



# Birth order and gender differences in family members’ and observers’ ratings of parent-adolescent interactions



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## Introduction

- Previous research focusing on outsiders’ views and insiders’ views of family interaction ratings has found that there have been low correlations of ratings between family members and observers (Surra & Ridley, 1991), yet family members’ reports have been both positively and significantly correlated (Schwarz, Barton-Henry, & Pruzinsky, 1985). Research has also found that there are greater discrepancies between adolescents’ reports and observers’ reports than between mothers’ and observers’ reports (Welsh et al., 1998).
- Because most of the studies have focused on single dyadic family subsystems, previous research may have glossed over the fact that different dyadic relationships do not occur in isolation (Dekovic and Buist, 2005) and that each parent-child dyad impacts the other family subsystems (Cox & Paley, 1997).
- Other research suggests that second-borns were found to have more decision-making autonomy than firstborns, particularly during early adolescence (Campione-Barr, Lindell, Short, et al., 2015), which may affect the ways that first-borns and second-borns interact with their parents (and the quality of those interactions) during adolescence.
- Gender also plays a role in family dynamics, as female only dyads (e.g., mother-daughter, sister-sister) tend to be more effectively intense than all other combinations (Campione-Barr & Smetana, 2019).
- Therefore the present study aimed to investigate the differences in ratings between observers, parents, and adolescents during a semi-structured adolescent disclosure task, and whether those ratings are affected by adolescent birth order and gender.

## Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis 1: RATER:** We predicted that observer reports and parent reports of parent-child interactions would be closer than adolescent reports would be to parents or observers.
- **Hypothesis 2: GENDER:** We predicted that interaction reports between daughters and parents will be closer than those between sons and parents.
- **Hypothesis 3: BIRTH ORDER:** We predicted that older siblings’ and parents’ reports would be closer than younger siblings’ and parents’ reports.

## Method

Participants	123 families( 246 parent-adolescent dyads)	
Mean sibling age	Older: 13.93 (+/ 0.95)	Younger: 11.47 (+/ 1.32)
Ethnicity	White: 85%	
Family Dynamic	Two-Parent families 72%	
Mean Family Income	106,827-\$373,894 Upper-Middle Class	
Parent Education	College degree: 72.3% Well Educated	

**Procedure:** Each parent-child dyad participated in an eight-minute disclosure/problem task, which was a video and audio recording. While family members were separated to complete questionnaires. Once an issue for each partner was selected, the topic was placed on an index card. Both the parents and the kids completed a questionnaires after the interview.

