

THE 'STRUGGLE' FOR AUTONOMY: PREDICTORS OF CONFLICT STYLE IN THE LAUNCHING STAGE OF THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

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As a context of study within the communication discipline, the family has received increasing attention over the last decade (Fitzpatrick & Badzinski, 1994). Although numerous studies have explored marital or conjugal conflict and parent/child communication patterns in early childhood, one neglected area of research concerns the management of conflict between parents and children in the later stages of the family life cycle. As children develop, so do their parents and other family members (Duck, 1986), and communication patterns change as families move through the family life cycle (Cobb, 1992; Olson, 1988; Pearson, 1993; Vangelisti, 1992; Youniss & Smollar, 1985).

Conflict management in the family context is an especially important research area, for as Stagner (1967) argued, analysis of the most basic principles of social conflict should begin with the family. Knowledge of conflict principles is rooted in the study of familial tension, and exploring how family members communicate when problems arise informs a general understanding of social conflict in groups, organizations, and even national/political disputes. After all, people experience their first conflicts within the framework of family life, and the style of resolution developed in those early years are affected by the family and will "probably persist throughout life" (Stagner, 1967, p. 27).

As families grow and develop, sources of conflict, along with methods of conflict resolution, change accordingly. A particularly relevant area for analysis of family conflict styles and techniques concerns the launching

Researchers have examined how resources are distributed in various interpersonal settings, however, the application of resource theory to the parent/young adult relationship has not been widely used. This may be because parents generally have more monetary and status resources than children. Often overlooked, however, are the various resources children control. Fitzpatrick and Badzinski (1994) note that "the behavior of even the youngest child can stimulate, elicit, motivate, and reward the actions of parents" (p. 748). Children are powerful because their behavior can affect parents (Bell, 1971), as anyone who has witnessed a screaming child in a grocery store can testify.

As young adults enter the launching stage, the power structure within the family begins to shift in an effort to adapt to increasing needs for autonomy of the young adult. For a young adult, autonomy needs are often in conflict with a need for security, which parents have provided in the form of love, money, goods, and services. When the struggle for autonomy intensifies, communication may become more conflict-oriented. The nature of resource exchange between parents and their children helps determine whether familial relationships will be positively or negatively affected by conflict, and it may be that conflict is managed differently in various stages of the family life cycle.

Family Life Cycle: The Launching Stage

Family systems develop in fairly predictable ways, and each stage of development is characterized by unique communication, tasks, and goals (Duvall & Hill, 1948). Conceptions of a family life cycle go back nearly fifty years when Sorokin, Zimmerman, and Caplin (1931) proposed a four stage model. Waller (1951) later identified five stages, while other researchers have posited seven and eight stage models (e.g. Duvall, 1977; Duvall & Hill, 1948), and even a 24 stage model (Rogers, 1960). One stage which is included in the expanded models is the launching stage of the family life cycle.

The launching stage has been identified as the most problematic and potentially longest stage of the family life cycle (see Galvin & Brommel, 1982; Mattesich & Hill, 1987; McGoldrick & Carter, 1982). This stage begins when the first child leaves the home for permanent employment, military service, marriage or college and extends until the last child has left the home (Duvall, 1977). Thus, it spans decades for some families and only months for others. The nuclear family shrinks during this time until only the original married pair is left in the home (Duvall, 1977).

stage of the family life cycle, or the stage at which adolescents begin their entry into young adulthood. Young adults, formerly quite dependent upon their parents, move toward autonomy and accumulate more power; this shift can create misunderstandings and conflict may emerge (Fearson, 1993). As families grow older, methods for managing conflict change, primarily because children attain more power and parent-child separation continues to occur (Galvin & Brommel, 19982). Using a resource theory framework, this study examines parents' and young adults' perceptions of conflict styles in the pivotal launching stage.

Resource Theory

The negotiation of roles and establishment of new boundaries as young adults prepare to leave home can result in stress and tension in a family. Perhaps one of the most important factors in the emergence of conflict in this stage is the negotiation that occurs, implicitly or explicitly, regarding the management and distribution of family resources.

