disclosure, (2) explored age differences in adolescent disclosure, and 3) examined associations between maternal emotion behaviors, adolescent disclosures, and mother- and adolescent-reported satisfaction with a conflict discussion. Adolescents ($N = 49$, $M_{age} = 14.84$ years) and mothers participated in a 10-minute conflict discussion. Adolescent disclosures and maternal emotions were coded moment-to-moment. Results showed that older adolescents engaged in longer durations and more intense instances of informational disclosures compared to younger adolescents. Male adolescents engaged in longer instances of informational disclosure compared to female adolescents. Results also showed that maternal validation was positively associated with the duration of adolescent informational disclosure as well as the duration of instances where both forms of disclosure were displayed. In contrast, maternal negative emotion was negatively correlated with frequency and duration of informational disclosure. Lastly, adolescent discussion satisfaction was positively correlated with both the frequency and total duration of informational disclosure. Implications for applying observational methodologies to the adolescent disclosure literature will be discussed.

Introduction

Adolescence is an important time in autonomy development as the child begins to have a separate life outside of the family. The main goal of adolescence is to develop a sense of self that is separate from one's parents, while still maintaining an attachment to family (Turner, Irwin, Tschann, & Millstein, 1993). During this time, peers become increasingly important because adolescents rely on their peers to help them develop their self-identity. However, parents retain their importance in an adolescent's life. While adolescents are engaging in self-exploration, it is crucial for parents to be aware of their actions and activities.

One specific way that parents retain their importance is through parental knowledge, which has been associated with positive adolescent outcomes (Stattin & Kerr, 2000), including lower levels of drug and alcohol use, less involvement in deviant behavior, better school performance, and higher self-esteem (Darling, Cumsille, Caldwell, and Dowdy, 2006). Parents can obtain knowledge about their adolescents through three different methods: adolescent disclosure, parental monitoring (also known as parental solicitation), and through parental control. Parental solicitation can be defined as parents actively seeking information about their adolescents (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Parents can actively seek information by asking the child or people the child engages with (i.e. the child's friends, coaches, teachers, etc.) direct questions about the child (i.e. their actions, whereabouts, behaviors, etc.). An example of parental solicitation is when a parent asks questions about their child's whereabouts to the parents of the adolescent's friend. Parental behavioral control occurs when a parent limits an adolescent's freedom by setting clear and consistent rules and restrictions (Stattin & Kerr, 2000), such as not allowing the child to go out at night past a certain time. Whereas once researchers believed that parental monitoring was the most important method that needed to be employed in order to buffer negative adolescent outcomes, due to its contribution to parental knowledge, that opinion has changed. Past researchers who had studied parental monitoring were primarily assessing parental knowledge as a whole (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Of the three methods listed above, adolescent disclosure, as opposed to parental monitoring, was the strongest predictor of parental knowledge (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Parental knowledge and adolescent disclosure are extremely important topics that aid in adolescent development as they have both been linked to both higher levels of adolescent adjustment as well as lower levels of juvenile delinquency (Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006). Parents cannot fully monitor everything their child does and therefore have to more readily rely on adolescent self-disclosure.

Self-disclosure occurs when an individual shares information pertaining to himself or herself with someone else (Tokić & Pećnik, 2011). Adolescent self-disclosure has been found to be more effective than parental monitoring in protecting children against negative outcomes such as delinquency and school problems; adolescents who self-disclose tend to have less deviant friends and better adjustment when compared to adolescents whose parents use high behavioral control (Stattin & Kerr, 2000; Hare, Marston, and Allen, 2011). There are two types of disclosure that individuals can engage in. First, they can share information through emotional disclosure, in which they share information about what they are feeling. For instance, an adolescent can share feeling anger over constantly being in trouble for doing things their sibling gets away with or

feeling discouragement due to their parents having little involvement in an activity that is important to them. Second, individuals can share information through informational disclosure, in which they share factual information about themselves. An example of this would be an adolescent sharing that they are failing a class or being teased at school.

The current research aimed to examine both emotional and informational disclosure in real-time. Specifically, I (1) explored gender differences in frequency, intensity, duration, and maternal emotions of disclosure in real-time interactions, 2) explored age differences in disclosures, and 3) examined associations between maternal emotions, adolescent disclosures, and mother- and adolescent-reported discussion satisfaction.

A great deal of attention has focused on why adolescents choose to disclose. One common goal behind adolescents' disclosure is to receive comfort and advice (Chaparro & Grusec, 2015). Adolescents choose to disclose information for several particular reasons including: (1) feeling that the information falls under the parents' jurisdiction, (2) trying to change the parents' mind, (3) trying to avoid being punished, (4) seeking support, and (5) having a sense of obligation (Hunter, Barber, Olsen, McNeely, and Bose, 2011; Smetana et al., 2006). Adolescents feel obligated to disclose about moral, conventional, and multifaceted issues to their parents more so than they do about personal issues. Adolescents have also reported disclosing more to their mothers than to their fathers about all issues (Smetana et al., 2006).

Adolescent Disclosure and Individual Differences

Both gender and age may influence adolescents' disclosure of information to parents. Female adolescents were more likely to disclose information than were male adolescents, especially in regard to emotional disclosure (Papini, Farmer, Clark, Micka, and Barnett, 1990). There were also differences in the amount of disclosure over the course of adolescence. Younger adolescents are more likely to engage in both emotional and informational disclosure with their parents than older adolescents. One study found that early adolescents (12-14-year-olds) exhibited the greatest amount of disclosure while middle adolescents (15-16-year-olds) exhibited the least. Interestingly, older adolescents (17-18-year-olds) exhibited an average amount of disclosure (Sinha, 1972) indicating a U-shaped curve in the level of disclosure. Older adolescents disclosed less than younger adolescents due to greater concerns for parental disapproval (Smetana, Villalobos, Tasopoulous-Chan, Gettman, and Campione-Barr, 2009; Nucci, Smetana, Araki, Nakaue, and Comer, 2014). Another reason that may explain the difference in the amount of disclosure older adolescents engage in might be due to the belief that their parents have fewer jurisdictions over information that falls within the personal domain (Rote & Smetana, 2016). Adolescents' efforts to establish autonomy (Fuligni, 1998) may contribute to declines in their beliefs about the legitimacy of parental control across adolescence (Keijsers, Branje, VanderValk, & Meeus, 2016; Smetana et al., 2006).

