University of Alberta

Conflict Resolution in the Parent-Adolescent Dyad:

Perceptions of Daily Conflict and Links to Family Functioning

by

Jennifer Ella Lynn Crawford

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ABSTRACT

Minor conflict is a normative part of the daily lives of adolescents and their families. Like all other activities of daily life, conflict within the parent-adolescent dyad is mediated through the family system and by overall family functioning. Through the use of constructive conflict resolution skills, adolescents and adults alike learn to offer opinions, defend views, and make decisions. Conversely, the repeated use of destructive conflict resolution strategies has been demonstrated to have a negative impact on adolescents and also tends to be associated with more problematic family functioning. The purpose of this study was to explore and come to a better understanding of conflict between parents and early adolescents, with the notion that multiple family sub-systems influence how parents and adolescents negotiate their way through conflict and resolution. A collective case study approach was employed in order to allow a detailed look at the experiences of several dyads within a set number of families. Multiple data collection activities were utilized to provide a deeper understanding of the complex interactions typical in family relationships. Five families with early adolescents (four 13-year-olds – two females and two males, and one 12-year-old male) participated in this study. A cross-case thematic analysis of the interview and Daily Log data was completed in order to get a more comprehensive examination of the phenomenon's of conflict and conflict resolution between parents and early adolescents in the sample. Results are presented thematically. The most salient themes which emerged across cases included the following: the importance of understanding the developmental functions of conflict in the parent-adolescent dyad as a mediating factor for parental coping with minor conflict; the importance of parents and adolescents being able to reflect on experiences of conflict

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as a change mechanism; consistency in parenting as a mediator for parent-adolescent conflict; the importance of communication amongst and between family members; and the differences in perceptions between adolescents and parents, especially with respect to conflict resolution. Additional sub-themes are discussed in the analysis section. Family and researcher reflections on the data and implications for clinical practice and parenting educational programs are also presented.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

For a significant number of adolescents, the transition from childhood to adolescence is accompanied by minor but recurrent daily conflict with their parents (Adams & Laursen, 2001; Laursen & Collins, 1994; Smetana, 1989; Steinberg, 2001). The study of the impact of conflict on family dynamics has a diverse and complicated background. While early research focused on the elimination of conflict as a functional goal in improving family life, later research demonstrated the importance of conflict in helping family members learn how to deal with disagreement in their lives (Shantz & Hartup, 1992). Further examination of conflict in the family setting demonstrated that not only can some conflict be adaptive, the types of resolution strategies that family members use, either constructive or destructive, serves instructional purpose in modeling appropriate methods for adolescents to use in managing conflict (Erel & Burman, 1995). That is, parents and important adults in the lives of adolescents teach, both directly and indirectly, many strategies for the resolution of conflict.

Conflict is a normative part of our daily lives; it is in this context that an opportunity for personal and social growth and development occurs. Through the use of constructive or prosocial conflict resolution skills, children, adolescents, and adults alike learn to offer opinions, defend views, and make decisions. Through interactions with parents, adolescents have the opportunity to practice the use of conflict resolution skills. They also have the opportunity to witness their parents model particular skills in their management of conflict in parent-parent interactions and in parent-sibling interactions (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Davies & Cummings, 1994; Erel & Burman, 1995). The

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family setting is clearly an important training ground for children and adolescents in the ongoing development of their conflict management and resolution skills.

There are many factors which, when combined, mediate the effects that any particular conflict will have on adolescents and on adults. The pattern of conflict resolution skills, evident within the family and dyadic setting, will be instructive as we attempt to understand general family functioning and functioning within the parent-child dyad. By developing an understanding of familial conflict resolution skill use, clinicians, therapists, and educators will be better equipped to support young people and their families in the use of effective resolution strategies, and ultimately develop healthier family relationships. Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is to examine the conflict resolution patterns in the parent-child dyad through the investigation of perceptions of daily conflict and links to family functioning.

The following literature review will examine some of the factors that contribute to our understanding of conflict resolution in family relationships. First, an examination of family systems theory and developmental contextualism will be presented. The focus of this component of the literature review is to outline how family relationships are part of a complex web of interrelated relationships, each having reciprocal influence on other relationships both within and outside the family system (Cox & Paley, 1997; Minuchin, 1998). Specifically, family systems theory and developmental contextualism will be critiqued and reviewed in relation to the present study. Second, the literature review will focus on the construct of conflict. Conflict, in and of itself, is not necessarily a negative experience. It helps to shape and guide our development as human beings, families, and communities. Perceptions of conflict in our lives, however, will guide how we approach

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and mediate it (Matza, et. al., 2001). Given that individuals construct their own realities, it is no surprise then, that different family members may have different perceptions of their experiences and therefore different perceptions of a single conflict incident. Perceptions will be discussed with reference to the manner that they mediate the conflict experience. In managing conflict, there are both constructive and destructive strategies that adolescents and their parents may employ. A review of research examining the different types of conflict and impact on social relations will be included. Predominant use of one type of strategy has implications for long-term adjustment and will be discussed as a contributing factor for adolescents and families in their day-to-day functioning.