The "resource hypothesis" provides one way to view communication and conflict in family relationships (see Blau, 1964; Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Foa & Foa, 1974; Scanzoni, 1979). It is a derivative of social exchange theory, which is based on the premise that individuals choose rewarding relationships over costly ones (see Homans, 1959; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). According to Foa and Foa, "social experiences are interpersonal encounters in which resources are given and/or taken away," and resources can be categorized as falling into several categories: love, status, information, goods and money, and services (1974, p. 125). All of these resources stem from a host of human needs, such as the desire for affection, approval, achievement, recognition, competence, exploration, acquisition, security, and independence (Foa & Foa, 1974).

A resource is anything one person can offer another to help achieve a goal (Hesse-Biber & Williamson, 1984). Importantly, it is by accumulating an amount of resources beyond one's actual need that an individual acquires *power* (Foa & Foa, 1974, p. 125). Therefore, the more resources a person maintains, the greater the power held in relation to those who desire such resources (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). If one person in a relationship holds all the resources, that person holds the power, and subsequently the relationship becomes imbalanced. There are occasions in relationships where people do not possess symmetrical resource amounts: one may give more love, provide more services, or offer more monetary support than does the relational partner (Foa & Foa, 1974). When symmetry is absent, there is a power imbalance in which conflict can emerge.

One of the tasks for the family in the launching stage is to facilitate communication regarding the growing independence and autonomy of the young adult. Duvall (1977) contends that preparation for this task begins much earlier in the family life cycle, and both parents and young adults must break repeated communication patterns to accomplish this launching effectively. The developmental needs of the young adult during this time can be in conflict with the needs of the family, especially when a young adult expresses needs for individuation and separation (Hoffman & Weiss, 1987; Klimek & Anderson, 1988; Lopez, Campbell, & Watkins, 1989; Smith, 1988). As other sources of support are developed, young adults establish bases outside the family to fulfill their needs.

While some families manage the shift in the launching stage easily, most families experience some conflict due to the need to re-negotiate roles and boundaries. Of particular interest during the launching stage is the manner in which tensions are managed as young adults leave home. Most of the literature concerning the launching stage depicts it as tumultuous and quite stressful (Anderson, 1988; Finkel & Hansen, 1992; Klimek & Anderson, 1988; Lopez et al., 1989). The developmental needs of the young adult during this time can be in conflict with the needs of the family, especially when a young adult expresses needs for individuation and separation (Finkel & Hansen, 1992; Hoffman & Weiss, 1987; Klimek & Anderson, 1988; Lopez et al., 1989; Smith, 1988). Olson (1988) reported that family cohesion drops to its lowest level during the launching stage, and families also report a marked decrease in adaptive ability. Notably, "transition" is listed as a key stressor during this period, and it is not reported as a source of strain by families at any other phase of the life cycle (Olson, 1988).

Characteristics of Conflict in the Launching Stage

When describing conflict, many communication researchers draw upon the now familiar definition proposed by Hocker and Wilmot (1985): "Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from the other parties in achieving their goals" (p. 9). Goals within the family context may be quite heterogeneous; the adolescent's goals may differ dramatically from parental goals. What is known about conflict between parents and their adolescent children is that conflict occurs frequently in these relationships and covers a range of issues, such as family household chores and performance in school (Youniss & Smollar,

1985). Generally, parent-adolescent conflict is viewed as functional and maybe even inevitable, given the changes in parent-adolescent relationships as a consequence of puberty (Montemayor, 1983; Steinberg, 1987). The move from childhood to adolescence (and ultimately to adulthood) is a major transition which is characteristically stressful because adolescents often lack sufficient coping mechanisms to guide them through such transitions. Although stressful, family conflict may also serve important purposes, such as the facilitation of developmental growth in the adolescent (Erikson, 1968; Kohlberg, 1969) and identity exploration (Cooper, Grotevant, Moore, & Condon, 1982).

