Parent-adolescent conflict in early adolescence. (Includes tables and bibliography.)
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This study explored parent-adolescent conflict during the early years of adolescence (ages 11 to 14). The responses of 357 youths in Grades 6, 7, and 8 to the Issues Checklist (Prinz, Foster, Kent, & O'Leary, 1979) revealed frequent conflicts with parents over a sizable number of issues during this period, peaking in Grade 7 between parents and sons, with exchanges between parents and daughters consistently more intense than those with sons across the three grades. There was considerable variation in both the frequency and intensity of conflict across specific issues. In addition, a consistent pattern of gender-typing was observed in conflicts between parents and daughters, reflecting traditional gender role stereotypes. The results of this study point to the importance of examining both the frequency and intensity of conflict, the specific issues over which there is conflict, and the gender of the participants in order to more fully understand the nature of parent-adolescent conflict during early adolescence.


Adolescence is viewed as a period of transformation and reorganization in family relationships (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Steinberg, 1990). Prominent among these changes is the shift that occurs from unilateral authority exercised by parents over their children to mutual authority in which adolescents share in the decision-making process and exercise increasing amounts of personal jurisdiction over their own behavior (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). This shifting and renegotiation of authority and control, along with a host of correlated biological, social, cognitive, and self-definitional/personal identity transitions that occur during this period, results in transformations in the pattern of family interactions and is associated with the emergence and escalation of conflict between adolescents and their parents (Montemayor, 1986; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Steinberg, 1990).

Research supports the claim that conflict is an integral component of parent-adolescent relationships (Laursen, 1995). Researchers have focused on the normative features of parent-adolescent conflict, including its frequency and intensity, developmental features throughout adolescence, the types of issues creating conflict, and its variation across families (Barber, 1994; Montemayor, 1983; Smetana, 1989; Steinberg, 1981). Specifically, conflict has most often, but not universally (Laursen & Collins, 1994), been reported to be at its highest levels in early adolescence and at its lowest levels in late adolescence (Clark-Lempers, Lempers, & Ho, 1991; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Galambos & Almeida, 1992; Montemayor & Hansen, 1985; Montemayor, 1983; Offer, 1969; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Steinberg, 1990). Conflict has also been linked to puberty or the degree and/or timing of pubertal maturation, as distinguished from age, in a number of studies (Holmbeck & Hill, 1991; Hill, Holmbeck, Marlow, Green, & Lynch, 1985a, 1985b; Steinberg, 1981, 1987, 1988; Steinberg & Hill, 1978), while several other
studies have reported little or no association between pubertal status and conflict in the family (e.g., Laursen & Collins, 1994). Parent-adolescent conflict has been found to vary as a function of gender, with conflict more often involving adolescents and their mothers than fathers, and daughter-mother dyads in particular (Hill, 1988; Montemayor, 1986; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Collins & Russell, 1991; Smetana, 1989; Steinberg, 1981). Finally, changes in parent-adolescent relationships during adolescence, including variation in conflict, have been found to be mediated by family context, family atmosphere, family structure, parental work status, personality characteristics and cognitive attributions of adolescents and parents, parenting styles, family interactional patterns, and ethnic-racial and cultural context of the family (Anderson, Hetherington, & Clingempeel, 1989; Barber, 1994; Collins, 1990; Flanagan, 1990; Hill & Holmbeck, 1987; Jacob, 1974; McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000; Montemayor, 1986; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Reuter & Conger, 1995; Smetana, 1988; Smetana & Gaines, 1999).

Although much has been learned about the nature of parent-adolescent conflict, the bulk of the research has focused on conflict throughout the pubertal and postpubertal years of adolescence, encompassing ages 12 to 18, or conflict linked to pubertal status per se (Montemayor, 1983; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Steinberg, 1990). Much less attention has been paid to conflict during early adolescence. This is unfortunate considering that the early years of adolescence have been associated with relational changes in the family, including heightened levels of conflict between young adolescents and their parents. Further, the study of changes in parent-adolescent conflict during adolescence has itself been truncated by the paucity of information on conflict in the prepubertal period of later childhood and the transitional years between late childhood and early adolescence (Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Hill, 1988).

