



Individuation of female adolescents: Relations with adolescents' perceptions of maternal behavior and with adolescent–mother discrepancies in perceptions

Efrat Sher-Censor*, David Oppenheim, Abraham Sagi-Schwartz

Center for the Study of Child Development, University of Haifa, 6035 Rabin Building, Mount Carmel, Haifa 31905, Israel

A B S T R A C T

Keywords:

Female adolescents
Individuation
Parent–adolescent communication
Social perceptions

The study examined how individuality and connectedness of female adolescents relate to their perceptions of maternal behavior and to adolescent–mother discrepancies in perceptions of maternal behavior. Seventy 16.5-year-old daughters and their mothers participated in the study. Individuality and connectedness of the daughters were assessed from observed daughter–mother interactions. The perceptions of daughters and mothers regarding maternal behavior were assessed using a video recall procedure. Daughters' negative perceptions of maternal behavior were associated with higher individuality. Daughter–mother discrepancies in perceptions of maternal behavior were related to lower connectedness of the daughters. Finally, daughters who showed high individuality at the expense of connectedness had more discrepancies in perceptions with their mothers compared to daughters that balanced between moderate-to-high individuality and connectedness. These findings underscore the importance of assessing daughters and mothers' perceptions of their interactions at the individual as well as the dyadic levels for understanding daughters' behavior during communication with their mothers.

© 2011 The Foundation for Professionals in Services for Adolescents. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

During the last two decades there has been a wide interest in studying observed individuation in adolescent–parent interactions. Individuation involves two independent dimensions: developing individuality (i.e. awareness of being separate, with independent thoughts, opinions and feelings) and maintaining connectedness to the parents (i.e., being emotionally involved, sensitive and responsive). Some adolescents exhibit a balanced individuation, and show moderate-to-high level of both individuality and connectedness. Others display imbalanced individuation and show high individuality at the expense of connectedness, high connectedness at the expense of individuality, or inhibition of both individuality and connectedness (Bengtson & Grotevant, 1999; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986).

Balanced individuation has been found to be consistently associated with better developmental outcomes during adolescence and early adulthood, such as higher self-worth, less psychological distress and better social relationships, compared to imbalanced individuation (Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O'Connor, 1994; Grotevant & Cooper, 1998; Scharf & Mayseless, 2008). Identifying processes that underlie adolescents' observed individuation is therefore important. Our study aimed to address this issue by assessing the *perceptions* and *discrepancies* in the perceptions of daughters and mothers regarding

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +972 4 8249073.

E-mail addresses: esher@psy.haifa.ac.il (E. Sher-Censor), oppenhei@psy.haifa.ac.il (D. Oppenheim), sagi@psy.haifa.ac.il (A. Sagi-Schwartz).

maternal behavior during daughter-mother interactions, and by examining their associations with daughters' observed individuality, connectedness, and the balance between them.

Perceptions and individuation

Children's subjective experience of parental behaviors appears to play an important role in shaping their behavior when interacting with their parents (Bowlby, 1973; Boyce et al., 1998; Powers & Welsh, 1999). Several researchers concluded that adolescents' perceptions of their parents as respecting and supporting their individuality are vital for their readiness to express individuality, i.e., exhibit clearly their opinions and point of views, as well as for their reciprocating connectedness to their parents. In other words, such perceptions may facilitate balanced individuation. Perceiving the parents as undermining adolescents' individuality or as rejecting and hostile, according to this view, may lead to imbalanced individuation patterns that are characterized by inhibition of their individuality and/or their connectedness. Adolescents may inhibit their individuality, because from their point of view self-assertion leads to negative parental responses, or because the relationship with the parents may be perceived as too fragile for handling disagreements. Adolescents may inhibit their connectedness by reciprocating the antagonism that they perceive in their parents' behavior (Allen et al., 1994; Allen, Hauser, O'Connor, Bell, & Eickholt, 1996; Marsh, McFarland, Allen, Boykin-McElhane, & Land, 2003).