Traditionally, researchers have focused only upon the presence or absence of conflict in parent-adolescent relationships and not upon the communication patterns that may be present. Whether conflict somehow changes and becomes more destructive in the launching stage, due perhaps to increased stress brought on by this major transition, is not clear. In fact, the opposite may be true; as adolescents move toward adulthood, they may develop an enhanced capacity for engaging in productive conflict management. Parker, Greene, and Serovich (1996) found that 40 of 72 families in the launching or empty nest stage reported symmetrical integrative strategies; interestingly, in this study the only case in which all members agreed on the most frequent conflict strategy used was when integrative strategies were reported. There was not a single family reporting all members using passive indirect or distributive strategies.

Clearly, the transitional launching period is a critical one, and investigation of how parents and young adults perceive and manage conflict is important. It may be that the styles used to resolve conflicts at this stage have a lasting impact upon the family system and subsequent communication patterns.

Conflict Style

Conflict in the launching stage can be managed productively or destructively. The productive/destructive element of conflict has long been recognized as central for the maintenance and morphogenesis of relational systems (Braiker & Kelley, 1979; Coser, 1956; Deutsch, 1973). Destructive conflict is characterized by a win-lose orientation with a focus upon manipulation and coercion (Deutsch, 1973), while productive conflict is win-win oriented and seeks to maximize the goals of the parties involved. This win-win versus win-loss orientation can also be understood as maximizing one's rewards for self versus other.

Researchers have identified three general conflict styles: integrative, distributive, and avoidance (see Cupach, 1982; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Roloff, 1976). This triad of styles has appeared in some form in a wide range of conflict research. More specifically, family researchers have applied versions of this category system in studies of late adolescence (Comstock, 1994; Gayle, 1992). Sillars (1980) has successfully used a three-dimensional model (integrative, distributive, and passive-indirect strategies) in studies of roommate conflict. For Sillars, passive-indirect would include avoidance and accommodation (nonconfrontation) strategies. For example, an individual using a passive strategy might avoid initiating discussion of any topic which might induce conflict. Integrative strategies represent a direct attempt to manage conflict from a win-win productive orientation. Individuals using integrative strategies openly address the conflict and attempt a collaborative resolution. Distributive strategies are derived from a competitive, win-lose orientation and include tactics that can be described as forceful and controlling, such as threatening others (see Sillars, Coletti, Parry, & Rogers, 1982).

Integrative styles have been associated with communication satisfaction (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Cupach, 1982), relational intimacy (Cupach, 1982), and satisfaction with conflict resolution (Koren, Carlton, & Shaw, 1980; Parker et al., 1996). Distributive styles, however, appear to negatively affect relationships in terms of communication and relational satisfaction (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Cupach, 1982; Gottman, 1979, 1982; Parker et al., 1996). Findings are less clear with regard to avoidance styles. Although most researchers have found that avoidance styles are negatively associated with relational and communication satisfaction (Cupach, 1982; Parker et al., 1996; Sillars, 1980), other researchers have found that partners who use avoidance styles report being satisfied with their relationships (Fitzpatrick & Winke, 1979).

Sillars' (1980) three-category approach has been adopted by the present study as a tool for assessing how parents and young adults perceive interactions in situations of conflict. In the launching stage, it is expected that conflicts will arise and will be addressed by using passive-indirect, distributive, and/or integrative styles. Because the launching stage is one in which families are moving toward the equalization of resources, young adults are negotiating autonomy and doing so from the vantage point of increasing power. Leaving home changes the young adult's status due to autonomy and resources increasingly found outside the family. The more

resources the adolescent has, the more integratively conflicts will be managed. In the launching stage, one would anticipate a movement toward equity and integration. Therefore, the following is hypothesized:

H1: Young adults and parents in the launching stage of the family life cycle will report using integrative conflict styles more frequently than either passive-indirect or distributive styles.

Resources and conflict. In the launching stage of the family life cycle, young adults possess varying levels of resources. Those who move from their parents' residence and are financially independent have cultivated important resources. As a result, they have more power, which will perhaps be reflected in their choice of conflict style. For example, a young adult who is financially independent and lives out of the parental residence may not passively submit to parental requests. Conversely, young adults who are still dependent to some degree upon their parents might exhibit different conflict styles.