The research that has explored parent-adolescent conflict during the early years of adolescence (approximately 11 to 15 years of age) has been concerned with the impact of puberty on parent-adolescent conflict, age differences in conflict during this period, and the specific issues or topics associated with disagreements, arguments, and negatively charged exchanges between the parties. Steinberg (1981, 1987, 1988) and Steinberg and Hill (1978) conducted a series of studies on pubertal status and parent-adolescent conflict with samples of 11- to 14-year-old boys and 11- to 16-year-old boys and girls, studies which employed cross-sectional and longitudinal designs, a variety of measurement methods, including observations of parent-adolescent interaction, questionnaires, and rating scales, and both behavioral (e.g., interruptions, explanations, deference) and self-report estimates of the frequency and intensity of conflict. Related studies of pubertal maturation and parent-adolescent conflict were conducted with samples of 7th-grade boys (Hill, Holmbeck, Marlow, Green, & Lynch, 1985a) and 7th-grade girls (Hill, Holmbeck, Marlow, Green, & Lynch, 1985b; Holmbeck & Hill, 1991), research which employed both questionnaire and observational measures. Putting aside the question of pubertal maturation per se and its impact on parent-adolescent relationships, the results of the Steinberg and Hill studies revealed heightened levels of conflict, oppositional behavior, and emotional distancing, as well as lower levels of parenting satisfaction, during the early years of adolescence. The parent-son and parent-daughter data also indicated
greater volatility and conflict between boys and girls and their mothers, but not fathers, during this time.

Several studies have explored parent-adolescent conflict during the early years of adolescence and age-linked shifts in conflict during this period, independent of pubertal maturation. Furman and Buhrmester (1992) conducted a cross-sectional study of age and gender differences in the personal relationships of 549 male and female youths, including samples of preadolescents (Grade 4) and early adolescents (Grade 7), in addition to mid-adolescent (Grade 10) and late-adolescent (college) groups. The quality of their relationships with their parents was assessed using the Network of Relationships Inventory (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985), which included the perceived frequency of conflicts with parents. Analyses revealed transformations in the parent-adolescent relationship over time, with conflict with parents reported as being greater in early and middle adolescence than in preadolescence or late adolescence, a pattern that was consistent for both parent-son/daughter and youth-mother/father relationships. Clark-Lempers, Lempers, and Ho (1991) used Furman and Buhrmester's (1985) Network of Relationships Inventory to study parent-adolescent conflict in a sample of 1,100 male and female adolescents, ages 11 to 19. In this study, more conflict with parents was reported by the early-adolescent group (ages 11, 12, and 13) than either the mid-adolescent group (ages 14, 15 and 16) or the late-adolescent group (ages 17, 18 and 19). In contrast to the Furman and Buhrmester (1992) findings, however, more parent-adolescent conflict was reported by daughters than sons, especially with mothers, across the age groups. Galambos and Almeida (1992) conducted a longitudinal study of parent-adolescent conflict from Grades 6 to 8, based on the responses of 80 adolescents and their parents to a subset of items from the Issues Checklist (Prinz et al., 1979). The analyses revealed a peak in adolescent-parent conflict during Grade 6 (11 years of age) and linear declines in the frequency and intensity of conflict and overall conflict over the 2.5 years of the investigation, a trend which was consistent for both sons and daughters.

Several other studies contributed some comparable data on parent-adolescent conflict during the early years of adolescence, although these studies were primarily concerned with the moderating effects of family context on conflict, including parental work status (Flanagan, 1990), social class (Jacob, 1974), and divorce (Anderson, Hetherington, & Clingempeel, 1989). Jacob (1974) assessed parent-son conflict in samples of younger adolescents (11 years of age) and older adolescents (16 years of age) via observation of family interactional process (e.g., interruptions) and questionnaire measures (e.g., disagreements). Total family disagreements tended to be greater, and initial agreements lower, in middle-class families with younger adolescent sons (11-year-old group) than with older adolescent sons (16-year-old group). Anderson et al.'s (1989) cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses of parent-adolescent conflict in a sample of 9- to 13-year-old boys and girls, based on both questionnaire and observational measures, revealed increased tension, distancing, and conflict in parent-son relationships, and especially in mother-son relationships, as boys matured during early adolescence (i.e., from the onset to the apex of puberty), with conflict declining thereafter in the nondivorced sample of families. Increased conflict was hot observed between parents and daughters in the nondivorced sample of families during the early years of adolescence. Flanagan's (1990)
longitudinal study of decision making in a sample of 504 early adolescents and their mothers over a 2-year period (from age 11 to 13 years), assessed via a modified version of Epstein and McPartland's (1977) Family Decision Making Scale, revealed relatively stable levels of mother-adolescent conflict over time in the employed/nondeprived sample of households. No differences were observed in mother-son and mother-daughter conflict over time in this employed group.