Family Functioning and the Parent Adolescent Dyad

Family Systems Theory

Traditionally, family therapists working from a Family Systems Theory (FST) perspective perceived and treated families in a systemic fashion (Minuchin, 1988). That is, systemic practitioners and theorists argue that the family is made up of several subsystems that form a larger system. FST examines the reciprocal relationships between individual members and considers the experiences within the family as multidimensional, non-linear events. For the past three decades theorists such as Bowen (1976), Bronfenbrenner (1979), and Minuchin (1988) have proposed broad systemic models to guide our understanding of the cultural, societal and familial forces that influence adolescent development. FST highlights how the interactions within the family can be understood on multiple levels as reciprocal exchanges. The number of reciprocal exchanges and multi-level interactions that guide and influence any individual family are countless. For example, reciprocal exchanges

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may take place between a parent and an adolescent, between an adolescent and a peer, or between social norms and the family. While the dyadic interactions between parent and adolescent are but one level of reciprocal exchange that can be examined, and while this dyad serves as one of the most influential during childhood and adolescence, there are many other levels, which will influence the interactions. The purpose of the present study is to explore the conflict skills and strategies of parents and adolescents in the context of the parent-child dyad.

Family Systems and Developmental Contextualism theorists view the development of human beings as an interactive process organized on multiple levels with shifting associations among biological, psychological, and social contextual levels (e.g., Lerner, Castellino, Terry, Villarruel, & McKinney, 1995). These perspectives provide a theoretical context for understanding how family members function in relation to others and how specific skills are developed within the context of the family and community (Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1988; Minuchin, 1988). "The central idea of developmental contextualism is that changing, reciprocal relations (or dynamic interactions) between individuals and the multiple contexts within which they live comprise the essential process of human development" (Lerner, et al., p. 287). The dynamic interactions between parent and adolescent then, when combined with other system influences and social contexts, serve an important influence on the course of development and the learning of social skills and conflict resolution strategies.

One fundamental principle agreed upon by the classic family system theorists and developmental contextualists is that the individual is connected to "guiding systems" that are functionally related so that change in one part of the system reverberates through to the

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other parts (Bowen, 1976; Bronfenbrenner 1985; Lerner et al., 1995). Furthermore, this system acts in a non-linear fashion, with multiple influences acting on the child, adolescent, or adult at any given time. "From a systems perspective, an open system such as the family is a complex, integrated whole, with organized patterns of interaction that are circular rather than linear in form" (Minuchin, 1988, p. 8). Given the importance of the family system as a guiding force in its members day-to-day functioning, it is no surprise that families provide adolescents with an unprecedented vehicle for learning social behaviour (Jenkins & Buccioni, 2000; Matza, Kupersmidt, & Glenn, 2001; O'Brien, Margolin, & John 1995). Conflict resolution, one of the social skills taught by families, is the focus of this dissertation.

Fundamental to our understanding of families and the reciprocal influences that define their structure are four main properties:

1. Family Synergy - the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. That is, the family has properties that cannot be understood by simply examining the combined characteristics of each part.
2. Subsystems form each system. Each subsystem can be examined as its own system.
3. The systems that make up the family are typically homeostatic. That is, they compensate for changing conditions within the environment by making coordinated changes within the inner workings of the system.
4. Systems have the ability to adapt to change or challenge the change in the environment. As such, they maintain a sense of adaptive self-organization (Cox & Paley, 1997).

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Given these properties, an examination of the parents' or the adolescent's conflict resolution skills, must consider the system of greatest influence, the family. In particular, this dissertation will examine the specific family sub-system of the parent-adolescent dyad.

Family members learn rules for behaviour and relating as a product of understanding the roles and boundaries determined by the subsystems. Repeated family interactions provide a basis for learning complex social rules, and, as such, these family interactions are instrumental in preparing adolescents for the social systems and subsystems they will encounter outside their family system (Cox & Paley, 1997). The adolescent and the parent influence the outcome of the system with both parties playing an active role in shaping their own environment.

The repeated implementation of destructive conflict resolution skills has been demonstrated to have a negative impact with regard to long-term socialization of children and adolescents. "Conflict seems to have powerful, often maladaptive, effects on individuals when it becomes an obstacle rather than a vehicle for change" (Shantz & Hartup, 1992, p. 271). Klein, Forehand, Armistead and Long (1998) investigated the relationship between maternal parenting skill during early adolescence and delinquency in early adulthood. These authors found a significant relationship between maternal skills in the resolution of mother–adolescent conflict and problem solving and the likelihood of serious legal problems in adolescents entering early adulthood. The link between type of parental conflict management and adolescent delinquency reinforces the important role that parents play in their children's development of both maladaptive and adaptive conflict resolution skills. Forehand, Brody, Slotkin, Fauber, McCombs, and Long (1986) found that the interaction of both parents with their adolescent influences the adolescent's behavioural

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and academic performance. While a mother's declining mental health is related to her adolescent's increasingly inappropriate conduct, the father-adolescent relationship is predictive of global adolescent conduct, and overall academic success. That is, when adolescents have increased negative and disruptive conflict with their fathers, their school grades and overall behaviour suffer. Shrek (1997) finds that not only are adolescents subject to the negative effects of parent-child conflict, but that the reverse is also true and that they may benefit from positive conflict. However, with respect to frequency of conflict at home, when adolescents and their parents enjoy reduced conflict the adolescent also generally enjoys improved mental health.

