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Correlates of Mothers' Value Messages of Compassion and Caution Over Time

Laura Wray-Lake
Claremont Graduate University

Constance A. Flanagan
University of Wisconsin - Madison

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The Pennsylvania State University

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Introduction

❖ Messages of compassion and caution represent two fundamental value dimensions parents communicate to children regarding how to treat and interact with others (Flanagan, 2003).

❖ Value socialization is typically discussed without specifying which values are being imparted, yet socialization processes may differ depending on the value dimension in question (Kuczynski & Grusec, 1997).

❖ Parenting strategies change substantially in response to developmental shifts across adolescence (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Kerr & Stattin, 2003). Moreover, parents' socialization strategies may be most effective when they fit both the child and his or her environment (Dix, 1992; Kuczynski & Hildebrandt, 1997).

Study Aims

❖ We aim to predict individual differences and within-person changes in mothers' value messages of compassion and caution over time. Our predictors include adolescent age, gender, transitions, and activities, as well as mother characteristics and family and neighborhood contexts.

Method

❖ Data came from the Social Responsibility and Prevention Project, a three-year longitudinal study of adolescents, parents, and teachers from eight school districts in Pennsylvania and Michigan.

❖ Imputing missing data, analyses utilized adolescents and their mothers who completed at least one wave of data ($N = 1638$); 717 dyads (44%) completed 2 and 259 (36%) completed 3 waves. Table 1 shows sample characteristics at wave 1.

❖ Predictor variables came from mothers and adolescents across three annual waves. In Table 2, we present characteristics of the longitudinal measures, including scale reliability and means.

Table 1. *Sample Characteristics at Wave 1*

	Mean / Frequency	Range
Adolescent Age	13.13	10–19
Adolescent Gender (Male=1)	0.45	0, 1
Mothers' Education[a]	2.90	1–5
Mothers' Race (Ref=White)		
Black	0.09	0, 1
Other	0.05	0, 1
Married (Yes=1, No=0)	0.78	0, 1
Family Religiosity (Yes=1, No=0)	0.71	0, 1

Note. Descriptive statistics were derived from data imputed with the EM method.
[a]Mothers' education was measured using a 5-point scale from *Did Not Finish High School* (1) to *Master's, Ph.D., or Professional Degree* (5); Sample mean reflected *Some Training after High School / Community College* (3).

Table 2. *Characteristics of Longitudinal Measures*

	N Items	Alphas	Range	Mean Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Mothers' Value Messages						
Compassion (M)	6	.74, .77, .78	1–5	4.36	4.23	4.18
Caution (M)	4	.64, .63, .71	1–5	3.90	3.92	3.82
Adolescent Transitions						
Transition to Middle School[a] (R)	1	–	0, 1	0.10	0.21	0.29
Transition to High School[a] (R)	1	–	0, 1	0.08	0.22	0.28
Experienced Bullying[b] (A)	1	–	0, 1	0.53	0.41	0.29
Adolescent Activities						
Substance Use[c] (A)	5	.77, .81, .82	1–6	1.53	1.56	1.64
Substance Use Attitudes (A)	3	.56, .63, .69	1–5	1.97	2.01	2.09
Community Service (A)	1	–	0, 1	0.65	0.47	0.53
Family Context						
Mothers' Knowledge (M)	4	.83, .87, .81	1–3	2.32	2.49	2.45
Mothers' Concerns (M)	6	.77, .76, .77	1–3	2.27	2.19	2.14
Neighborhood Context						
Ease of Substance Use (M)	3	.93, .93, .95	1–5	3.12	3.31	3.36
Neighborhood Cohesion (A)	8	.85, .86, .88	1–5	3.53	3.44	3.42

Note. Descriptive statistics were derived from data imputed with the EM method. M=Mother report. R=Researcher collected. A=Adolescent report.
[a]Coded as 0 (*no transition*) versus 1 (*made the transition*). [b]Coded as 0 (*have not been bullied*) versus 1. (*adolescent or friend experienced bullying*).
[c]Substance use items were standardized for analysis.

Analytic Plan

❖ We conducted multilevel modeling using SAS PROC MIXED 9.1 where occasions were nested within persons.

❖ Separate models were fit for mothers' value messages of compassion and caution.