Due to the fact that perspective taking and other cognitive abilities improve with age (Eisenberg, Cumberland, Guthrie, Murphy, & Shepard, 2005; Van der Graaff et al., 2014) and attempts to establish autonomy are perceived by parents as appropriate in late adolescence compared with early adolescence (Feldman & Quatman, 1988), it is possible that mothers perceived older adolescents' thoughts and feelings as clearer and more justified compared with younger adolescents. Furthermore, older adolescents and their

parents are more likely to engage in patterns of mutual validation during parent-adolescent interactions (Main, Paxton, & Dale, 2016); thus, older adolescents and their mothers are more likely to achieve a greater understanding of one another's point of view.

Adolescent Disclosure and Parental Influence

The way parents respond to their adolescents' disclosures also seems to play an important role in determining whether their adolescent discloses more intense (i.e. substantive) information and whether they will choose to disclose at all. For example, one important feature of positive parent-adolescent relationships is parental validation (i.e., communication of understanding and appreciation, though not necessarily of agreement) of adolescents' thoughts and feelings. Parental validation may facilitate adolescent disclosure by communicating that adolescents' feelings are important and justified. Adolescent self-report literature suggests an increased likelihood of future disclosure when the parent has validated previous disclosures (Tilton-Weaver et al., 2010). A recent study that examined links between observed parental behaviors and adolescents' reports of their emotional disclosures during parent-adolescent interactions found that greater perceived maternal validation and less observed maternal distress in response to adolescent-reported disclosures were associated with adolescents' reports of disclosing more detailed and substantive information about their emotional experiences (Gamache Martin, Kim, & Freyd, 2017).

On the contrary, parental negative affect or lack of supportiveness in response to their children's negative affect can promote coercive cycles of interaction (Lougheed, Hollenstein, Lichwarck-Aschoff, & Granic, 2015; Patterson, 1982), thereby inhibiting future disclosure. Tilton-Weaver and colleagues (2010) found that when adolescents perceive negative parental responses to their disclosures, adolescents are more likely to feel controlled and less connected to parents, leading to less disclosure and more secrecy over time. Taken together, these findings suggest that adolescents' perceptions of positive (e.g., validating) or negative (e.g., invalidating) parental responses to their disclosures play a role in predicting adolescent disclosure over time.

Gaps in the Literature

Although disclosure seems to be relatively important in adolescence, in part because parents cannot fully monitor everything that their child does at this age, we lack understanding of several aspects. For one, researchers have primarily focused on informational disclosure (i.e., adolescents sharing basic information about their day and their location) as opposed to emotional disclosure. Yet, emotional disclosure is important. In the literature, emotional disclosure was strongly correlated with the adolescents' perception of the openness of the parent and the satisfaction they felt with the parent-child relationship (Papini et al., 1990). Emotional disclosure is also important to consider because during adolescence emotionally charged issues commonly occur and emotions become difficult to regulate (Lougheed, Hollenstein, and Lewis, 2015).

A second limitation is that the literature on disclosure has mainly relied on self-report measures of self-disclosure. This is problematic because self-report is not always accurate (Smetana et al., 2006). Self-report does not allow researchers to observe parent-adolescent interactions in real-time, so as to determine what parental behaviors directly inhibit or facilitate adolescent disclosure. These gaps in the literature beg the question:

what can parents do in real time to help facilitate adolescent disclosure about topics that are difficult to discuss such as those triggering a conflict? One of the few studies to examine parental facilitation of adolescent disclosure during parent-adolescent interactions assessed adolescent information management, and found that when adolescents were able to communicate clearly and had mothers who were categorized as more receptive, they engaged in more disclosure about personal and multifaceted issues (Rote, Smetana, Campione-Barr, Villalobos, & Tasopoulos-Chan, 2012). On the other hand, when adolescents had mothers who communicated clearly, they displayed fewer instances of disclosure and more instances of concealment from their parents. It was speculated that mothers who communicated clearly to their adolescent were more dominating of the conversation. This study aimed to find factors that could predict single instances of disclosure but did not examine what parental behaviors occurred after an adolescent had disclosed information. There is a lack of understanding of parental behaviors that may facilitate subsequent adolescent disclosure during parent-adolescent interactions. The extent to which an adolescent experiences responsive parenting is associated with their willingness to disclose spontaneously (Kearney & Bussey, 2015). Another study, which conducted interviews with adolescents, found that parents had the ability to hinder adolescent disclosure through unfavorable reactions and could also prompt adolescent disclosure through positive reactions (Tokić & Pećnik, 2011). These behaviors, although not studied after an initial moment of disclosure, could impact subsequent disclosure in a continuous parent-adolescent conversation.

The Present Study

The current study built upon prior findings by examining which maternal emotion behaviors encourage or hinder adolescents' information and emotional disclosure. Mother-adolescent dyads were used in this study because adolescents have previously reported disclosing more to their mothers than to fathers (Smetana et al., 2006). Because prior research has demonstrated age and gender differences in adolescent disclosure, I also examined age and gender differences in the frequency, duration, and intensity of both forms of disclosure and maternal emotions. Finally, this study also examined both adolescent and mother discussion satisfaction. Examining mothers and adolescents' satisfaction allows for an introductory exploration into whether disclosure is functional and leads to better outcomes in mother-adolescent interactions.