Finally, Laursen, Coy, and Collins (1998) studied changes in parent-adolescent conflict across adolescence via meta-analyses of the results of studies of conflict in the dyadic exchanges between 12- through 22-year-old adolescents and parents in nonclinical samples. The effect size estimates revealed a linear decline in the frequency of parent-adolescent conflict across adolescence, with conflict levels highest during early adolescence (ages 10 to 12), lower during mid-adolescence (ages 13 to 16), and lowest during late adolescence (ages 17 to 22). The affective intensity of conflict; on the other hand, increased from early adolescence to mid-adolescence, with no differences observed between mid-adolescence or early adolescence and late adolescence. The linear declines in frequency of conflict across adolescence were greater in mother-child dyads than father-child dyads, while the increasing intensity of conflict from early adolescence to mid-adolescence was limited to father-son relationships.

With only a few exceptions, the research on parent-adolescent conflict during the early years of adolescence has explored relationships based on measures of the total frequency, level, and/or intensity of conflict across a wide array of specific conflictual issues. While informative, such summative measures do not permit the identification of the landscape of issues generating conflict during early adolescence, the degree to which conflict varies as a function of topic, or an assessment of changes in conflictual issues throughout this period. Smetana (1989) conducted in-depth interviews with 102 children and adolescents, including samples of preadolescents (M age = 11.1 years) and early adolescents (M age = 13.2 years), in addition to mid-adolescents (M age = 15.6 years) and late adolescents (M age = 17.1 years), to determine the major issues creating conflict with parents. Content analyses of self-generated lists of disagreements across the age groups yielded several categories of conflictual issues, including chores, appearance, personal-behavioral style, homework and school performance, interpersonal relationships and regulation of interpersonal activities, bedtime and curfew, health and hygiene, regulation of activities, and finances. The total number of conflict issues reported did not differ from preadolescence to late adolescence, although more conflicts were reported with mothers than fathers, especially by females. On the other hand, category of conflict was found to interact with age level for boys and girls, with early adolescents reporting more conflicts over homework and grades than preadolescents or mid-adolescents and fewer conflicts over chores than late adolescents.

Smetana and Asquith (1994) also explored the frequency and intensity of parent-adolescent conflict across six domains (24 issues) via rating-scale responses of sixty-eight 6th, 8th, and 10th graders (ages 10, 12, and 14, respectively). Conflict was found to vary across the age groups as a function of conflict domain, with the 6th graders reporting more frequent conflicts than the 8th or 10th graders on issues in three domains: morality
Conflict over personal issues also varied by adolescent gender, with more conflicts occurring between parents and their daughters than sons in this domain. In addition, the intensity of conflicts also varied by domain, with the angriest conflicts occurring over issues in the domains of morality (e.g., lying) and conventions (e.g., chores, table manners).

Using the Issues Checklist (Prinz et al., 1979), Papini and Sebby (1988) also identified domains of parent-adolescent conflict via a factor analysis of the responses of 63 young adolescents in the 7th grade (M age = 13 years). This analysis yielded seven factors (i.e., domains) which accounted for 78.5% of the variance: persistent concerns (sex, friends, drinking), school issues (grades, homework), household issues (messiness, noise, chores, radio volume), room care issues (putting things away), appearance issues (dress, neatness), leisure issues (television viewing, free time), and time management issues (bedtime, curfews). Conflicts were found to vary across the domains as a function of adolescent gender and pubertal status, with females reporting more intense conflicts than males in regard to persistent concerns.

Finally, in the previously cited longitudinal study by Galambos and Almeida (1992), five domains of conflict were identified based on principal components analyses of a subset of items from the Issues Checklist (Prinz et al., 1979): chores, appearance, politeness, finances, and substance use. When conflict was explored at the level of these conflictual domains, the general pattern of linear declines in overall conflict observed from the 6th to 8th grades was duplicated for the domains of chores, appearance, and politeness. However, no changes were found for substance use, and conflicts over finances increased during this period.

In sum, these studies have documented the multidimensionality of parent-adolescent conflict during early adolescence and variation in conflict as a function of issues or domains of conflict, which exhibit different trajectories over time. The purpose of the present study was to extend our knowledge of parent-adolescent conflict during the transitional years of later childhood and early adolescence, identify the domains of conflict between parents and young adolescents (the issues over which they disagree and argue), and examine both gender and age-related variations in parent-adolescent conflict in these domains during this period.