❖ Cohort sequential data were modeled using relatively orthogonal linear and quadratic polynomials for age and their Level 2 means.

❖ To address missing data, multiple imputation was employed using 91 variables. We used 40 datasets to avoid power fall-off (Graham, Olchowski, & Gilreath, 2006). Diagnostic plots indicated that parameters were estimated well, and relative efficiency estimates were above 98%.

Results

Adolescent Age

❖ Mothers' messages of compassion declined in relation to adolescents' age. Declines were steeper in early adolescence, and leveled off somewhat in late adolescence (see Figure 1).

❖ Mothers' messages of caution also declined in relation to adolescents' age. Mothers of older adolescents showed flatter curves and lower levels than mothers of younger adolescents (see Figure 2).

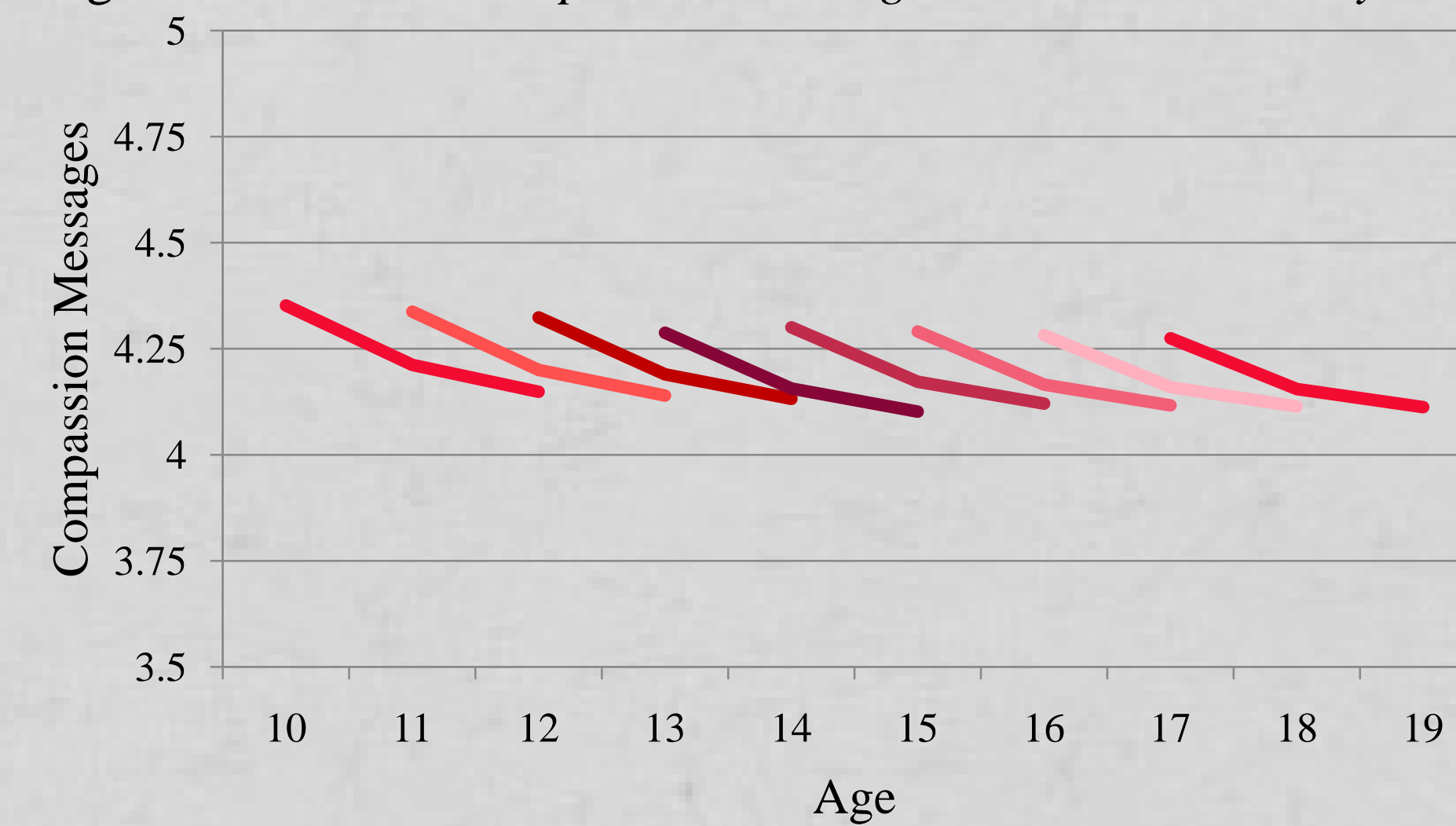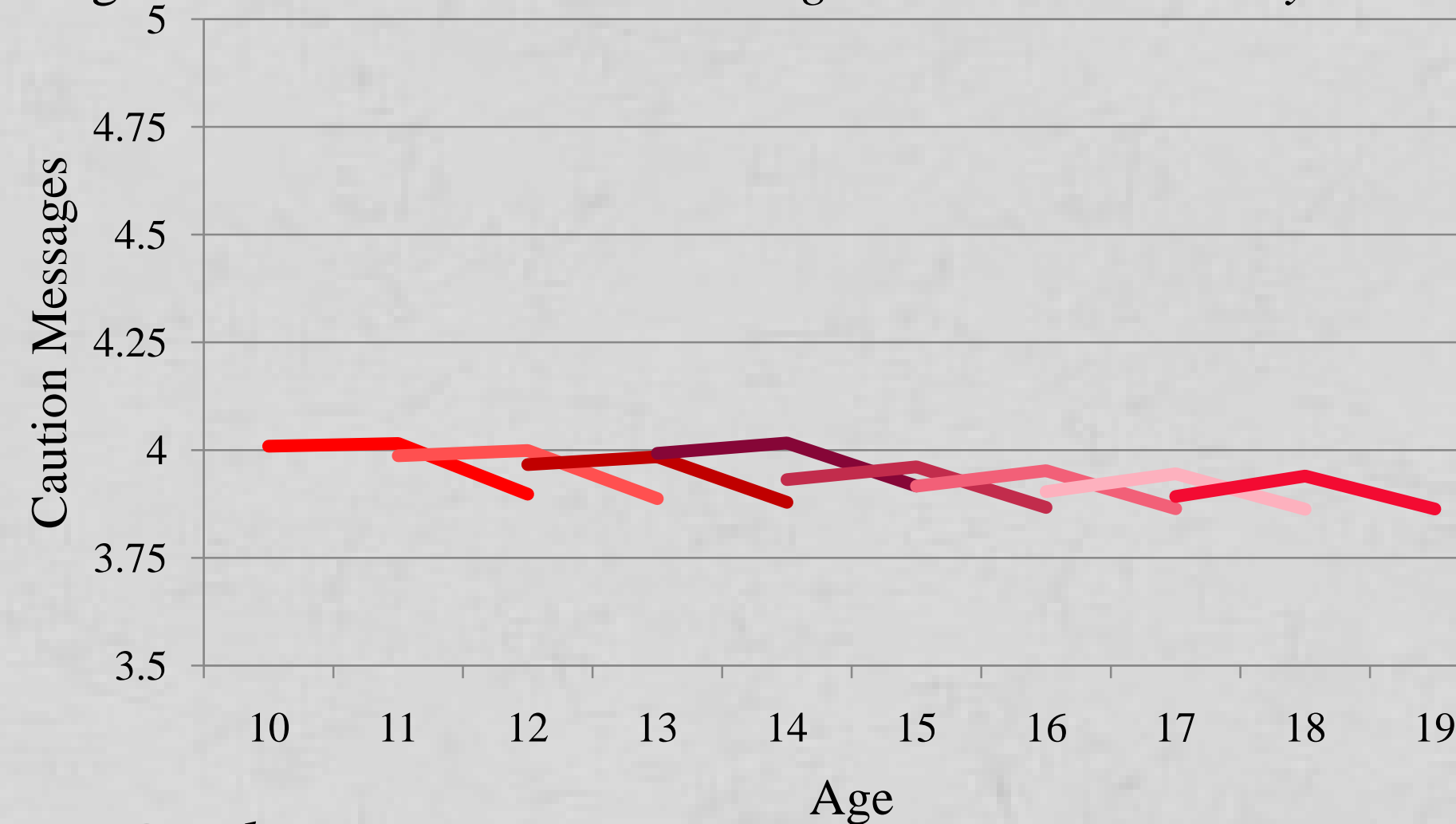Figure 1. *Mothers' Compassion Messages: Growth Curves by Cohort*

Figure 2. *Mothers' Caution Messages: Growth Curves by Cohort*

Adolescent Gender

❖ Mothers of boys emphasized caution less than mothers of girls.
❖ Mothers' messages of compassion did not differ by adolescent gender.