The proposed research addressed the following questions: (1) Are there differences across older and younger adolescents in the frequency, duration, and intensity of disclosures in the context of parent-adolescent conflict discussions? I hypothesized that younger adolescents would engage in both types of disclosure more frequently and for longer periods of time compared with older adolescents. (2) Are there differences across older and younger adolescents in the duration of maternal emotions displayed during the conflict discussions? I hypothesized that mothers of older adolescents would spend more time validating their adolescents compared to younger adolescents because older adolescents and their parents are more likely to engage in patterns of mutual validation during parent-adolescent interactions (Main et al., 2016). (3) Are there differences across male and female adolescents in disclosures? I hypothesized that female adolescents would engage in both types of disclosure more frequently and for longer periods of time than male adolescents. (4) Are there differences across male and female

adolescents in the duration of maternal emotions displayed during the conflict discussions? I did not expect to see a difference between mothers of male and female adolescents due to the fact that prior research hasn't shown a difference between the way mothers react to their adolescents' disclosure based on their gender. (5) Are there any associations between maternal emotions and adolescent disclosures? Due to previous research findings on the importance of validation, I hypothesized that maternal validation would be associated with more instances and higher intensity of informational disclosure as well as increased instances of emotional disclosure. I also hypothesized that maternal negative emotions would be associated with lower instances of both types of disclosures. (6) Are there any associations between disclosures, maternal emotions, and mother- and adolescent-reported discussion satisfaction? I hypothesized that adolescents who engaged in higher frequencies of disclosure would feel more satisfied with the process and outcome of the conflict discussion than those who had fewer instances of disclosure. I also hypothesized that mothers would report feeling more satisfied with the process and outcome of the conflict discussion when their adolescents engaged in more instances of disclosure and less satisfied when their adolescents engaged in fewer instances of disclosure.

The present study moves beyond the reliance in previous research on self-report measures by examining disclosure in real-time and observing both emotional and informational disclosure in the same context. This study will extend the empirical literature on adolescent disclosure by contributing to our understanding as to how such dynamics occur in families with typically-developing adolescents by examining disclosure in the context of mother-adolescent conflict discussions.

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study were 50 adolescents (30 female; M age = 14.84 years, $SD = 1.99$) and their mothers who participated in a research study on how mothers and adolescents talk about conflict (see Main et al., 2016). Adolescents were recruited at ages 13-14 years old ($N = 29$, 62% female) and 17-18 years old ($N = 21$, 57% female). This age range was recruited in order to look at disclosure across both early and late adolescence. One dyad from the younger age group was excluded from the analyses because of an error in researcher instruction during the interaction portion of the task, resulting in an analysis of 28 mother–adolescent dyads for the younger group. The racial/ethnic composition of the sample is: 62% non-Hispanic white, 16% non-Hispanic black, 10% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4% Hispanic, and 8% other. Maternal education ranged from a high school degree to an advanced graduate degree, with the median highest degree obtained being a bachelor's degree (36.0%). Families' annual income ranged from less than \$25,000 per year to more than \$150,000 per year, with the average family income in the \$81,000 to \$100,000 range.

Procedures

Participants were recruited from local schools and communities in the San Francisco Bay Area using a variety of methods, including through schools, teen afterschool programs, parenting groups, and parent/teen newsletters. Dyads were instructed to discuss a topic of disagreement for 10 minutes. Mothers and adolescents independently identified two topics that they felt caused the most disagreement in their relationship using the modified version of the Issues Checklist (Prinz, Foster, Kent, & O'Leary, 1979). Mothers were given a \$20 check, and adolescents were given a \$20 gift card for participating.

Measures

Observed disclosure. To code both forms of observed disclosures (informational and emotional) each conversation was first segmented into adolescent and parent conversation turns. The discussions were each watched in their entirety twice by two coders. Coders were instructed to watch the video once all the way through without assigning any codes, with codes assigned on the second viewing the interaction. This was done to get a more holistic understanding of the conversation before assigning disclosure codes. Each adolescent conversation turn was coded for whether or not disclosure occurred (total sum = frequency of disclosure) and for how long each disclosure occurred (duration). Additionally, each instance of disclosure was rated on a scale of 0.5 (*low*) to 3 (*high*) to indicate the intensity of each disclosure using modified versions of the Couples Interaction Coding System (Marsh et al., 2002) and the Supportive Behavior Coding Systems (Allen et al., 2012) (see Appendix for a full version of the coding scheme). Codes were recorded using Mangold INTERACT (Version 16). Emotional disclosure and informational disclosure were each coded separately for frequency (number of times adolescent disclosed during conversation), duration (length of each disclosure in seconds), and intensity (rating of each disclosure). Disclosures were categorized into one of three classifications: informational disclosures (disclosures that received ratings > 0 for only informational disclosure), emotional disclosures (disclosures that received ratings > 0 for

only emotional disclosure), or both (disclosures that received ratings > 0 for both informational and emotional disclosures).

Intensity of disclosures was coded with a focus on the degree of information shared. If emotional disclosure was present, it was coded for intensity on a scale of 0.5 (*brief statement hinting at an emotion relating to self*) to 4 (*clearly stated emotions*). A given disclosure was rated highly in intensity for emotional disclosure if the adolescent clearly stated that he/she was experiencing intense feelings about something or someone. For example, if the adolescent stated that he/she was angry, happy, hurt, or jealous with a person or situation, the conversation turn would be rated high in intensity for emotional disclosure. A given disclosure was rated low in intensity for emotional disclosure if the adolescent made a statement about an internal emotion state where the feelings were more implied. For example, if the adolescent stated that they felt like there was no recognition for the things that they did around the house, without further elaboration. If informational disclosure was present, it was coded for intensity on a scale of 0.5 (*brief statement about a fact relating to self*) to 4 (*areas not commonly shared*). A disclosure was rated highly in intensity for informational disclosure if the adolescent disclosed facts or experiences about themselves that would not be commonly shared or would be very strange if shared with a stranger. For example, if the adolescent stated that they smoked marijuana with their friends last weekend while they playing video games or stated that their accomplishments are never enough for their parent because they are always expected to achieve more than they have. If either of these examples occurred during a conversation turn, that conversation turn would be rated highly in intensity for informational disclosure. However, it is important to note that the two forms of disclosure were not mutually exclusive. For example, an adolescent could state that they are afraid of becoming an alcoholic because they have been consuming higher quantities of alcohol more frequently and have witnessed a number of their friends become alcoholics. This would be a statement that would be rated highly in both informational and emotional disclosure because they are both clearly stating an intense feeling as well as sharing facts about a topic that is not commonly discussed with parents.