Spill-Over Theory

The likelihood that factors in one system will influence skills, strategies and competence in the same direction in another system is referred to in the research literature as the spillover effect (Margolin, Oliver & Medina, 2001). The spillover effect occurs when the emotional climate from one environment or family system 'spills over' or is carried into the emotional climate of another. An example of this might be the adolescent, angry at being disciplined at school, comes home and has an argument with a parent or sibling, or conversely, the parent, happy to get a raise, celebrates with the family by taking them for dinner. This spillover effect amongst the subsystems of the family is as likely to occur as a result of positive interactions as of negative ones. That is, family subsystems are likely to share feelings of happiness, and competence in addition to feelings of stress and frustration. Feelings and notions of emotional and social competence are widely influenced through the interactions between family subsystems. As such, "the family systems perspective

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understands psychopathology as a reflection of family processes" (Margolin, Oliver & Medina, 2001 p.11). This proposal then, seeks to examine further the role of conflict in family process.

Behavioural Family Systems Theory – Conflict as a Product of Development

Another theory that is relevant to the proposed study is Behavioural Family Systems Theory (BFST) of Feldman and Gehring (1988). They have suggested that family systems theory alone does little to advance our clinical understanding of how families function.

> Theorizing from a family systems perspective has far outstripped the empirical research associated with it...The task remains to demonstrate empirically to what degree the clinically derived constructs described by the theory have applicability to non-clinical populations and are useful in describing transformations of family structure in the family life-cycle (p. 1036).

Further to this, Robin and Foster (1989) suggest a BFST approach which combines the concepts of molecular contingency arrangements, social-learning principles, and behavioural exchange theory with the family systems concepts of circular relationships. While family systems theory allows for important theorizing about families and the individuals that make-up a family, research needs to be developed which specifically examines the concepts proposed by the theory. Given the context of a family system, how is it that family members, as both agents of change in the family and individual developing beings, influence each other in the application of conflict resolution strategies?

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BFST, as proposed by Robin and Foster (1989) examines families as social systems comprised of members who have mutual control over one another's 'contingency arrangements' (See Figure 1, p. 13). They suggest that each member of the family system comes equipped with individual communication skills and belief systems which "both determine and are, in part, determined by their interactions with other members" (Robin & Foster, 1989, p.8). Biological change (i.e., adolescence), like any other major change to the system, results in disruptions to the homeostasis of the family.

Within the theory, the onset of the period of adolescence, one of "exponential physiological, cognitive, emotional and behavioural change" results in psychosocial changes that reverberate throughout the system (Robin & Foster, 1989, p.8). The adolescent's increasing desire for independence from the family system results in changes in the behaviour of other family systems, especially the parental system. The previously established homeostasis of childhood is disrupted by changing expectations on the part of the adolescent with regards to rights and freedoms, and on the part of the parent with regards to responsibility and more adult-like behaviour.

Several other developmental factors influence the adolescent's metamorphosis from childhood to adulthood. These challenges include the cognitive and physical changes of adolescence and the psychological adaptation that accompanies sexual maturation. Identity development, development of same- and opposite-sexed peer and romantic relationships and preparations for vocation, career or university also dominate the period of adolescent development. It is no surprise then that the family system also experiences changes in response to the developing adolescent (Robin & Foster, 1989).

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Robin and Foster (1989) propose three factors that influence the family in their adjustment to the increasing independence of adolescence. The first factor is the family structure. Family structure is defined as the organizational power structure that exists such that the family goals can be accomplished. This structure is seen as being hierarchical, and based on the differential distribution of power. Several dynamics influence the balance of power in the family system. These dynamics may include multigenerational rules or patterns, the cultural and social systems at play, the history of a particular family system (e.g., a patriarchal vs. matriarchal tradition), or the control of coalitions and reinforcers. The structure of the family system is significantly altered by the individuation of the adolescent. Power structures, which place the parents at the top of the hierarchy, are typically challenged and a re-distribution of power within the family system results.

The second factor proposed by Robin and Foster (1989) addresses the issues of belief systems and cognitive distortions. Belief systems and cognitive distortions encompass the idea that "family members' beliefs, expectations and attributions concerning parenting, child rearing, and family life are habitual responses learned from life experiences and are subject to control by environmental and internal antecedents and consequences" (Robin & Foster, 1989, p. 14). In the case of cognitions, positive cognitions generally elicit positive emotional response, while negative cognitions elicit negative emotional response. Repeated interactions, which generate negative cognitions and negative emotional response, lead to a negative mindset and perhaps prolonged negative feelings within a parent-child dyad. These negative feelings lead to increased likelihood of "interlocking cycles of punishment and avoidance" and do not foster the development of effective problem solving skills (p. 15).