METHOD

Participants

The participants in this investigation were 357 youths (165 males and 192 females) in Grade 6 (n = 112; M age = 11.8 years), Grade 7 (n = 120; M age = 13.0 years), and Grade 8 (n = 125; M age = 14.1 years) in four middle/junior high schools in Ohio. The racial composition of the sample was primarily Caucasian (82%); the remainder were African American (15%) and Hispanic, Asian American, Native American, and multiracial (3%).
Most of the adolescents (80%) lived in families with two parents (or one parent and another adult), with the remaining 20% in single-parent families.

**Instrument**

Parent-adolescent conflict was assessed via a modified version of the Issues Checklist (Prinz et al., 1979), an instrument consisting of 40 issues (items) representing potential areas of conflict between adolescents and their parents. For each issue, the adolescent is asked to indicate whether or not it has been a topic of conversation during the last month. For each issue identified as a topic of conversation, the adolescent is asked to indicate the intensity of the discussion on a 3-point scale: 1 (calm), 2 (a little angry), and 3 (angry). The checklist yields two scores: (1) frequency of conflict—the total number of issues discussed (range = 0-40) and (2) intensity of conflict—the average intensity of the discussions (range = 1-3). Low scores indicate less frequent and less intense conflict while high scores reflect more frequent and more intense conflict in parent-adolescent discussions.

**Procedure**

The principals and 6th-, 7th-, and 8th-grade teachers in four middle and junior high schools were contacted by the authors and asked to participate in the research project. Parental permission was also obtained. A modified version of the Issues Checklist (Prinz et al., 1979) was then administered by the first author to the students in all participating 6th-, 7th-, and 8th-grade classes, with the assistance of the classroom teachers.

**RESULTS**

**Frequency and Intensity of Conflict**

Responses to the Issues Checklist indicated that virtually all of the participants (99.2%) had some conflict with their parents in the last month, ranging from conflicts over 1 issue (1%) to conflicts over all 40 issues (2%). On average, they reported conflicts over 17.44 issues (SD = 7.50) in the last month, or almost half of the issues in the checklist, with 20% of the participants reporting conflicts over 25 to 40 issues during that period. An analysis of variance on the frequency of conflicts revealed a Grade X Gender interaction, with the number of conflicts varying across grades, but only for boys, F(2, 351) = 4.60, p = .011. Parent-son conflicts were highest in Grade 7 (M = 20.29), significantly exceeding those in Grade 6 (M = 16.72) and Grade 8 (M = 16.53). No differences were found in the frequency of conflict between parents and their daughters across the three grades.

The intensity of conflict ranged from 1 (calm) to 3 (angry), with the sample as a whole reporting moderately intense exchanges on average (M = 1.77, SD = 0.40). More intense conflicts were reported by females (M = 1.81) than males (M = 1.69) across the three grade levels, F(1, 351) = 4.07, p = .044. There was no main effect for grade, F(2, 351) = 0.07, p = .929, and no Grade x Gender interaction, F(2, 351) = 0.82, p = .44, in the
intensity of conflict between parents and adolescents during these early years of adolescence.

Domains of Conflict

In order to better describe the multidimensional nature of parent-adolescent conflict during the early years of adolescence and to assess variation in conflict across issues, responses regarding conflict intensity were subjected to principal components analysis, followed by varimax rotation of factors. Using the criteria of eigenvalues greater than 1.00 for factors, and factor loadings of .40 or greater for the discrete issues, 13 factors (i.e., domains of conflict) emerged, accounting for 58% of the variance in parent-adolescent conflict. The domains and their defining issues are presented in Table 1, and include substance abuse, personal autonomy/personal jurisdiction, negative personal/moral characteristics, meal choices/table manners, room care, household responsibilities (chores), homework/school performance, punctuality/curfews, inconsiderate behavior, personal appearance (clothing), personal hygiene, irritating/disruptive behavior, and television viewing. Table 2 presents the frequency of conflict, represented by the mean rate of endorsement across the items in each domain, and the intensity of conflict, represented by the mean conflict intensity rating for each domain.