Studies that examined marital dyads provide indirect support for the importance of focusing on partners' perceptions of their interaction. Such studies which measured couples' evaluation of each other's messages after each speaker's turn, showed that couples' behaviors were better predicted by their *perceptions* of the partner's preceding behavior than by trained observers' ratings of the preceding behavior (Halford & Sanders, 1990; Notarius, Benson, Sloane, Vanzetti, & Hornyak, 1989). Yet, to the best of our knowledge, the association between the perceptions of adolescents regarding parental behavior and the observed individuation of adolescents has not been examined. The first goal of our study was therefore to examine this link.

Discrepancies in perceptions and individuation

Our second aim was to examine the relations between *discrepancies* in adolescent-parent perceptions of the parents' behavior and adolescent individuation. Two seemingly contradictory ideas have been offered regarding the meaning of discrepancies in perceptions in the family. Some researchers (e.g., Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Callan & Noller, 1986) considered family discrepancies as normative, representing the different developmental tasks which parents and adolescents face. According to this view, parents' agenda is to maintain family cohesion and harmony, which may lead them to perceive the family through "rose-colored glasses". Adolescents' task, however, is to develop individuality, and therefore, perceiving the family differently than their parents could facilitate this task (Butner et al., 2009; Callan & Noller, 1986; Campione-Barr & Smetana, 2004). For example, the expectancy-violation model (Collins, 1995; Collins, Laursen, Mortensen, Luebker, & Ferreira, 1997) suggests that adolescents and parents experience discrepancies regarding time tables of autonomy which "are both normative and functional" (Collins et al., 1997, p. 193), as they stimulate conflicts, which in turn facilitate the creation of more age appropriate expectations.

Yet, clinicians and other researchers have suggested that discrepancies in adolescent-parent perceptions are *not* adaptive. According to the family systems perspective, sharing a similar view regarding the family is necessary for constructive communication between parents and adolescents, and is vital for the well-being of the family members and for adaptive family functioning (De Los Reyes & Kazdin, 2006; Kenyon & Koerner, 2009; Olson et al., 1983; Paikoff & Collins, 1991; Reiss, Oliveri, & Curd, 1983). Supporting this view, several studies indicated that more discrepancies in adolescent-parent perceptions of the family were associated with lower self-competence and with more behavior problems of adolescents (Ohannessian-McCauley, Lerner, Lerner, & von Eye, 2000; Pelton & Forehand, 2001; Sher-Censor, Parke, & Coltrane, *in press*). Also, families that experienced relatively more discrepancies in their perceptions of the family were found to be enmeshed or disengaged and rigid or chaotic in their family roles and rules (Olson et al., 1983).

The seemingly contradictory views regarding the meaning of discrepancies in perception may be compatible. As proposed by Welsh, Galliher, and Powers (1998), discrepancies in perceptions may reflect adolescents' developing individuality, while shared views may reflect the connectedness between family members. Excessive familial discrepancies could be associated with imbalanced individuation, in terms of displaying high individuality at the expense of maintaining connectedness. Welsh et al. (1998) did not address systematically other patterns of individuation, but it can be inferred that the lowest level of familial discrepancies may be expected for adolescents who display high connectedness and inhibit their individuality, and intermediate level of discrepancies may be expected for adolescents who maintain a balance between high individuality and high connectedness. The expectation regarding the association between discrepancies and the imbalanced pattern of low individuality and low connectedness is less clear. However, if shared views reflect connectedness, then it can be expected that adolescents who inhibit their connectedness would experience more discrepancies in perceptions with their parents compared to adolescents who display higher levels of connectedness (i.e., adolescents who balance between individuality and connectedness and those who show connectedness at the expense of individuality).

The literature about marital communication provides additional indirect support for these expected links. Distressed couples experience more discrepancies in their perceptions of their interactions than non-distressed couples (Gottman, Notarius, Markman, Bank, & Yoppi, 1976), and constructive marital communication is associated with fewer discrepancies in couples' perceptions of their communication (Knudson, Sommers, & Golding, 1980; Sillars, Roberts, Dun, & Leonard, 2001;

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/881151>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/881151>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)