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The final factor proposed by Robin and Foster involves problem-solving communication skills. These skills, as seen by Robin and Foster "are particularly salient to the study of parent-adolescent relations because many conflicts between parents and teenagers take the form of a series of specific disputes that require resolution to restore a new pattern of family functioning" (1989, p. 11). Not only are basic problem-solving or conflict resolution skills essential during the transition period of adolescence, the more intense a particular conflict, the more proficient family members will need to be at utilizing effective resolution skills. When deficits in these skills exist, it is much more likely that increased conflict will result. Several research studies assert that in Western societies at least, democratically based conflict resolution tactics (as opposed to authoritarian or permissive-laissez faire types) are most likely to reduce conflict and promote healthy future conflict resolution (Robin & Foster, 1989; Steinberg, 2001). Furthermore, Robin and Foster suggest that excessive use of parental authority or abdication of authority results in much higher levels of conflict, which has potential to be disruptive to the developmental progress through independence for the adolescent. It is the resolution skills in the parent-child dyad upon which this dissertation will focus.

Robin and Foster (1989) suggest then, that the problem solving abilities, communication patterns, belief systems and family structure govern the degree of disruption to homeostasis as well as the duration, pervasiveness and affective intensity experienced by the family system. Difficulties in any of the above may lead a family toward clinically significant difficulties in managing the transitions presented by adolescence (Robin & Foster, p.8). There is little research addressing Robin and Foster's model, however a meta-analysis of research studies examining the increase of conflict in

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adolescence suggests that the changes in conflict patterns are more strongly linked to age rather than the onset of puberty as Robin and Foster suggest (Smetana, 1989). This finding supports the notion that the social forces of change which take place in the adolescent time period are more likely to explain the differential experiences of family conflict versus biological forces alone (Furman & Buhrmeser, 1985; Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998).

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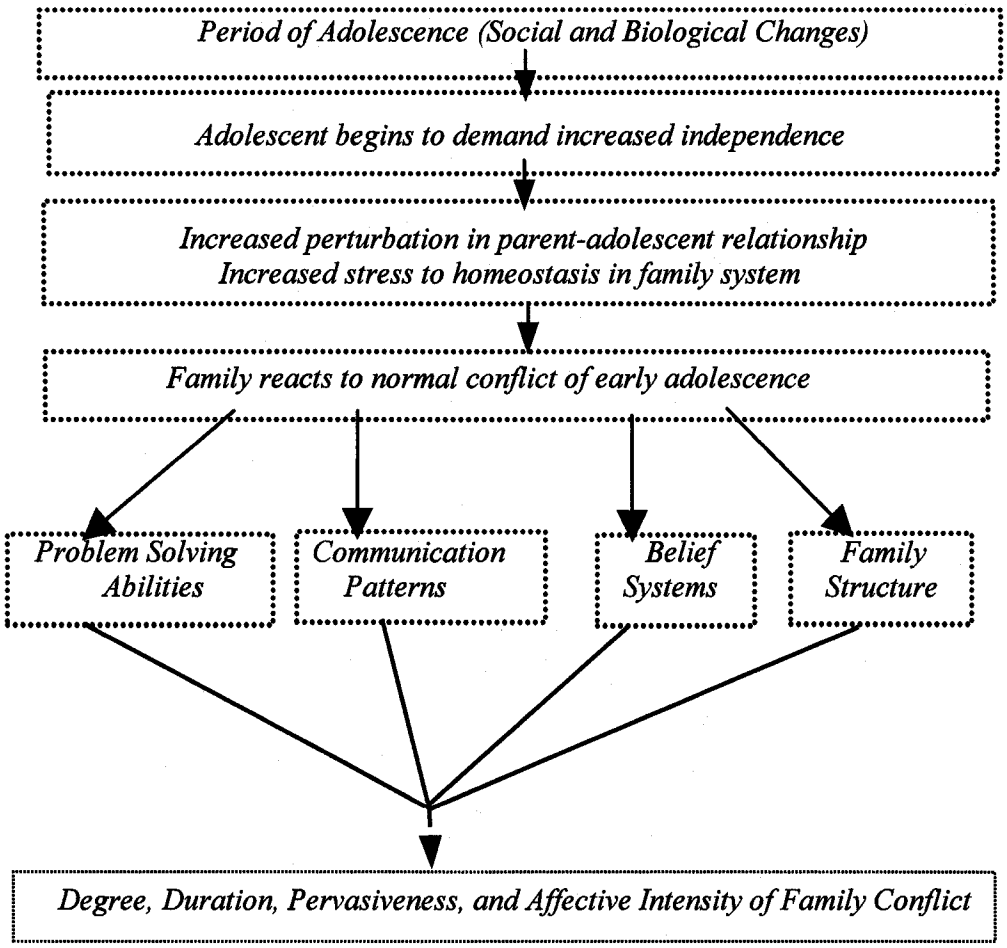
Figure 1: Behavioural Family Systems Theory



Adapted from Robin A.L., & Foster, S.L. (1989). Negotiating Parent Adolescent Conflict. New York: The Guilford Press.

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Within the above structure, family members have learned rules for behaviour and relating as a product of understanding the roles and boundaries determined by the subsystems. Repeated family interactions provide a basis for learning complex social rules, and as such these family interactions are instrumental in preparing adolescents for the social systems and subsystems they will encounter outside their family system (Cox & Paley, 1997). Early adolescence, however, may present a challenging time for the adolescent and the family system, as the youth strives to re-define their role within the family structure, thus disrupting the established roles.