The author and a trained undergraduate research assistant, who reached 75% agreement on training videos across all codes prior to the start of coding, completed the coding for this study. Weekly calibration checks and discussions were held to minimize coder drift. Reliability was checked across 30% of the videos, and a minimum of 80% agreement across all disclosure codes was required in order for the data to be included in the final analyses. All participants' disclosure codes met this criterion and none were therefore excluded from analysis. Interrater reliability was calculated for both the agreement on the presence or absence of disclosure as well as on the intensity codes assigned. The total disclosure agreement percentage between both coders was calculated to be 99.30%. The total informational disclosure agreement percentage between both coders was 98.91% and the total emotional disclosure agreement percentage was 99.69%. I also ran a correlation between the intensity codes assigned by both coders. The correlation coefficient for informational disclosure was $r = 0.88$ and for emotional disclosure was $r = 0.85$. Proportional durations of adolescent disclosures were derived for analyses by dividing the total duration of each adolescent disclosure category by the

length of the discussion. Total durations of each adolescent disclosure category were also used for analyses.

Parental emotional behaviors. Parents' emotions were coded using the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF Version 4.0; Coan & Gottman, 2007). The SPAFF coding system considers the stream of behavior as continuous, and this allows for codes to be assigned at any time during the interaction. The SPAFF is divided into positive, negative, and neutral codes, with specific emotions within each broad dimension. However, for the purpose of this study the codes were collapsed into negativity (e.g., contempt, criticism, defensiveness), validation/interest, and positivity (enthusiasm, affection, humor) (see Main et al., 2016). Reliability was checked for each dyad, and a minimum of 75% agreement across all SPAFF codes was required in order for the data to be included in the final analyses. Cohen's kappa was used to calculate interrater reliability. The average kappa across all codes was .77 and .75 (range = .62 to .88) for mother and adolescent codes, respectively (see Main et al., 2016). Proportional durations of maternal emotions were derived for analyses by dividing the total duration of each maternal emotion category by the length of the discussion.

Discussion satisfaction. To assess how satisfied both mothers and their adolescents felt with the overall discussion, dyads separately reported their satisfaction with the outcome and the process of the discussion (see Main, Paxton, & Dale, 2016). Both adolescents and their mothers were separately asked to rate how satisfied they were with the outcome of the discussion and how satisfied they were with the way the conversation went on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely). Mother and adolescent satisfaction ratings were then analyzed separately in order to determine what aspect of disclosure contributed to better outcomes, if any, for adolescents compared to their mothers.

Results

Prior to analyzing the study questions, I examined the normality of the variables. Descriptive statistics for all study variables are presented in Table 1. The variables Emotional Frequency, Emotional Total Duration, Informational Average Duration, Emotional Average Duration, and Informational Intensity were all positively skewed, suggesting that there were several adolescents that did not exhibit these behaviors. Therefore, these variables were log-transformed in order to avoid violating normality assumptions. Outliers were also removed from the dataset prior to analysis. Outliers were defined as any values that were significantly numerically distant from values in the dataset. One outlier was removed from the Emotional total duration, Maternal validation, Both frequency, and Informational total duration variables. Two outliers were removed from the Emotional frequency and Both total duration variables. Three outliers were removed from the Informational average duration, Maternal interest, and Both average duration variables. Lastly, four outliers were removed from the Informational intensity, Emotional intensity, and Maternal satisfaction variables.

Age Differences in Observed Disclosures and Maternal Emotions

Descriptive statistics for adolescent disclosures (frequency, duration, and intensity) across adolescent age groups are presented in Table 2. Older adolescents engaged in longer average durations of informational disclosure than younger adolescents. Older adolescents also engaged in more intense informational disclosure durations compared with younger adolescents. There were no age differences in the frequency of informational disclosure. There were also no age differences in the frequency, intensity, or duration of emotional disclosures or of instances where both emotional and informational disclosures were present. Differences across adolescent age groups for adolescent disclosure and proportional durations of maternal emotions for the overall sample are also presented in Table 2. There were no age differences in the proportion of time mothers spent validating, showing interest, or negatively responding to their adolescent.

Gender Differences in Observed Disclosures and Maternal Emotions

Descriptive statistics for adolescent disclosures (frequency, duration, and intensity) across adolescent gender groups are presented in Table 3. Male adolescents engaged in longer total durations of informational disclosure. There were no gender differences in the frequency or intensity of informational disclosure. There were also no gender differences in the frequency, intensity, or duration of emotional disclosures or of instances where both emotional and informational disclosures were present. Differences across adolescent gender for adolescent disclosure and proportional durations of maternal emotions for the overall sample are presented in Table 3. There were no gender differences in the proportion of time mothers spent validating, showing interest, or negatively responding to their adolescent.

Correlations between Observed Disclosure, Maternal Emotions, and Satisfaction

Correlations between adolescent disclosures, mother proportional emotion durations, and mother/adolescent discussion satisfaction for the overall sample are presented in Table 4. Maternal validation was significantly correlated with both the total duration of instances that adolescents engaged in both informational and emotional disclosure. Parental negative emotion was negatively correlated with frequency and total

duration of informational disclosure. Conversely, adolescent discussion satisfaction was positively correlated with both the frequency and total duration of informational disclosure.