There may be a greater potential for distributive conflict when parents control young adults' resources, such as money and place of residence, particularly because the launching stage is characterized by the struggle for independence. Additionally, young adults with fewer resources may feel a need to avoid conflict with their parents altogether. There is a more equal distribution of resources and power when the young adult exhibits a greater degree of independence, thus, the choice of conflict style would perhaps be more integrative. In short, financial dependence and place of residence (living at home versus living away from home) may be related to conflict styles chosen by young adults. Similarly, parents who have young adults who are technically launched but are still somewhat dependent may use different conflict styles than parents with more autonomous children. Therefore, the following hypotheses are posited:

H2: Young adults and parents of young adults who are financially dependent will be more likely to use passive-indirect and distributive styles and less likely to use integrative styles than those who are financially independent.

H3: Young adults and parents of young adults who live at home will be more likely to use passive-indirect and distributive styles and less likely to use integrative styles than those who live away from home.

Life stage and conflict style. Because degree of independence may affect choice of conflict strategy, an interesting comparison can be made between young adults in the launching stage (who still have siblings at home) and

those whose families have entered the empty nest stage, when the launch is complete and *all* children have left home (Duvall, 1977). Families in the empty nest stage may report use of different conflict styles than families still in the launching stage. Families in the empty nest stage have completed the often conflictual passage through the launching phase (Duvall, 1977), resources have been redistributed, and roles and boundaries have been re-negotiated. Therefore, the following hypothesis is posited:

H4: Families in the empty nest stage of the family life cycle will be more likely to use integrative styles and less likely to use passive-indirect and distributive styles than families in the launching stage.

Satisfaction, quality of communication and conflict style. One significant outcome variable that has been widely studied in communication research across relational types is satisfaction. Satisfaction concerns "one's subjectively experienced contentment with either a marital or parent/child relationship" (Fitzpatrick & Badzinski, 1994, p. 735). Researchers have noted a link between conflict resolution in long term relationships and relational satisfaction (see Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Fitzpatrick & Winke, 1979). Importantly, studies of conflict in launching stage families have revealed a link between conflict styles and general satisfaction with family experiences: family members who report frequent use of integrative resolution strategies typically report greater levels of satisfaction (Comstock, 1994; Gayle, 1992).

When parents and young adults engage in conflict, the process of resolution could affect their reported satisfaction with the relationship. Win-win approaches to conflict resolution are generally described as more productive, therefore, it seems likely that those who report the use of integrative strategies may report higher levels of satisfaction, and those who use passive-indirect or distributive strategies may report lower levels of satisfaction. Thus, the following hypothesis is posited:

H5: Young adults' and parents of young adults' satisfaction with communication will be directly related to use of integrative style and inversely related to the use of passive-indirect and distributive styles.

Similarly, quality of communication is likely to be linked to conflict style. In this study, quality of communication is defined as perceived "openness" of communication. Young adults often challenge family processes during the launching stage (Duvall, 1977), and it has been reported that open discussion during this time can ease transitions between roles (Klimek & Anderson, 1988). Young adults develop values and an identity separate

from their parents, therefore, the perceptions of family openness and flexibility can either encourage or inhibit communication. Fahs (1981) suggests that a cooperative orientation is the "preferred basis for the reduction and control of social conflict" (p. 42). Thus, integrative styles may accompany a higher quality of communication, while lower quality of communication may be reported with passive-indirect and distributive styles. Based upon the preceding observations and explanations of conflict in the launching stage, the following hypothesis is posited:

H6: Young adults' and parents of young adults' quality of communication will be directly related to use of integrative style and inversely related to passive-indirect and distributive styles.

METHOD

Research Participants

Participants ($N=355$) for this study were drawn from two different populations, college students and parents of college students. The young adults (students) ($n=203$) were recruited from Speech Communication courses at a large southeastern university during the Fall of 1990. The study was conducted outside of class on a voluntary basis. The mean age of the young adults was 21.7 ($sd=2.2$) and 50% female ($n=101$), 50% male ($n=102$).