Table 1  
*Items Included in Ratings of Mother-Adolescent Interactions*

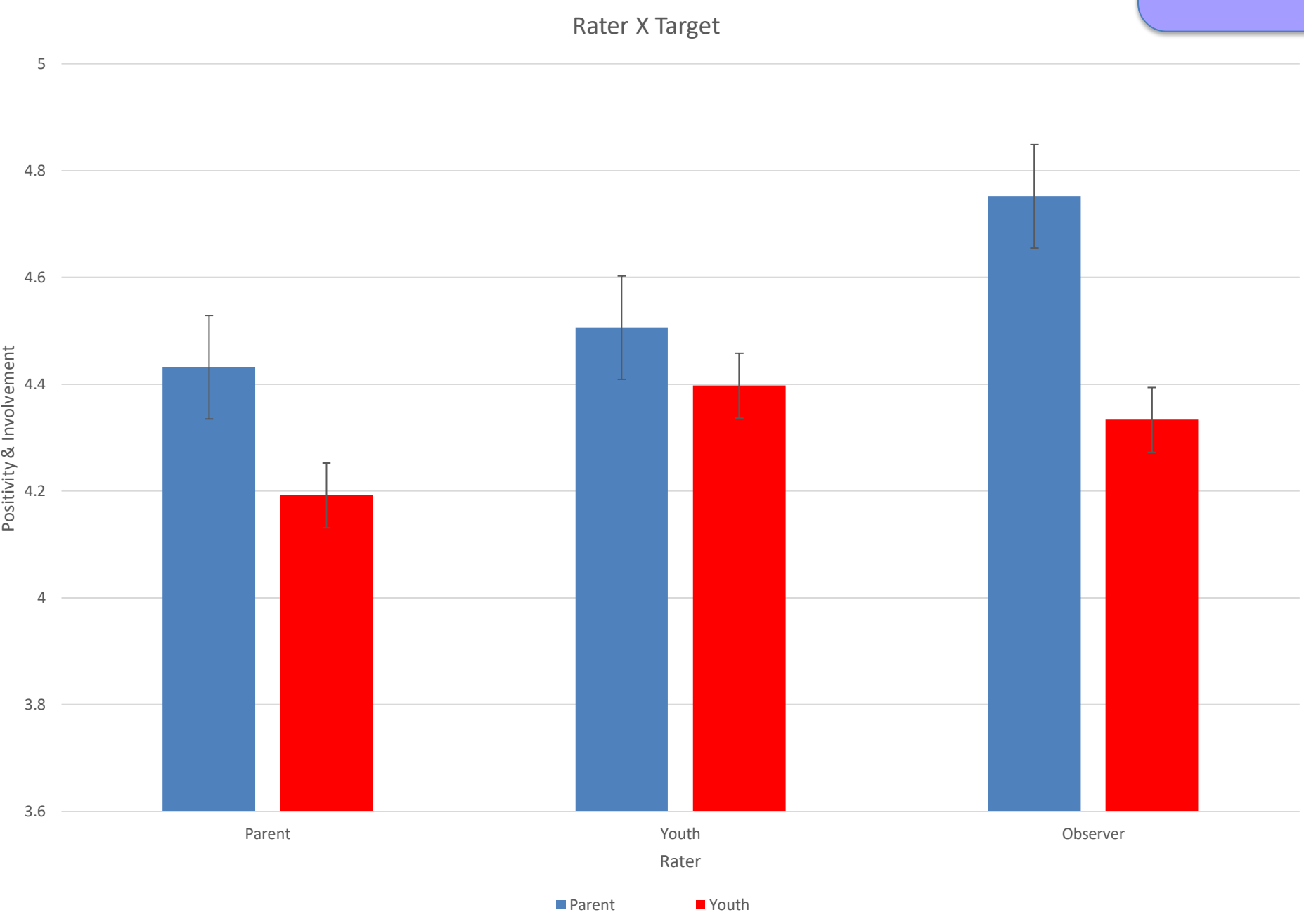
Mother		Adolescents		Observer	
Rating mother	Rating adolescent	Rating adolescent	Rating mother	Rating mother	Rating adolescent
Expressed true feelings	Expressed true feelings	Expressed true feelings	Expressed true feelings	Listened to other	Listened to other
Listened to other	Other listened Positive	Other listened Positive	Listened to other	Supportive Warmth	Supportive Warmth
Supportive Positive			Supportive Positive	Explained position	Explained position
Explained position			Explained position	Involved/i nterested	Involved/i nterested
Involved/int ered in task	Involved/interes ted in task	Involved/interes ted in task	Involved/int ered in task	Tolerates differences	Tolerates differences
Other free to express opinion			Other free to express opinion		
$(\alpha s = .87, .82)$		$(\alpha s = .82, .80)$		$(\alpha s = .82, .78)$	
$(\alpha s = .92, .84)$		$(\alpha s = .56, .54)$		$(\alpha s = .67, .68)$	

Note. Values represent separate alphas for interactions with older, younger siblings.