Discussion

The present study built upon previous findings by examining age and gender differences in observed adolescent disclosures and which parental emotion behaviors were positively or negative associated with adolescent disclosure. The study also examined correlations between adolescent disclosure, maternal emotions, and discussion satisfaction. Below we discuss these findings in more detail and address implications of this study for applying observational methodologies to research on adolescent disclosure and parent-adolescent relationships.

Age Differences in Observed Disclosures and Maternal Emotions

The present study examined age differences in the observed frequency, duration, and intensity of both informational and emotional disclosure. Findings suggested that there were differences in the amount of disclosure between older and younger adolescents. Contrary to previous self-report studies that looked at age differences in disclosure, I found that older adolescents engaged in longer average durations of informational disclosures than younger adolescents. Older adolescents also engaged in significantly more intense informational disclosures compared to younger adolescents. Self-report literature does potentially tap more into the frequency that adolescents believe they disclose to their parents. However, I did not find any significant differences when looking at the frequency that adolescents disclosed. These findings could suggest there is a self-presentation bias present in the self-report literature, where older adolescents may be underreporting how frequently they disclose to their parents or younger adolescents are over-reporting how frequently they disclose to their parents (e.g., Sinha, 1972; Smetana et al., 2009; Nucci et al., 2014). In addition, it is possible that there were no age differences present when looking at emotional disclosure because parents continue to remain an important source of emotional support across adolescence (Smetana et al., 2006).

Gender Differences in Observed Disclosures and Maternal Emotions

The present study also examined gender differences that may be present in the frequency, duration, and intensity of both forms of disclosure. Contrary to previous findings that relied on self-report (e.g., Papini et al., 1990), we found that male adolescents engaged in longer instances of informational disclosure. There were no other gender differences present in the frequency or intensity of informational disclosure. There were also no gender differences in the frequency, intensity, or duration of emotional disclosures or of instances where both emotional and informational disclosures were present. These findings could once again suggest that there may be a self-presentation bias present in the self-report literature, where female adolescents may be over-reporting how much they disclose to their parents or male adolescents are underreporting how much they disclose to their parents. It is also possible that the differences between the results I found and the results from the self report literature is due to the fact that disclosure is being observed in a conflict context. Potentially, I may be tapping into something that is pretty different than what is being measured in survey self-report measures.

Correlations between Observed Disclosure, Maternal Emotions, and Satisfaction

Lastly, the present study examined correlations between observed disclosure, maternal emotions, and mothers' and adolescents' discussion satisfaction. Consistent

with previous literature (e.g., Tilton-Weaver et al., 2010; Gamache Martin et al., 2017), parental validation was positively associated with duration of informational disclosure and instances where both types of adolescent disclosure were present. The literature on adolescent disclosure has found that positive parental reactions to disclosures are associated with greater adolescent feelings of connectedness with parents, which in turn predicts greater disclosure (Tilton-Weaver et al., 2010). These findings suggest that when parents display validating behaviors during parent-adolescent conversations, adolescents are more likely to disclose both about their emotional experiences as well as information about their life experiences.

The current study also found that parental negative emotion was negatively correlated with frequency and total duration of informational disclosure. This is consistent with previous research which found that when adolescents perceive negative parental responses to their disclosures, adolescents are more likely to feel controlled and less connected to parents, leading to less disclosure and more secrecy over time (Tilton-Weaver et al., 2010). Interestingly, adolescent discussion satisfaction was positively correlated with both the frequency and total duration of informational disclosure that adolescents engaged in. However, mother discussion satisfaction was not correlated with the frequency, duration, or intensity of any of the three disclosure categories that were analyzed.

It is important to note that we did not find any significant correlations when looking at emotional disclosure or when looking at instances of both types of disclosure. I also did not find that interest was correlated with any of the frequency, duration, or intensity of the three disclosure categories that were analyzed. It could be that these correlations were non-significant due to the fact that there were less instances of emotional disclosure and instances where both types of disclosure were present compared to informational disclosure.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are some limitations in the present study that need to be mentioned. First, although mother and adolescent perceptions of the quality of the discussions were assessed, the present study did not assess mother and adolescent perceptions of overall relationship quality. Assessment of overall relationship quality would shed light on whether the observed dynamics reflect consistent patterns within the relationship or whether the parental emotions displayed were in direct response to adolescent disclosures during the conversations. Future research should also look into the timing of maternal and adolescent emotions and adolescent disclosure in order to determine whether there is a way to predict whether the adolescent will engage in future disclosures. Future research should also look further into emotional disclosure and adolescent and maternal emotions in order to determine why emotional disclosure is not necessarily tied to higher discussion satisfaction.

Second, the present study included only mothers. Previous research has reported that adolescents often report less conflict with fathers, possibly due to the fact that most of their meaningful conversations occur with their mothers (Noller & Callan, 1990). Future research with fathers, as well as contexts in which both parents are present, would further our understanding of parental influences on adolescent disclosure. It would also

shed light on whether there are differences in parental responses to adolescent disclosures based on the parent's gender or the presence of a spouse.

Third, though the present study is unique in that it captured observed adolescent disclosures and maternal emotions, it will be important in future research to test whether there is convergence between adolescents' observed disclosures and their self-reports of disclosure. Furthermore, it would also be informative to examine dynamic associations between maternal emotions and the depth (i.e., intensity) of such disclosures (see Gamache Martin et al., 2017).

Finally, the cross-sectional design precludes examining developmental changes in associations between maternal emotions and adolescent disclosures over the course of adolescence. The relatively small sample size did not allow sufficient power to examine whether there were any cultural differences present or any age differences present when looking at male and female groups.