Parents with young adult children ($n=152$) were recruited by trained researchers and filled out questionnaires in their homes. The requirement for inclusion in the parent sample was that they have a child currently in college. The mean age of the parents was 44.3 ($sd=7.3$), and the parent sample was 62% female ($n=95$) and 38% male ($n=57$).

Measurement Instruments

Two versions of the conflict style questionnaires were developed, and wording was changed to accommodate the perspective of the participant. Young adults responded to the questions in reference to their parent(s), and each parent responded in reference to *one* particular child currently in college.¹

Conflict strategies. Conflict styles were measured according to which methods of dealing with conflict were used with a variety of topics. Items asked participants to rate each of three methods according to how often it is used when they and their parent(s)/adolescent disagree on thirteen topics. The conflict styles presented were distributive, integrative and passive-indirect. These strategies are described by Sillars (1980) as representative of groupings of conflict strategies. Each conflict style was

presented with a short description, and the responses for each topic ranged from "never used" to "always used." Responses to these conflict styles were listed according to specific topics, and examples include finances, career choice, sexual issues, clothing, social life, and moral/value issues. The 13 items were summed and averaged for each style with a higher score indicating more reported use of a conflict style, and the reliabilities of these scales (Cronbach's alpha) were excellent (distributive = .94; integrative = .95; passive-indirect = .94).

Family life stage. Because Duvall (1977) defines the transition between the launching and empty nest stages as marked by the presence or absence of children in the home, lifecycle stage was established by a single item, "Are any of your siblings [children] presently living at home with your parent(s) [you]?" (yes/no). Because all of the participants were currently in college (or had children in college) and Duvall (1977) equates this with leaving the home, residence of siblings determines the family life stage. Participants were assigned to either the launching (yes) or empty nest stage (no or NA) based on their response to this question.

Financial dependence and place of residence. These variables were measured by two questions. One question established young adults' level of financial dependence on their parent(s). The question asked what percentage of expenses their parent(s) [they] pay (0, 25, 50, 75 or 100%). Place of residence was established by asking "Do you currently live at home with your parent(s)?" or "Does your child currently live at home with you?" (yes/no).

Communication satisfaction and quality of communication. Satisfaction was measured with a single seven point Likert-type question asking "How satisfied are you with your family communication?" End-point responses ranged from "very satisfied" to "not at all satisfied" with a higher score indicating more satisfaction with family communication.

Perceived quality of communication was measured by 6 seven-point semantic differential items. The stimulus question stated "How would you describe your family communication?" Anchor responses included open/closed, available/restricted, productive/unproductive, clear/un-clear, good/bad and useful/useless. The more "positive" item was scored higher, and the reliability of this scale was good (alpha = .91).

Analyses

Data analyses consisted of 95% confidence intervals, correlations, t-tests, and one-way analyses of variance. The level of significance was set at $p < .05$ for tests, with .01 for correlations.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1—Use of conflict styles. To test the first hypothesis, 95% confidence intervals were constructed for distributive, integrative and passive-indirect conflict styles separately for young adults and parents, and the hypothesis was supported. Table 1 contains the confidence intervals which show reported use of integrative conflict style was significantly different from both distributive and passive-indirect, but passive-indirect and distributive were not significantly different. Both young adults and parents reported more use of integrative strategies than either distributive or passive-indirect strategies.

Table 1
95% Confidence Intervals for Young Adults' and Parents' Conflict Styles

Conflict style	N	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval
Young Adults:				
Integrative	198	3.07	1.11	2.92-3.23
Distributive	200	1.85	.82	1.73-1.97
Passive-indirect	198	1.84	.84	1.72-1.96
Parents:				
Integrative	138	3.50	1.11	3.32-3.68
Distributive	135	1.55	.66	1.44-1.66
Passive-indirect	131	1.62	.76	1.49-1.75

Hypothesis 2—Financial dependence. The second hypothesis predicted differences in conflict style by level of financial dependence, and this was partially supported for young adults but not for parents (see Table 2). One-way ANOVAS were conducted for the three conflict styles by the five levels of financial dependence. For parents, there were no significant differences in use of the three styles by level of financial dependence. For young adults, neither distributive or passive-indirect strategies were significantly different by level of financial dependence. Young adults' level of financial dependence did, however, have a significant effect on reported use of integrative strategies ($F(4,192) = 3.21, p < .01$).