The most frequent conflicts during the early years of adolescence (i.e., those domains whose endorsement rates exceeded the overall mean rate of 45.46% across the domains) involved, at the high end, household chores, room care, and homework and school performance (range = 61%-79%), in addition to curfews and punctuality, inconsiderate behavior at home, television viewing, and irritating and disruptive behavior at home. The domains endorsed less frequently (i.e., endorsement rates below the overall mean) included personal autonomy and jurisdiction, personal appearance, negative personal and moral characteristics, and, least frequent at 17%, substance abuse.

A series of 3 x 2 (Grade x Gender) analyses of variance on the endorsement rates revealed main effects for grade for 6 of the 13 domains of conflict: punctuality/curfews, F(2, 349) = 10.47, p = .001; personal hygiene, F(2, 349) = 8.67, p = .001; personal appearance, F(2, 349) = 4.14, p = .017; television viewing, F(2, 349) = 3.75, p = .024; irritating/disruptive behavior, F(2, 349) = 4.20, p = .016; and homework/school performance, F(2, 349) = 5.07, p = .007. There was more frequent conflict in Grades 6 and 7 than in Grade 8 over punctuality/curfews (48% vs. 30%), personal hygiene (41% vs. 27%), irritating/disruptive behavior (48% vs. 39%), and television viewing (60% vs. 42%), and more frequent conflict in Grade 7 than Grade 8 over personal appearance (45% vs. 31%) and homework/school performance (67% vs. 55%). In addition, significant main effects for gender were found for 5 of the 13 domains of conflict: household chores, F(1, 349) = 4.90, p = .028; personal appearance, F(2, 349) = 4.14, p = .017; personal autonomy/personal jurisdiction, F(2, 349) = 3.90, p = .049; irritating/disruptive behavior, F(2, 349) = 4.41, p = .036; and homework/school performance, F(2, 349) = 3.90, p = .049. Parent-daughter conflict was more frequent than parent-son conflict over household chores (82% vs. 75%), personal appearance (42% vs. 34%), personal autonomy/personal jurisdiction (41% vs. 35%), and irritating/disruptive behavior.
behavior (48% vs. 42%). Parent-son conflict was more frequent than parent-daughter conflict over homework/school performance (65% vs. 56%).

The most intense conflicts (i.e., those exceeding the overall mean rating of 1.74) involved, at the high end, irritating/disruptive behavior at home, negative personal/moral characteristics, and homework/school performance (range = 1.92-1.95), in addition to punctuality/curfews and personal autonomy/personal jurisdiction. Less intense conflicts (i.e., those below the overall mean) occurred over room care, household chores, inconsiderate behavior, television viewing, personal appearance, and personal hygiene, with the least intense conflicts involving meal choices/table manners and substance abuse.

A series of 3 x 2 (Grade x Gender) analyses of variance on the intensity ratings revealed main effects for gender for 5 domains of conflict. For each, parent-daughter conflict was more intense than parent-son conflict: household chores (M = 1.79 vs. 1.60), F(1,333) = 9.23, p = .003; care of room (M = 1.81 vs. 1.61), F(1, 306) = 6.30, p = .013; personal appearance (M = 1.77 vs. 1.50), F(1, 194) = 6.69, p = .010; meal choices/table manners (M = 1.65 vs. 1.45), F(1,224) = 4.96, p = .027; and personal autonomy/personal jurisdiction (M = 1.88 vs. 1.38), F(1, 297) = 3.91, p = .049). The intensity of parent-adolescent conflict did not vary across the three grade levels, and there were no Grade x Gender interactions for any of the 13 conflict domains.

Interestingly, there was concurrence between the levels of frequency and intensity of conflict for a number of domains (high frequency-high intensity, low frequency-low intensity), as well as differences between the levels of frequency and intensity of conflict for other domains (high frequency-low intensity, low frequency-high intensity). Conflicts over homework/school performance, irritating/disruptive behavior, and punctuality/curfews were both frequent and intense, while those over personal appearance, personal hygiene, meal choices/table manners, and substance abuse were relatively infrequent and less intense. In contrast, conflicts over negative personal/moral characteristics and personal autonomy/personal jurisdiction were less frequent but more intense, while those over household chores, room care, inconsiderate behavior, and television viewing were more frequent but less intense.