Conclusion and Implications

This study adds to our understanding of how features of the parent-adolescent relationship facilitate adolescent disclosure. The observational methodology sheds light on everyday parental emotion-related behaviors that facilitate adolescent disclosure in everyday parent-adolescent interactions. The only study to our knowledge that has used observational measures of adolescent emotional disclosures during a task that encouraged adolescents to talk with their parents about a topic for which they wanted support (Hare et al., 2011). In the current study, though not explicitly instructed to do so, most adolescents across both age groups spontaneously disclosed about both informational and emotional experiences during a conflict discussion. Previous research shows that parents primarily obtain information about their adolescents across different contexts through spontaneous adolescent disclosure (e.g., Stattin & Kerr, 2000; Tucker, Wiebe, Main, Lee, & White, in press). Thus, measurement of adolescents' observed spontaneous disclosure in contexts in which they are not explicitly instructed to disclose makes an important contribution to our understanding of adolescent disclosure to parents in everyday situations.

Due to the fact that adolescents increasingly spend more time outside the home, the positive effects of disclosure on adolescent adjustment will likely be gleaned only if parents can engage in behaviors that facilitate disclosure. The current study can be used to inform interventions for parents and adolescents who are struggling with adolescent disclosure. Specifically, parents should try to engage in validating behaviors when their adolescent does disclose information as this appears to have a positive effect on the frequency of disclosures.

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Table 1. *Descriptive statistics of study variables.*

Variables	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skew	Kurtosis
Maternal Emotions						
Negative	0.00	0.88	0.28	0.22	0.75	0.16
Validation	0.00	0.42	0.11	0.10	1.13	0.77
Interest	0.00	0.39	0.10	0.09	1.33	1.68
Adolescent Disclosure						
Informational frequency	1.00	25.00	10.61	6.37	0.42	-0.73
Emotional frequency	0.00	8.00	0.71	1.44	3.47	14.32
Both frequency	0.00	15.00	3.18	3.27	1.49	2.56
Informational total duration	1.94	319.19	101.72	69.02	0.87	0.91
Emotional total duration	0.00	42.71	2.67	6.80	4.61	25.48
Both total duration	0.00	262.47	53.81	61.36	1.41	1.60
Informational average duration	1.94	60.03	10.93	9.75	3.37	13.89
Emotional average duration	0.00	12.95	1.38	2.58	2.64	8.29
Both average duration	0.00	65.03	13.68	14.88	1.85	3.83
Informational intensity	0.53	4.00	1.11	0.72	2.31	5.75
Emotional intensity	0.00	3.00	0.59	0.95	1.59	1.32
Both intensity	0.00	2.25	0.83	0.67	0.62	-0.76
Discussion Satisfaction						
Maternal satisfaction	1.50	5.00	4.09	1.01	-1.33	1.09
Adolescent satisfaction	1.00	5.00	3.84	0.99	-0.93	0.94

Notes: Min = minimum, Max = maximum, *M* = mean, *SD* = Standard deviation

Maternal emotion codes refer to proportions. “Both” refers to disclosures that received intensity scores greater than 0 for both emotional and informational disclosure.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics of adolescent disclosures and proportional durations of maternal emotions across adolescent age.*

Variable	Older <i>M (SD)</i>	Younger <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t (df)</i>
Both Disclosures			
Frequency	3.52 (2.91)	2.46 (2.70)	1.28 (46)
Total Duration (seconds)	58.13 (56.43)	38.90 (46.04)	1.28 (45)
Average Duration (seconds)	13.57 (10.15)	8.86 (9.53)	1.62 (44)
Intensity	0.86 (0.70)	0.80 (0.67)	0.32 (47)
Emotional Disclosure			
Frequency	0.33 (0.42)	0.26 (0.42)	0.61 (45)
Total Duration (seconds)	0.66 (0.91)	0.49 (0.86)	0.69 (46)
Average Duration (seconds)	0.62 (0.83)	0.44 (0.71)	0.83 (47)
Intensity	0.33 (0.55)	0.40 (0.71)	-0.35 (43)
Informational Disclosure			
Frequency	11.14 (6.06)	10.21 (6.67)	0.50 (47)
Total Duration (seconds)	116.90 (56.07)	83.11 (63.04)	1.92† (46)
Average Duration (seconds)	2.39 (0.27)	2.09 (0.47)	2.77* (43)
Intensity	0.72 (0.18)	0.60 (0.17)	2.30* (43)
Maternal Emotion Proportions			
Maternal Negative Emotion	0.25 (0.26)	0.30 (0.19)	-0.83 (47)
Maternal Validation Emotion	0.13 (0.10)	0.08 (0.08)	1.91† (46)
Maternal Interest Emotion	0.07 (0.07)	0.10 (0.06)	-1.38 (44)

Notes: *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation, *df* = degrees of freedom

†*p* < .10, **p* < .05

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics of adolescent disclosures and proportional durations of maternal emotions across adolescent gender.*

Variable	Male <i>M (SD)</i>	Female <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t (df)</i>
Both Disclosures			
Frequency	2.68 (2.45)	3.10 (3.05)	-0.50 (46)
Total Duration (seconds)	38.19 (43.45)	51.94 (54.95)	-0.90 (45)
Average Duration (seconds)	10.20 (10.14)	11.37 (10.03)	-0.38 (44)
Intensity	0.74 (0.73)	0.88 (0.64)	-0.69 (47)
Emotional Disclosure			
Frequency	0.22 (0.37)	0.33 (0.44)	-0.96 (45)
Total Duration (seconds)	0.37 (0.73)	0.68 (0.94)	-1.27 (46)
Average Duration (seconds)	0.44 (0.77)	0.56 (0.77)	-0.54 (47)
Intensity	0.34 (0.71)	0.39 (0.62)	-0.26 (43)
Informational Disclosure			
Frequency	10.74 (6.10)	10.53 (6.63)	0.11 (47)
Total Duration (seconds)	122.17 (70.81)	80.82 (50.17)	2.21* (46)
Average Duration (seconds)	2.26 (0.40)	2.19 (0.44)	0.51 (43)
Intensity	0.68 (0.18)	0.63 (0.18)	1.01 (43)
Maternal Emotion Proportions			
Maternal Negative Emotion	0.25 (0.23)	0.30 (0.22)	-0.78 (47)
Maternal Validation Emotion	0.10 (0.09)	0.10 (0.09)	0.08 (46)
Maternal Interest Emotion	0.10 (0.07)	0.08 (0.06)	0.99 (44)