Adolescent Transitions

❖ Mothers decreased messages of compassion at times when their adolescents reported that they or a friend had been bullied.

❖ Transitions to middle and high school were not significantly associated with mothers' value messages.

Adolescent Activities

❖ Adolescents with more positive attitudes toward substance use had mothers who communicated less about compassion.

❖ Adolescents who volunteered more often had mothers with higher reports of compassion and lower reports of caution.

❖ However, activity variables were not significant in, and thus were excluded from, the full models shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Multilevel Models for Mothers' Value Messages of Compassion and Caution*

	Mothers' Value Messages	
Fixed Effects	Compassion	Caution
Intercept	4.53(.12)***	3.37(.16)***
Adolescent Age		
Age Linear: L1[a]	-.09(.01)***	-.04(.01)**
Age Linear: L2[b]	.08(.01)***	.03(.01)†
Age Linear L1 X Age Linear: L2	-.07(.03)**	.13(.03)***
Age Quadratic: L1	.04(.01)**	-.06(.02)***
Age Quadratic: L2	.04(.01)**	-.07(.02)***
Adolescent Gender: L2		
(Male=1, Female=0)	-.03(.02)	-.05(.02)*
Mother Characteristics: L2		
Education	-.01(.01)	-.04(.01)***
Married (Yes=1, No=0)	.02(.02)	-.07(.03)**
Race: Black[c]	-.01(.04)	.14(.04)***
Race: Other[c]	-.03(.05)	.01(.05)
Adolescent Transitions		
Transition to Middle School: L1	.01(.03)	.06(.04)
Transition to Middle School: L2	-.05(.05)	-.11(.06)†
Transition to High School: L1	-.02(.03)	.04(.04)
Transition to High School: L2	.03(.05)	.002(.06)
Experienced Bullying: L1	-.03(.02)*	-.02(.02)
Experienced Bullying: L2	.07(.04)†	.04(.05)
Family Context		
Knowledge of Child's Friends: L1	.02(.02)	-.001(.03)
Knowledge of Child's Friends: L2	.13(.03)***	-.003(.04)
Mothers' Concerns: L1	.02(.02)	.06(.03)*
Mothers' Concerns: L2	.07(.03)*	.28(.04)***
Family Religiosity: L2	.06(.03)*	.01(.03)
Neighborhood Context		
Ease of Substance Use: L1	-.001(.01)	.02(.01)*
Ease of Substance Use: L2	.004(.01)	-.02(.02)
Neighborhood Cohesion: L1	.003(.01)	-.01(.02)
Neighborhood Cohesion: L2	.06(.02)***	-.02(.02)

Note. Linear age was centered at age 14. Imputed parameters are shown. [a]L1=Level 1 Effects. [b]L2=Level 2 Effects. [c]Reference=White. †$p < .10$, *$p \leq .05$, **$p \leq .01$, ***$p \leq .001$.

Family Context

❖ Mothers with greater knowledge of their child's friends communicated more about compassion.

❖ Mothers with greater concerns about their child's future reported communicating more messages of compassion and caution. Moreover, increases in concerns were associated with increases in messages of caution.

❖ Family religiosity was associated with greater emphasis on compassion.

Neighborhood Context

❖ When mothers increased perceptions that substances are easily obtained in the community, they also increased their messages of caution.

❖ Adolescents' reports of neighborhood cohesion were positively associated with mothers' messages of compassion.

Discussion

❖ Analyses support the theoretical tenets that parenting is often flexible and socialization practices are adapted based on adolescents' age, experiences, and contexts.

❖ Mothers may report less values communication with older adolescents because they have fewer opportunities for such communication and/or due to a desire to not overcontrol their maturing teens.

❖ The different evidence compiled for the two types of value messages demonstrates the importance of examining value content in research endeavors aimed at understanding value socialization processes.

❖ Results illustrate to researchers, practitioners, and parents some of the ways in which value messages can be tailored to adolescents' developmental contexts.