Table 2
Frequency and Intensity of Conflict by Domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Rate of Endorsement M (SD)</th>
<th>Conflict Intensity Rating M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Substance abuse</td>
<td>17% (.34)</td>
<td>1.50 (.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Personal autonomy/personal jurisdiction</td>
<td>37% (.27)</td>
<td>1.81 (.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Negative personal/moral characteristics</td>
<td>35% (.35)</td>
<td>1.94 (.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Meal choices/table manners</td>
<td>27% (.28)</td>
<td>1.56 (.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Care of room</td>
<td>75% (.34)</td>
<td>1.73 (.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Household chores</td>
<td>79% (.27)</td>
<td>1.72 (.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Homework/school performance</td>
<td>61% (.33)</td>
<td>1.92 (.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Punctuality/curfews</td>
<td>47% (.35)</td>
<td>1.88 (.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Inconsiderate behavior</td>
<td>46% (.32)</td>
<td>1.72 (.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Personal appearance</td>
<td>38% (.30)</td>
<td>1.67 (.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Personal hygiene</td>
<td>35% (.31)</td>
<td>1.64 (.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Irritating/disruptive behavior</td>
<td>46% (.25)</td>
<td>1.95 (.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Television viewing</td>
<td>50% (.49)</td>
<td>1.69 (.67)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DISCUSSION

Although the findings of previous research on parent-adolescent conflict during the early years of adolescence are not uniformly consistent (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998), and despite disagreements about the role of pubertal status and/or pubertal timing in parent-adolescent conflict (Laursen & Collins, 1994; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Steinberg, 1990), the bulk of the studies support the contention that parent-adolescent conflict is at its highest during early adolescence (Galambos & Almeida, 1992; Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998; Montemayor, 1986; Offer, 1969; Steinberg, 1990) and that it declines significantly, and possibly linearly, through mid-adolescence to its lowest levels in late adolescence (Laursen et al., 1998). The research also suggests that this conflict is best described as "temporary permutations" (Laursen et al., 1998) or "minor bickering" (Smetana, 1988) over a number of "day-to-day mundane matters" (Steinberg, 1990), as opposed to the earlier, psychoanalytically and clinically inspired view of adolescence as a period of storm and stress between youths and their parents (Montemayor, 1986; Rutter, Graham, Chadwick, & Yule, 1976; Steinberg, 2000).

The 11- to 14-year-olds in the present study reported conflicts with their parents over nearly half of the 40 discrete issues in the Issues Checklist (Prinz et al., 1979), on average, during the last month, with 20% reporting conflicts over 25 to 40 issues during this time period. No differences were found between males and females in the frequency of conflicts with parents. However, there was variation in the frequency of parent-adolescent conflict within the group of males, with conflict occurring more frequently between parents and their sons in Grade 7 than in either Grade 6 or Grade 8.

The rather sizable number of conflicts between adolescents and their parents in this study is generally consistent with the position that the early years of adolescence are marked by relatively frequent disagreements and/or arguments over a variety of issues (Laursen et al., 1998; Montemayor, 1986; Steinberg, 1990). Further, although this study was cross-sectional in design, and despite the absence of samples of youths in the middle and later years of adolescence, the finding that the frequency of conflict was at its highest level in Grade 7 and significantly lower in Grade 8 for the males is consistent with the view that parent-adolescent conflict peaks during the transition to adolescence and subsequently subsides (Laursen et al., 1998).

While disagreements between parents and adolescents were relatively frequent during this period, the data also revealed that the level of conflict intensity was, in general, relatively moderate. Interestingly, and contrary to the absence of differences between males and females in terms of the frequency of conflict with parents, females reported more intense conflicts compared with males. A number of previous studies have found more parental conflict with daughters than with sons (Smetana, 1989; Smetana & Asquith, 1994; Papini & Sebby, 1988), particularly between daughters and their mothers (Montemayor, 1982, 1986; Steinberg, 1990; Hill, 1988; Holmbeck & Hill, 1991). The analysis in the present study focused on adolescent conflicts with parents in general, and thus did not permit a more discriminating analysis of mother-daughter and father-daughter conflict. Suffice it to say that the results suggest that adolescent gender is a
differentiating factor as reflected in the level of intensity (or emotionality) displayed by adolescents in their conflicts with parents. Finally, Laursen et al.’s (1998) meta-analysis of research on parent-adolescent conflict revealed significantly greater negative affect (i.e., more heated exchanges) between adolescents and parents during the middle years of adolescence than in the early years. The relatively mild intensity levels marking parent-adolescent conflicts in the present study are consistent with the lower levels of affective intensity revealed in Laursen et al.’s analysis.