Table 2
One-way ANOVA for Young Adults'
and Parents' Conflict Styles by Financial Independence

Conflict style	F	df	p
Young Adults:			
Integrative	3.21	4,192	.01
Distributive	.73	4,195	NS
Passive-indirect	.88	4,193	NS
Parents:			
Integrative	.57	4,142	NS
Distributive	.42	4,141	NS
Passive-indirect	.91	4,140	NS

To understand which means were significantly different for young adults, group comparisons were conducted via LSD mean contrast, and only two groups were significantly different for young adults' use of integrative strategies. Young adults with no financial dependence (M 0% = 2.44) were less likely to report use of integrative strategies than were those with moderate to high financial dependence on parent(s) (M 50% = 3.54; M 75% = 3.15; M 100% = 3.16).

Hypothesis 3—Place of residence. The third hypothesis predicted differences in conflict styles by place of residence, and this was partially supported for both parents and young adults (see Table 3). *T*-tests were conducted, and integrative and distributive strategies for young adults were not significantly different by place of residence. Place of residence did, however, have a significant effect on use of passive-indirect strategies ($t(197) = 2.11, p < .05$). Results indicate that young adults who live at home ($M = 2.11$) reported significantly *more* use of passive-indirect strategies than young adults who did not live at home ($M = 1.78$).

Table 3
T-tests for Young Adults'
and Parents' Conflict Styles by Place of Residence

Conflict style	Mean	Mean Away	df	t	p
	At Home	From Home			
Young Adults:					
Integrative	3.17	3.05	196	.53	NS
Distributive	1.93	1.83	199	.61	NS
Passive-indirect	2.11	1.78	197	2.11	.05
Parents:					
Integrative	2.93	3.05	146	-3.42	.001
Distributive	1.59	1.55	145	.37	NS
Passive-indirect	1.72	1.59	144	.86	NS

For parents, however, only integrative strategies were significantly different by place of residence ($t(146) = -3.42, p < .001$). Parents with young adults who lived at home ($M = 2.93$) reported significantly *less* use of integrative strategies than parents of young adults who did not live at home ($M = 3.05$).

Hypothesis 4—Family life stage. The fourth hypothesis predicted a difference in reported use of conflict styles by lifestage, and this was not supported for young adults but partially supported for parents (see Table 4). *T*-tests were conducted for young adults, and integrative, distributive or passive-indirect strategies were not significantly different by lifestage. For parents, however, lifecycle stage had a significant effect for both integrative ($t(146) = -2.59, p < .01$) and passive-indirect ($t(144) = 2.00, p < .05$) conflict styles. Parents with families in the launching stage of the life cycle reported significantly *more* use of passive-indirect strategies ($M = 1.74$) and significantly *less* use of integrative strategies ($M = 3.29$) than did parents with families in the empty nest stage (M passive-indirect = 1.49; M integrative = 3.75).

Table 4
T-tests for Parents' and Young Adults'
Conflict Styles by Family Life Cycle Stage

Conflict style	Launching Stage	Empty Nest Stage	df	t	p
Young Adults:					
Integrative	3.11	3.01	196	-.63	NS
Distributive	1.86	1.82	199	-.39	NS
Passive-indirect	1.78	1.86	197	.23	NS
Parents:					
Integrative	3.75	3.29	146	-2.59	.01
Distributive	1.53	1.57	145	.38	NS
Passive-indirect	1.49	1.74	144	2.00	.05

Hypothesis 5—Satisfaction. The fifth hypothesis predicted relations between level of satisfaction with communication and reported use of conflict styles, and these were supported for both parents and young adults (see Table 5). Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated, and satisfaction was significantly related to use of all three conflict strategies for young adults. Satisfaction was inversely related to use of both distributive ($r = -.332$; $p < .001$) and passive-indirect ($r = -.38$; $p < .001$) conflict strategies. Satisfaction was, however, directly related to use of integrative strategies ($r = .18$; $p < .01$). That is, young adults who reported higher levels of satisfaction reported more use of integrative strategies and less use of both distributive and passive-indirect strategies.