## Discussion

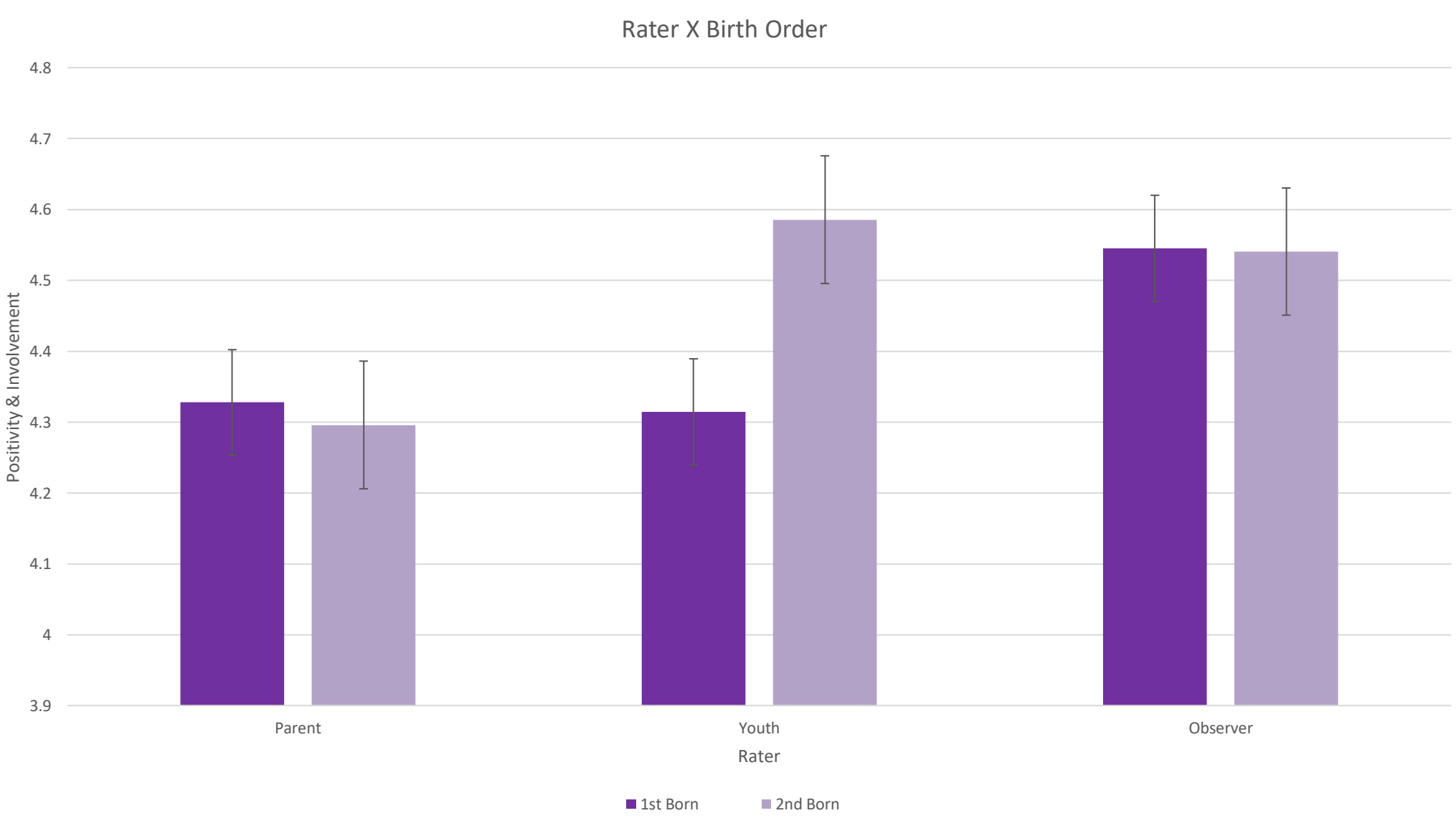
- **Hypothesis 1-- Partially Supported:** All raters reported that parents were significantly more positive, but observers reported parents the most positively.
- **Hypothesis 2-- Not Supported:** No gender differences in ratings were revealed.
- **Hypothesis 3-- Partially Supported:** While parents did not rate older and siblings differently, second-born adolescents rated their interactions with parents more positively than first-born adolescents.
- **Conclusion:** Overall, results indicated that observers rated interactions between parents and adolescents more positively among all raters. While there were no gender differences in ratings, second-born adolescents reported higher ratings of interactions than did first-born adolescents.
- **Limitations/ Future Directions:** The present study examined predominantly White, middle-class sample. Future studies should examine more diverse populations to increase generalizability of these findings.

## Results



- A significant Rater X Target interaction,  $F(2, 466) = 41.44, p < .001$ , was found. In general, parents were rated more positively than adolescents by all 3 raters, but observers rated parents the most positively.

## Primary Analyses



- A significant Rater X Birth Order interaction,  $F(2, 466) = 7.15, p < .001$ , was found. While there was no birth order difference in parent and observer ratings of the interactions, second-born adolescents rated their interactions more positively than did first-born adolescents.

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