Laursen, Coy, and Collins, (1998) suggest that the family coping with the time-period of early adolescence will experience the most frequent conflict. Mid-adolescence will see a stabilization in the frequency of conflict, while later adolescent years bring a significant decline in the frequency of conflict from the early adolescent years. This is consistent with Robin and Foster's (1989) notion that the establishment of a new homeostasis, which includes the adolescent as an increasing independent family member, may be the most difficult period with regard to conflict in the parent-child dyad. Once the adolescent-parent relationship negotiates the need for the increased autonomy of the adolescent, conflict is reduced. Despite the difficulty of the early-adolescent period, research does show that adolescents consistently view their family, and in particular their parents, as the primary support in their lives. Even as the interaction with peers begins to outweigh the interactions and influence of parents, the family system serves a stabilizing and supporting role which will guide the adolescent into successful adulthood (Arnett, 1999; Feldman & Gehring, 1988).

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Developmental Considerations

Adolescent Development

The adolescent years bring with them the beginnings of Formal Operations, which allow adolescents to think more objectively about their role in the family system (Piaget, 1972). The behaviours and characteristics an adolescent exhibits in their formative years often follow them into adulthood, thus making the early adolescent years crucial for understanding conflict resolution skills. This ability to think and reason logically, in ways they could not do as a younger child, coincides with the adolescent's attempts to renegotiate the boundaries of family in order to gain independence. It should serve as no surprise then that early adolescence has been found to be the time period of highest conflict (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998), given the significant changes in thinking and the beginning of disruption to homeostasis in the family system.

Developmental Tasks of Parenting

While change and development on the part of the early adolescent is anticipated in the parent-child dyad, developmental changes on the part of the parent are less well understood. Several researchers have proposed developmental stages of parenthood, with the suggestion that turning points for change in parenthood result from the gradual realization that there exists a dissonance between a parents' image of themselves and their reality. When this dissonance becomes great enough, the parent is forced to either change their image of themselves or change the reality in which they are functioning by changing their behaviour (Galinsky, 1987). "From the birth of a first child, which tends to make both parents feel more 'adult' – thinking about themselves and their responsibilities differently –

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through the unexpected issues raised by adolescent children, parenthood is undoubtedly an impetus for cognitive growth" (Berger, 1994, p. 478). Galinsky (1987) proposes a stage theory of parenting that begins with The Image Making Stage of the expectant parent and ends with the Departure Stage, whereby parents launch their young adult children. Of particular interest in this dissertation is The Interdependent Stage, which encompasses the teen years. In this stage, as their teen moves, ever more determinedly towards adulthood, parents and teens are forced to examine and renegotiate their relationships. This stage can be particularly difficult for parents for several reasons. Galinsky notes that unlike the previous stage, The Interpretive Stage, the Interdependent Stage is one of increased turbulence where the parent is forced to examine both the image of themselves as a parent and the image of their teen as no longer being a child. The major task of this stage is the redefinition of the parent-child relationship. "The new relationship is welded together with elements that may seem like polar opposites; distances and closeness, separateness and connectedness.... 'Now they're big. And it's a different relationship. They're as big as I am. They're people. They are my people. My children – people'. " (Galinsky, 1987, p. 282).

Conflict Resolution

Conflict Defined

An initial step in developing an improved understanding of conflict in the family is to define conflict itself. Typically, when researchers, practitioners and laypeople alike consider family conflict, they tend to think of intense verbal and even physical altercations between family members. While these types of conflict are the most obvious of the types,

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they occur relatively infrequently in typical families. Conversely, the daily lives of typical families are filled with minor disagreements over everyday topics (Smetana, 1988). As such, for the purposes of this dissertation, Cummings' and Davies' (2002) definition will be adopted as it allows an examination of the more typical, non-clinical family interactions. "A more encompassing definition [of conflict] conceptualizes conflict as any major or minor interparental interaction that involves a difference of opinion, whether it is mostly negative or mostly positive" (Cummings & Davies, 2002, p. 38). This definition will be applied to all dyadic conflict within the family setting.

Constructive Versus Destructive Conflict Resolution

Socio-cognitive development in the parent-adolescent relationship is a comparatively new area of research. In the last three decades, the movement in studying conflict resolution has moved away from sole investigation in terms of frequency of conflict and increasingly toward the process of conflict and its resolution. Starting with Deutsch's work (1973), social conflict is examined with reference to the type of resolution process that takes place. He distinguished between constructive and destructive conflict and defined them based on whether conflict is an obstacle to change based on coercive, manipulative and avoidance strategies or whether conflict facilitates change through approaches based on problem solving and negotiating. Destructive conflict resolution occurs when individuals utilize negative strategies such as name-calling or manipulation in an effort to reach their goals whereas constructive conflict resolution strategies involve prosocial strategies such as brainstorming and negotiation (Rinaldi & Howe, 1998; Shanz & Hartup, 1992).

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Within the last 15 years, there have been a number of studies examining children's abilities to solve problems, communicate disagreement, take the perspective of others, and make situational evaluations (Chung & Asher, 1996; Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997; Dunn & Slomkowski, 1992; Sinclair, 2000). A review of those studies indicates that constructive and destructive conflict is correspondingly associated with distinct social development outcomes. Both Sinclair (2000) and Chung and Asher (1996) cite communicative conflict, moral reasoning and justifying as constructive methods for managing conflict situations and suggest that some children are more capable than others of employing these skills in problematic life situations. Negotiation, compromise and problem solving are also frequently cited as constructive methods for managing conflict and are correspondingly expected to foster interpersonal growth (Chapman & McBride, 1992; Eisenberg et. al., 1996). Conversely, extensive use of destructive conflict strategies including manipulation, disengagement, verbal and physical aggression appear likely to inhibit optimal levels of child and adolescent development (Delveaux & Daniels, 2000; Furman & McQuaid, 1992; Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2001; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1999).