Notes: *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation, *df* = degrees of freedom

†*p* < .10, **p* < .05

Table 4. *Correlations between adolescent disclosures, proportional durations of maternal emotions, and discussion satisfaction.*

Variable	Parental negative emotion	Parental validation	Parental interest	Adolescent discussion satisfaction	Parent discussion satisfaction
Both Disclosures					
Frequency	0.004	0.16	-0.006	0.05	0.04
Total Duration	-0.14	0.38**	-0.09	-0.09	-0.05
Average Duration	-0.07	0.23	0.12	0.19	0.20
Intensity	0.18	0.11	0.08	0.15	0.05
Emotional Disclosure					
Frequency	-0.01	-0.18	-0.05	0.07	0.06
Total Duration	0.09	-0.13	-0.02	-0.12	0.03
Average Duration	0.003	0.03	0.04	0.001	-0.02
Intensity	-0.13	-0.03	0.04	0.04	0.09
Informational Disclosure					
Frequency	-0.29*	0.25†	0.008	0.38**	0.26
Total Duration	-0.38**	0.25†	-0.03	0.34*	0.17
Average Duration	-0.16	0.36*	0.16	0.23	-0.17
Intensity	-0.08	0.26†	0.07	0.08	0.18

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

Appendix

Introduction to Coding Disclosure in Parent-Adolescent Conflict Discussions

The overall goal of the coding system is to identify the dynamics between the target adolescents and their parents during a task when the adolescents and their parents are discussing topics of conflict. To maximize the reliability of this system, it is essential that you carefully follow the procedure described below when coding a discussion.

This coding system codes interpersonal interactions on the dyadic level. This system codes each members' interactions separately within a dyad. Thus, for each dyad, for example, the "mother-adolescent" dyad, you will have a code for speech of the adolescent to the mother and a code for speech of the mother toward the adolescent. You will focus mainly on the adolescent's speech and code for the mother before and after the child discloses something.

How to Code the Interaction:

Step 1- First, you should listen to the family discussion one time in its entirety. The goal in this pass through the discussion is to get as good a feel as possible for the general tone of the discussion, as well as for the nature of the conflict. For this reason, you should generally listen to the discussion without stopping or replaying sections of it, except in those few cases where this is necessary to understand what parties are saying. The object of this pass through the video is to hear the discussion in "real time" as you would hear it if you were listening to it live.

During this pass, you should jot notes on your coding sheet, which you feel might be important for coding the interaction.

Step 2- After your initial pass through, you should note the time of the instance of disclosure as well as the topic being disclosed (try to be as concise as possible). You will be coding informational self-disclosure and emotional self-disclosure separately. In order to assign the appropriate scores for the interaction you should consult the coding manual.

Note on multiple topics:

When multiple topics are discussed, you should include both topics in coding. However, coding should be weighted according to (1) the amount of time spent on each topic, (2) how important the topic is to the adolescent, and (3) when in doubt assume the first topic is more important.

Note on the appropriate place to stop coding:

Even if the participants finish their discussion of the conflict topic, you should continue to watch and code the entirety of the conversation, even if the participants are not at all on topic.

Depth of Informational Self-Disclosure

Informational self-disclosures are statements that communicate something that the partner would not automatically know about the person, and that wouldn't necessarily come up in everyday conversation. Self-disclosure includes information that is shared about oneself. **Self-disclosure may be assessed by asking the question, "Did this person share personal information or did they disclose information that they could've kept secret?"** Self-disclosed information includes private statements about oneself that would make the other person feel as though they know the speaker better. Self-disclosure refers both to the topic and to what the person says about it. Willingness to ask questions that express your interests may be considered self-disclosing. Each disclosure (could be a statement) is coded independently, and the overall score is assigned based on the disclosure that reaches the highest level. **Score the highest level of self-disclosure as the score you assign.** Persistence or lack of it would alter scores by +/- 1 point.

Affect: If a lot of affect (emotion) is displayed, this can be part of what's being disclosed and be scored. Sometimes, the most disclosing thing might even be the affect more than the content (i.e. that I'm really worried about something may be more disclosing than what that something is). However, it's also possible for people to be highly self-disclosing without showing any real affect.

Vulnerable: With vulnerability assess the degree to which the person would be made vulnerable sharing this information with the parent. Vulnerability is assessed by the degree of social vulnerability of the statement, not vulnerability within the dyad. Just because a statement is an area of disagreement within the dyad does not mean it makes the person vulnerable. For example, teen presents problem and parent responds, "I don't think that problem is a big deal". While one might argue that might make the individual vulnerable by potentiating disagreement that is not what is assessed with the vulnerability in this code.

NOTE: Criticism Caveat - Saying something critical or being angry about the other person typically minimizes your own vulnerability to such an extent that we code it as a "0" even though it might seem to fit elsewhere. Some angry statements might not get scored at all (i.e. attacks) and others could be scored highly (to the extent they reflected great vulnerability, i.e., by implicitly conveying a sense of hurt or upset, even though they are covering it up or minimizing it with anger).

****Do not score down just because someone is saying something easily within the relationship; nor do you score up if they seem anxious with what they are disclosing.****

- 0.5 Brief statement about a more specific topic relating to self that doesn't fit a 0 but doesn't fit into higher scores.

Example: "I'm gonna fail this Spanish test." (said matter of factly with no elaboration)

Example: "I need some money to buy some sneakers, I don't know how to get it." (Child is simply inquiring about how to raise money)

Example: "I'm annoyed with my sister for picking on me."