Table 5
Correlations for Satisfaction and Communication Quality
with Conflict Styles by Group

	Passive-indirect	Distributive	Integrative	Satisfaction	Quality
Young Adults:					
Distributive	.42**				
Integrative	.03	-.12			
Satisfaction	-.38**	-.33**	.18*		
Quality	-.40**	-.34**	.22*	.65**	
Parents:					
Distributive	.43**				
Integrative	-.10	-.16			
Satisfaction	-.28*	-.23*	.08*		
Quality	-.28**	-.36**	.33*	.37**	

* $p < .01$

** $p < .001$

For parents, the relations between satisfaction with communication and the three conflict styles were very similar, but the correlation between satisfaction and integrative style for parents was not significant. Satisfaction was, however, inversely related to use of both distributive ($r = -.23$; $p < .01$) and passive-indirect ($r = -.28$; $p < .01$) conflict strategies. That is, parents who reported higher levels of satisfaction reported lower use of both passive-indirect and distributive strategies.

Hypothesis 6—Communication quality. The sixth hypothesis predicted relations between quality of communication and use of conflict styles, and this was supported for both parents and young adults (see Table 5). Correlations were conducted, and quality of communication was significantly related to use of all three conflict strategies for young adults. Quality of communication was inversely related to use of both distributive ($r = -.34$;

$p < .001$) and passive-indirect ($r = -.40$; $p < .001$) conflict strategies. Quality of communication was also directly related to use of integrative strategies ($r = .22$; $p < .01$). Thus, young adults who reported better quality of communication reported more use of integrative strategies and less use of both passive-indirect and distributive strategies.

The pattern of relations between quality of communication and conflict style was the same for parents. Quality of communication was significantly related to use of distributive ($r = -.36$; $p < .001$) and passive-indirect ($r = -.29$; $p < .001$) strategies. Quality of communication was also directly related to use of integrative strategies ($r = .33$; $p < .001$). Parents who reported better quality of communication reported more use of integrative strategies and less use of both passive-indirect and distributive strategies.

DISCUSSION

This study examined young adults' and parents' perceptions of conflict style from a resource theory perspective. One of the initial findings of this study is that young adults and parents reported different frequencies in use of conflict strategies: a significantly higher use of integrative versus passive-indirect and distributive strategies was reported, and this supports others' findings (e.g., Parker et al., 1996). It may be that the use of conflict styles by young adults and parents are more integrative than typically thought. For example, Duvall's (1977) contention that communication is during this time for families may be inaccurate. From a resource theory perspective, increased autonomy may enhance the capacity for parents and young adults to engage in constructive conflict management.

Resource Theory

A trend toward greater independence by young adults may be linked to choice of conflict style. This study revealed partial support of resource theory in predicting uses of conflict styles. For example, parents in the empty nest stage of the family life cycle were less likely to use passive-indirect styles and more likely to use integrative strategies than families in the launching stage. In addition, parents with young adults living in the home were less likely to use integrative conflict styles than parents with young adults not living in the home. Young adults who resided in the home were more likely to report using passive-indirect strategies than those not living at home. However, in terms of financial dependence, young adults reported more use of integration if they were monetarily dependent on their parent(s). This finding does not lend support to the resource approach as conceptualized in this study. It may be that reliance

upon others for financial assistance encourages the use of more integrative styles. After all, support could be withdrawn if young adults choose not to engage in constructive conflict management.

Young adults may also have resources (other than money and independent residences) that help redistribute power and redefine boundaries in family relationships. For example, one could surmise young adults could control the amount of contact between themselves and their parents, which could in turn affect frequency of conflict, conflict style used, level of satisfaction, and quality of communication. In addition, decision-making power could be interpreted as a resource. If young adults are free to engage in whatever activities they desire, they would appear to have an important resource: the ability to make important decisions without (or with minimal) parental influence. Interpretation of the results for operationalization of resources in this study, however, is complicated by the relatively small number of young adults and parents of young adults in the study who reside at home, have families in the launching stage of the family life cycle, or have financial independence.