Employment of constructive versus destructive conflict strategies has on-going and long-term impact in the lives of adolescents and adults alike. The development of specific conflict resolution skills in the one family subsystem has been shown to impact children's other family subsystems (Rinaldi & Howe, 1998). Furthermore, the utilization of these skills has been linked to the overall quality of one's relationships (Chung & Asher, 1996; Howe, Rinaldi, Jennings, & Petrakos, 2002). Cummings and Davies (2002) suggest that a child's distress at marital disagreement is directly related to both the type of resolution strategies used in managing the conflict and the degree to which the conflict is resolved. It

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would seem that conflict in the family setting might play an important role in teaching adolescents how to respond effectively to conflict in their own experiences. "An important question for parents, practitioners, and others concerned with the well-being of children and families is how parents can handle everyday differences better for the sake of children" (Cummings & Davies, 2002, p. 35).

Standards and Perceptions of Family Conflict

Our expected standards and our perceptions of how relationships are going are thought to serve important roles in understanding our relationships with others. The notion of 'how things should be' and 'how things are' serve as important benchmarks of comparison when examining the parent-child relationships (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Matza, et. al., 2001). Matza, et al. (2001) suggested that an individual's standards are important and act as a cognitive reference point for understanding their perceptions of social situations. Relationships are governed by our perceptions relative to our expectations of each relationship. Negative consequences exist when our experiences do not meet up with our expectations. "People react to their perceptions, but these perceptions are filtered through their standards (Matza, et. al., 2001, p.249). An investigation into the perceptions of adolescents with regard to the standards they hold for parental relationships may support our understanding of the role of perceptions in conflict resolution amongst family members.

Perception also guides the selection and use of appropriate conflict resolution skills (Loraine, 1991). If an individual does not perceive that a conflict exists, or they do not view it as serious, then the skills they utilize may appear at first glance to be inappropriate. It is

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not uncommon for individuals in a dyadic relationship or family setting to have different perceptions of the degree or nature of a conflict experience. Robin and Foster (1984) found large discrepancies between adolescents and their parents in their perceptions of conflict in the family setting. Calian and Noller (1986) found that typically, adolescents tend to overestimate the negative attributes of their family. Adolescents also perceive more conflict with their mothers than their mothers perceive with them (Calian & Noller). The participants in this study individually recorded daily data to assist the researcher in examining the similarities and differences in perception of daily conflict in the parent-child dyad.

Gender Based Differences in Conflict Resolution

With regard to levels of conflict at home, researchers have found that mothers, as the primary caregivers in western society, tend to bear the brunt of the majority of conflict with their teens (Montemayor, 1982; Richardson, Abramowitz, Asp, & Patersen, 1986; Smith & Forehand, 1986; Silverberg & Steinberg, 1987). It may be, that mother-child dyads will describe more frequent and minor conflict experiences in their Daily Log than will father-child relationships. Mothers may have a different perception of conflict in the parent-adolescent dyadic relationship given the higher frequency with which they experience it. Fathers, on the other hand, may not be as accustomed to conflict and may perceive it is a bigger problem when they are faced with it. Potentially, this may add to fathers' overall feelings of stress and may exacerbate the spill-over effect. As such, given the findings of previous research, conflict in the father-child dyad may be found to be less frequent, but rated more seriously than mother-child conflict.

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Implications

When considering conflict from a broad viewpoint, which includes the typical family disagreement to more serious conflict exchanges, the degree and type of conflict strategies consistently emerge as important factors. While serious parent-adolescent conflict is estimated to occur for only 15-20% of families (Montemayor, 1983, Steinberg, 2001), 60-70% of adolescents and parents readily acknowledged regularly disagreeing (Rutter, Graham, Chadwick, & Yule, 1976; Steinberg, 2001). So, while the majority of families maneuver through the teen years relatively unscathed by serious conflict, increased distress is noted when conflicts go unresolved, deal with childrearing or child related problems or are consistently resolved in a destructive manner (Cummings & Davies, 2002, p. 36). A vast majority of the families experiencing daily conflict could benefit from a better understanding regarding how to best manage the inevitable conflict that is bound to occur.

By examining the relationships between family factors and resolution strategies we can broaden our understanding of the developmental role of conflict in adolescents' social adjustment. Information stemming from this type of research will help to support clinical family therapists and family educators in developing family specific recommendations to be utilized in the clinical setting. Such information may also be useful in designing skill-specific programs to teach conflict resolution skills and may also be used to revise traditional parenting and communication curriculums to produce more consistent gains in conflict resolution skill development (e.g., Pepler, Craig, Roberts, 1998). Finally, enhanced understanding of conflict resolution patterns may well contribute to an earlier identification

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of adolescents and families with deficit skill levels and assist in the prevention of adjustment difficulties.