(A statement made about the siblings' behavior being out of line with no elaboration).

- 1 Personal opinions, not necessarily controversial but still going out on a limb a bit.

Encompasses facts about self **OR** the speaker is going out a little more on the limb with the information being disclosed.

Example: "I'm worried that I'm gonna fail this Spanish test."

Example: "I feel like I get more done when you're not in the house. Like when you went on that walk and I got ready for school and got out fine when you're not there."

If someone in essence says "me too" to a highly disclosing statement, without adding other information, it usually will get a maximum of a 1 no matter how said or in what context (except in cases where the material is extremely self-disclosing—e.g., revealing a history of sexual abuse).

** 2 and above is getting into areas that are not commonly shared with strangers or others and are more difficult to say. **

- 2 Relatively controversial opinions (i.e. sharing information about bullying/teasing). Expressing feelings about information that is socially acceptable but not always readily expressed. Also coded here are things that might be a bit more embarrassing, things that someone might think the speaker is a little silly for saying.

Example: "Yeah and it's really bad, I'm tired of humiliating myself by taking that test over and over again, it's a horrible test and I'm terrible at it."

Example: Teen to Parent: "Larry keeps picking on me" (w/ no follow-up).

- 3 Sharing information about something that expresses strong feelings that are less socially acceptable (e.g., embarrassed (for 13 year old); for age 21: "I feel like I need more of your time right now.").

OR

Revealing facts about self that are a little strange to reveal to a stranger, a little potentially embarrassing. The information that is revealed has some emotional content and seems to be important to the speaker.

Example: “Kids are teasing me.” (Worse than Larry picking on me, because implies something more embarrassing, i.e. a *group* is making fun of me vs. 1 person acting like a jerk, it is something that would not typically be shared).

Example: “I was worried about you when you fell and the ambulance came to get you.” (for 13 year old)

Example: “Dad doesn’t want to talk to me, he never says anything to me, he doesn’t understand me.”

- 4 Areas not commonly shared.
Expressing strong feelings (other than socially acceptable feelings, such as anger at something outrageous. Can also be sadness, fear, loneliness, or anxiety about something in particular).

OR

Describing experiences or facts about self that would be very strange to tell a stranger.

Example: “I feel like no matter what type of accomplishment there is on my part, there is always something more to be bugged about. It’s never enough.” (Adolescent shares that accomplishments are never enough because there is always more to be done, which causes adolescent to feel inadequate)

Depth of Emotional Self-Disclosure

This code assesses the verbalization of inner states, and so we are coding **verbal statements that inform us about what the individual is feeling**. *Higher-level disclosures will state the emotion more explicitly, whereas lower level disclosures imply the emotion that is felt* (and thus some inference is required to determine the emotion that is felt). In assigning this code, each emotional disclosing statement is coded independently, and the overall score is assigned by combining these scores.

Note.

(1) Elaboration (or lack of it) alters the scoring of a statement by $\pm 1/2$ point such that disclosures that are followed up or elaborated get more credit.

(2) Emotional tone alters the scoring of a statement by $\pm 1/2$ point, such that statements

made with more feeling or emotion (e.g. with a lot of affect or enthusiasm) get higher scores, and statements made with emotions that seem to minimize the statement (e.g. making a joke out of something or saying it in a way that minimizes the importance) get lower scores.

Note.

Statements of the type “One of my big issues is” are not scored as a disclosure of internal states

Note: Statements of the type “I think you need to...”, or “I don’t think you should” will not be scored as a disclosure. Statements of the type “I need...”, “I want...”, “I don’t need...”, or “I don’t want...” will be scored as disclosure.

STEP 1. Individual Statement Scoring: Every instance of the behaviors outlined below should be noted and scored using the following scale.

****Statements at the .5 and 1 level do not expressly state the feeling that is being conveyed****

.5- Low: Statements about internal states where the feelings are more implied (i.e., you have to really draw out or interpret to get the emotion underlying the statement).

Example 1: “I feel like you don’t listen to what I am saying.”

Example 2: “I feel like there is no recognition for the things that I do”

Example 3: “Getting back to dance has been a good thing for me” [said without further elaboration]

Example 4: “Honestly you don’t take care of me that much.”

1- Medium: Statements about thoughts and feelings where the feeling is expressed but in a minimal or less clear way (i.e. hints of what the emotion would be, but some inference is required)

Example: “How does it feel to me going to a school every day that I don’t want to go to because you sent me there? Do you think I’m going to want to help you by cleaning up when I get home or am I going to want to relax because I had a horrible day because of you?”

2- Medium High: Clearly stating feelings that are less intense (e.g. good, bad, nice, not nice, yucky) and more readily expressed. You have to have a clear statement of a feeling to reach this level.

Example 1: “The other day you walked in and you just wouldn’t talk to me. That made me feel bad.”

Example 2: “I’m not going to play this role any more – I feel like I am the one doing all the work and it doesn’t feel good.”

3- High: Clearly stating feelings that are deeper or more intense (e.g., anger, hurt, anxiety, sadness, fear, emotional pain, loneliness, frustration, anxiety, despair, inadequacy).

Example 1: "I'm always the one that gets in trouble and then I get mad because you catch me and not Luca. He can do whatever he wants, but when you catch me I get in trouble."

Example 2: "Often the thing that really bugs me is when I say 'can you not interrupt me' and instead of you saying I'm sorry I did just interrupt you, you get defensive or act offended that I'm calling you out or just push it aside, that's what really frustrates me."

Example 3: "I know I was just feeling kind of discouraged. I didn't feel like I wasn't getting very much help from anyone. I had a lot of things going on too. We had the hockey championships and I was preparing for that, And I don't think I really played as well as I wanted to have it was kind of discouraging and no one else just really seemed to care about that."