Satisfaction and Quality of Communication

It was also found that satisfaction and quality of communication were inversely related to both distributive and passive-indirect strategies for both young adults and parents. In addition, these variables were found to be directly related to the use of integrative strategies for both parents and young adults. Although the design used in this research cannot establish causality, it does appear that a win-win approach to conflict management is related to higher satisfaction and quality of communication. This supports findings from previous research which has suggested that passive-indirect and distributive styles contribute to decreased satisfaction with communication in family relationships (Comstock, 1994; Gayle, 1992; Parker et al., 1996). As quality of communication increased, use of distributive strategies decreased for both parents and young adults. This finding is not surprising when the win/lose orientation of distributive strategies in general is taken into account. Satisfaction and quality of communication were inversely related to use of passive-indirect strategies. Because passive-indirect strategies incorporate both avoidance and withdrawal tactics, it leads to the conclusion that satisfying high-quality relationships are characterized by managing conflict rather than avoiding it.

Limitations

The sample for the present study is taken from young adults and unassociated parents, therefore family perceptions of conflict are not addressed. This study, then, provides evidence about negotiation of conflict from only one perspective in each family. In the future, samples could include triads of both parents and their young adults in order to understand differences and similarities between the two groups' perceptions of conflict management styles (cf. Parker et al., 1996). In addition, because the young adults in this sample are students, findings may be different for a non-student population.

While the present study employed three operationalizations of resources, the construct could be expanded to encompass more than financial dependence, place of residence and lifestyle. Future research should focus upon young adults' perceptions of resources and power in relationships.

One of the limitations of this kind of self-report measures is people may respond in what they deem "socially acceptable" ways. Such may have been the case in the present study. The integrative style, as operationalized on the survey instrument used in this study, is the most positive approach to conflict management. Thus, reports of frequency of use of this conflict style may be exaggerated. Stronger operationalizations may have resulted in a different distribution of reported usage across the three styles, but the social desirability bias may persist. Interestingly, means indicated participants still reported using use of some of the less "socially accepted" conflict styles (see Table 1). Additionally, self-report data is inherently biased by an individual's perception, and perceptions from an entire family of each member's style use would be useful.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study may have a number of important implications for the study of family life, particularly for those who seek to help family members manage their relationships productively, such as family therapists, social workers, and school counselors. Ascertaining the styles of conflict family members adopt as well as how those styles are employed may be one way to address communication difficulties. For example, counselors or social workers who work in school settings might devise programs which help youth and their parents identify more effective strategies for conflict management. The launching stage of the family life cycles presents a transition that some families may find difficult, and productive communi-

cation strategies adopted before this time might be invaluable. In addition, it might be possible to teach entire families how to effectively manage conflict. Family therapists might consider developing programs which help families identify their conflict strategies and assess their effectiveness (see Openshaw, Mills, Adams, & Durso, 1992; Sternberg, 1994; Wolcott & Weston, 1994). These kinds of programs could be particularly beneficial for blended families where conflict styles are likely to be more diverse.

Though the current investigation provides important insights into family conflict patterns, but in future studies every effort should be made to recruit intact family units for participation. Doing so would help insure we have a more global, and probably more accurate understanding of the dynamics of family communication. Specifically, by including all family members, it would be possible to explore the intricacies of role relationships. For example, we could examine how parent-child roles shift and change as parents enter the final stage of the life cycle and their children enter middle-age. Or, we could explore how mother-daughter, father-son relationships evolve as families manage conflict *over time*. In the realm of family research, cross-sectional studies are abundant. If we are to truly gain insight into how family communication patterns change over the life course, it is important to begin employing longitudinal research designs. Finally, given the growing body of literature in family communication, researchers should begin to work toward better triangulation of their research designs. It is time to rise to the challenge of widening the research net to include more observational, experimental, and ethnographic studies of the family.

NOTES

¹ Copies of the instruments are available from the first author. The reliabilities of most measures were very good, but the satisfaction measure in particular is weak because of single item measurement

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