Original Contributions of the Present Study

The purpose of the current study was to address the following gaps in the current family conflict literature: Perceptions of family environment and the conflict within plays a substantial role in how individual family members cope with and view challenges to their systems (Robin & Foster, 1984). As such, it is important to examine how each member of the parent-child dyad views the conflict within their system. This dissertation allowed for the examination of perceptual similarities and (in-depth examination of conflict experienced by different family members) differences that existed between parents and adolescents with regard to significant conflicts and their resolution in a small sample of families. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of parent-child conflict was permitted through the examination of family factors such as task accomplishment, role performance, communication, affective expression, involvement, control, and values and norms, as important contributors to the parent-child management of conflict.

Behavioural Family Systems Theory predicts that the time period of early adolescence will be the most conflict ridden due to the disequilibrium created in the family by the increasing independence of the adolescent. As such, families with early adolescents were examined. Finally, having mothers, fathers, and adolescents complete questionnaires, complete a Daily Log, and participate in in-depth interviews allowed for a richer examination of the factors that individual families see as important in our understanding of conflict within the home setting. While research studies have used interview techniques

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with parents and adolescents, a vast majority of these studies have asked parents and adolescents to examine their experiences retrospectively, have consisted of a single interview, or have neglected either a parent or a child in the data collection procedure. Many studies utilize retrospective parental report of child functioning. As a result, these techniques may not provide the sense of jointly created environment evident in the collection of Daily Log information over a longer period of time, from multiple respondents. Finally, the use of clinical tools in this study (i.e. the FAM III and CTS questionnaires) allowed for a starting point for discussing and examining conflict within the parent-adolescent relationship.

Guiding Questions:

Each family's questionnaire data was examined, scored and subsequently reviewed during their final interviews. Reflection on their clinical questionnaire data and discussion of conflict in the parent-adolescent relationship within the context of these questionnaires was used as starting point for the interviews. Associations and deeper understandings of the answers to the following question were derived through qualitative analysis within each family's story and across the stories of all families who participate in the project. The main research questions were:

1. How do parents and early adolescents understand and resolve conflicts in their relationship?
2. What do parents and early adolescents perceive as influencing the occurrence of conflict as well as its resolution?
3. How does family functioning serve to influence conflict resolution?

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Qualitative analysis of the associations and links between concepts allowed for a deeper understanding of conflict resolution within each family and across the stories of all families who participated in the project.

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CHAPTER TWO: METHODS

The design of this study was based on a qualitative model that focused on a cross-case study analysis or 'Collective Case Study' (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1994). A collective case study is "not the study of a collective, but instrumental study extended to several cases...[the cases] are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases" (Stake, 1994, p. 237). A qualitative, collective case study can be described as an in-depth examination of a few instances of a phenomenon; in this instance, the experience of conflict and conflict resolution in parent-early teen relationship. While the occurrence of conflict within the family is common and healthy, research suggests that there is a relationship between the intensity, frequency, and type of conflict resolution with increased likelihood of poor outcomes for teens (Cummings & Davies, 2002, Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998). Case study allows for a glimpse into the complicated interactions in the family setting, which may not be adequately described by purely quantitative techniques alone. The co-construction of the experience of conflict within the parent-child dyad makes for a complex interaction, which is not easily understood. Conflict and the resolution of conflict are mutual processes with each participant playing a role and influencing the outcome of the conflict. This process is further influenced in the parent-teen relationship by the beginning of a fluctuating power differential, which commonly exists between a parent and early teen. The early teen is beginning their push for independence as they continue on their path of development into adolescence (Robin & Foster, 1984). The parent too, experiences the changes in their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of parenthood and both parties must learn new roles as they move together along the path of development. Through

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this study I aimed to obtain a deeper understanding of this complex relationship through the in-depth stories of a sample of parents and their adolescents.

While a qualitative cross-case analysis is the primary method for this study, clinical questionnaire type data is also employed and displayed to serve several purposes. Questionnaire data were used in an effort to assist in a deeper understanding of the dynamics within each family unit and each dyadic relationship and to serve as a catalyst for process review and participation. The use of multiple types of questionnaire based data collection is common in clinical psychological practice and was also utilized to guide and inform the interview questions and to provide families with a focal point in discussing conflict within the parent-adolescent relationship. The use of multiple sources of data also provided for triangulation of the data (Stake, 1994). Finally, each type of data (questionnaire, daily log, and interviews) presents with individual strengths and weaknesses which, when combined provide a fuller and more comprehensive view of the individual family dynamics of parent-adolescent conflict.

Five families, each comprised of at least one early adolescent (ranging in age from 12 to 13 years of age), and one or both parents participated. In order to participate, each family had to include at least one parental figure and one target adolescent. For the purposes of this dissertation, no additional members of the family, outside the target adolescent and their parent(s), participated. Ethics approval was granted by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board.

The sample of five families was acquired through letters, which were sent home from school with Grade 6 through 8 adolescents in two Calgary area schools. Prior to sending home letters, several other methods of contacting potential participants were

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attempted, including advertisements in local community centers and doctor's offices, direct mail advertising, and advertising through the internal webmail system of the Calgary Health Region. Acquiring a sample through these other means proved to be difficult and the limitations, which are a result of this, are discussed in a further section of this dissertation.