In addition to providing information on the total frequency and intensity of parent-adolescent conflict, this study offered a detailed portrait of the specific issues generating conflict. The adolescents reported considerable levels of conflict over the perennial issues of doing household chores, taking care of their rooms, watching too much television, fighting with siblings and bothering parents, playing music too loud and forgetting to turn off the lights, as well as doing homework and getting good grades in school. Considerable levels of conflict were also reported over getting up in the morning, getting to school on time, and obeying curfews. In general, these issues pertain to fulfilling one's duties and responsibilities, particularly at home and school. Most of these and related issues were identified as areas of conflict during early adolescence in both the Smetana (1989) and Smetana and Asquith (1994) studies, and in earlier research by Montemayor (1986) and Offer (1969).

There is a considerable body of research indicating that the assignment of household responsibilities to children is common in this society, and thus normative, reflecting parental beliefs that doing chores will foster responsibility and a "work ethic" (Goodnow, 1988). It is not surprising, therefore; that tensions and conflicts over household responsibilities are most prevalent during the transitional years from preadolescence to adolescence (Goodnow, 1988; Montemayor, 1983), as this is the period during which increasingly autonomous youths challenge parental attempts to assert unilateral authority over their activities and behaviors at home (Smetana & Asquith, 1994).

Conflicts were reported to be less frequent over such issues as the choice of friends, clothes, and food, personal cleanliness, the use of free time and going places alone, and negative characteristics like lying, cursing, and getting into trouble outside the home, with the lowest frequency of conflicts reported over substance abuse (i.e., smoking, drinking, drug use). Less frequent conflict in these areas likely indicates that parents were generally satisfied with the behavior/choices of their children and consequently granted them greater autonomy (Smetana & Asquith, 1994).

A number of age- and gender-based differences were observed in the frequency of parent-adolescent conflict over many of these issues. For example, the 6th and/or 7th graders reported more frequent conflict than the 8th graders over such issues as homework and school grades, punctuality and curfews, personal hygiene, personal appearance, irritating/disruptive behaviors, and television watching. The peaking of conflict over these issues in Grades 6 and 7 testifies further to the volatility of parent-adolescent relationships during the transitional years from preadolescence to adolescence (Laursen et al., 1998).
Gender was found to be a differentiating factor in the frequency of conflicts over household chores, personal appearance, irritating and/or disruptive behaviors, and personal autonomy and/or personal jurisdiction. Interestingly, for each of these issues, there was more frequent parent-daughter conflict than parent-son conflict. It appears that parents have greater expectations for their daughters to perform household duties, dress appropriately, and not be disruptive at home during the early years of adolescence (White & Brinkeroff, 1981), while being more restrictive of their daughters' freedom to go places alone, choose friends, make decisions about money, and decide how to spend free time. The single issue which generated more conflict between parents and sons compared with daughters was doing homework and getting good grades in school. These gender differences are clear indications of gender-typing in the socialization of girls and boys in ways that coincide with stereotypical conceptions of femininity and masculinity in this society (Antil, Goodnow, Russell, & Cotton, 1996; Blair, 1992; Coltrane, 2000).

The results on the intensity of affect displayed in the exchanges between parents and adolescents revealed concordance between the levels of frequency and intensity for a number of issues, including homework and school performance, irritating and disruptive behaviors, and punctuality and curfews (high frequency, high intensity), as well as personal appearance, personal hygiene, meal choices/table manners, and substance abuse (low frequency, low intensity). The more interesting results, however, pertain to conflict over issues in which there was discordance between the levels of frequency and intensity (i.e., issues generating frequent conflict but not very intense exchanges, such as chores, room care, inconsiderate behavior, and television viewing, and issues evoking less frequent conflict but highly intense exchanges, such as personal autonomy/personal jurisdiction and negative personal/moral characteristics). The issues generating frequent but not very intense conflicts indicate the importance of these issues to parents and the likely presence of continued resistance and/or lack of compliance by adolescents; however, the adolescents do not display strong emotions (anger, hostility) in these discussions or their parents see these issues as not being serious enough to warrant strong emotional responses, or both. In the case of relatively infrequent but intense conflicts, it is likely that the behaviors or characteristics are not often displayed by adolescents, but are of significant importance to parents, evoking strong emotional reactions and possibly reciprocal emotional responses from adolescents. In short, these are the infrequently discussed "hot topics" in the family.

Finally, as in the case of the frequency of conflict, gender was found to be a differentiating factor in the expression of emotions in exchanges between parents and adolescents. It was in the exchanges between parents and their daughters that the most intense emotions were exhibited. Parent-daughter conflict was more intense than parent-son conflict over the issues of household chores, care of room, meal choices/table manners, personal appearance, and personal autonomy. This parallels the findings on the frequency of conflict, thus representing consistent and strong evidence of gender-typing in the socialization of young females along traditional lines in this society (Coltrane, 2000; Goodnow, 1988).
Taken together, the results of the present study demonstrate the productiveness of differentiating the frequency and intensity of parent-adolescent conflict, as this approach yielded a more complete picture of this conflict. Second, the examination of parent-adolescent conflict over discrete issues, as opposed to the total level of conflict, also proved to be very productive, as both the frequency and intensity of parent-adolescent conflict were found to vary across domains. Finally, this study revealed the significance of the gender of the adolescent in understanding the frequency and intensity of conflict with parents. Most importantly in this regard, the results revealed a clear and consistent pattern of gender-typing in both the frequency and intensity of conflict between parents and their daughters during the early years of adolescence.

It is important to note that this study was not without its limitations. The sample of adolescents was neither randomly selected nor representative of all 11- to 14-year-olds. It was a convenience sample of primarily Caucasian adolescents from one Midwestern state, and did not represent the full spectrum of family structures and socioeconomic conditions in the population. Further, the data on parent-adolescent conflict were gathered exclusively from the adolescents, an important point since there is evidence of differences between adolescents and parents in their reporting of conflict (Gonzales, Cauce, & Mason, 1996).

There is clearly a pressing need to examine conflict across more diverse and representative samples. Nevertheless, the findings of this study are consistent with much of the previous empirical and theoretical literature on parent-adolescent conflict during the early years of adolescence. The findings also provide a more complete picture of the specific issues generating frequent and/or intense conflict between adolescents and their parents during this period.

Table 1
Domains of Parent-Adolescent Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Eigenvalue</th>
<th>Items (loadings)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Substance abuse</td>
<td>6.045</td>
<td>Smoking (.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Drinking (.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Drug use (.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Personal autonomy/pers. jurisd.</td>
<td>2.659</td>
<td>Earning my own money (.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Going places alone (.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My allowance (.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How to spend free time (.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Choosing friends (.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being bothered when I want to be alone (.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Negative personal/moral characteristics</td>
<td>1.851</td>
<td>Lying (.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cursing (.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Getting into trouble (.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Meal choices/</td>
<td>1.563</td>
<td>What I eat (.52)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
table manners
What time to eat (.67)  
Table manners (.49)

5. Care of room 1.441  
Putting clothes away (.77)  
Cleaning room (.78)

6. Household chores 1.427  
Helping around the house (.44)  
Taking care of possessions (.61)  
Keeping the house neat (.67)

7. Homework/school performance 1.327  
Doing homework (.63)  
Grades (.68)

8. Punctuality/curfews 1.297  
Getting up in the morning (.75)  
Getting to school on time (.40)  
Coming home on time (.40)

9. Inconsiderate behavior 1.156  
Playing music too loud (.42)  
Turning off lights (.66)

10. Personal appearance 1.117  
Selecting clothes to wear (.70)  
Selecting new clothes (.74)

11. Personal hygiene 1.093  
Cleanliness (.67)  
Feet on furniture (.60)

12. Irritating/disruptive behavior 1.046  
Using the telephone (.53)  
Book/movie choices (.56)  
Fighting with siblings (.40)  
Bothering parents (.44)

13. Television viewing 1.019  
Watching television (.71)

Table 2
Frequency and Intensity of Conflict by Domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Rate of Endorsement</th>
<th>Conflict Intensity Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>(SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Substance abuse</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>(.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Personal autonomy/personal jurisdiction</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>(.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Negative personal/moral characteristics</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>(.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Meal choices/table manners</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>(.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Care of room</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>(.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Household chores</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>(.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Homework/school performance</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>(.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Punctuality/curfews</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>(.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Inconsiderate behavior</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>(.32)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. Personal appearance 38% (.30) 1.67 (.72)
11. Personal hygiene 35% (.31) 1.64 (.68)
12. Irritating/disruptive behavior 46% (.25) 1.95 (.64)
13. Television viewing 50% (.49) 1.69 (.67)

REFERENCES


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