Consent forms were provided with the information package and parents were requested to return packages to the place from which they were recruited. Each parent and adolescent was asked to complete a consent form indicating his or her willingness to participate in the research study (See Appendix A). To protect anonymity, all questionnaire materials, Daily Log pages, and interview transcriptions were identified with pre-assigned numbers. No forms except consent required participants' names. All materials have been secured by the researcher in a locked room and will be so maintained for a period of five years subsequent to the completion of this dissertation, after which they will be destroyed.

Instruments and Data Collection Tools

The study was completed over two phases, with the first phase comprising the completion of clinical questionnaire data, specifically the *Family Assessment Measure III* (FAM III), the *Conflict Tactics Scales* (CTS) and a demographics questionnaire. The second phase of the study involved the completion of a Daily Log for seven consecutive days by family members, and finally, family interviews, including a joint parent-adolescent interview and individual, separate interviews with adolescents and parents. Data collection methods and tools are described in the following section.

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Phase One: Instruments and Data Collection Tools

FAM III

The *Family Assessment Measure III* (FAM III; Skinner, Steinhauer, Santa-Barbara, 1995), is an individually completed measure of family and dyadic functioning (See Appendix B). It is composed of three scales, a General Scale, a Dyadic Relationship Scale, and a Self-Rating Scale. Fifty items and nine subscales make up the General scale, while the Dyadic and Self-Rating scales are composed of 42 items and seven subscales each. All questions employ the forced Likert-type responses "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Disagree", and "Strongly Disagree". Reliability data indicates that internal consistency reliability ranges from 0.89 - 0.93 for adults across the forms, while reliability for the child forms ranges from 0.86 - 0.94 (Skinner et al., 1995; Skinner Steinhauer, & Santa-Barbara, 1983). Skinner et al., and Garfinkel et al., (1983) also noted that the FAM III reliably differentiated between problem families and non-problem families, thus supporting the measure's criterion validity. Concurrent and construct validity have been supported through comparison of the FAM III with other measures of family functioning (Skinner et al., 1995; Skinner Steinhauer, & Santa-Barbara, 1983).

The basic subscales on all three forms of the FAM III include the following: Task Accomplishment, Role Performance, Communication, Affective Expression, Involvement, Control, and Values and Norms. In addition to the above subscale scores, the General Form of the FAM III provides subscale scores for Social Desirability and Defensiveness. Each form of the FAM III provides subscale scores in addition to an overall rating score. The entire FAM III takes approximately 30 to 40 minutes to complete (Skinner, et. al., 1995).

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For the purposes of this dissertation, in order to limit the number of questionnaires completed by any one participant, only the General and Dyadic questionnaires were used.

The Conflict Tactics Scales

Two versions of the *Conflict Tactics Scale* were utilized: *The Conflict Tactics Scales: Parent –Child* (CTSPC) and *The Conflict Tactics Scales: Child – Adult* (CTS2-CA). The *Conflict Tactics Scales* (CTS) were originally developed to measure "the extent to which specific tactics, including acts of physical violence, have been used" in the resolution of conflict between dating, cohabitation or marital partners (Strauss, et al. 1996, p. 283). In the mid 1990s, the CTS was revised to include forms which examine parent-to-child conflict and child-to-parent conflict. Internal consistency reliability of the CTS2 ranges between 0.79 and 0.95. Initial data indicates construct and discriminant validity has been obtained. "In addition, because, conceptually and methodologically, the CTS2 is fundamentally the same as the CTS1, the extensive evidence supporting the validity of the CTS1 (Straus, 1990a) may also apply to the CST2" (Straus et al., 1996, p. 307). Early factor analysis revealed constructs representing: (1) verbal reasoning, (2) psychological abuse/aggression, (3) physical aggression, and (4) life-threatening violence (Strauss, 1990) (See Appendix C).

The CTS2 was further revised, as per Straus instructions (Straus et al., 1996), to remove the subscale which measured sexually aggressive tactics in order to reduce the likelihood that participants might be unwilling to complete a questionnaire which was perceived to be controversial. The CTS was revised yet a second time (both the parent-child and child parent versions), with benign and moderate strategies retained and highly

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aggressive strategies removed. (e.g., ...discussed the issue calmly vs. ...threatened you with a knife or gun). This change was necessitated, as sources for recruiting participants were unwilling to allow questions regarding more serious conflict tactics. The revised versions of the measure contain several subscales including the following: the (1) reasoning/negotiation, (2) psychological aggression, and (3) consequence scales. The revised version of the Parent-Child version of the CTS2 (CTSPC) which was ultimately used, contained 17 items which were ranked on an 8 point frequency scale asking respondents to consider the past year (never, once, twice, 3-5 times, 6-10 times, 11-20 times, and more than 20 times, not in the past year but it did happen before) (Appendix A).

The revised Child-Parent version of the CTS2 (CTS2-CA) contained 17 items and asked the child to rate the frequency of specific conflict tactics used in their home. Each question is reiterated four times, changing each time to reflect conflict resolution tactics received from mother, directed towards mother from self, received from father and directed towards father from self (Appendix A). Items were ranked on an 8-point frequency scale and conflict resolution strategies ranged from constructive to more destructive and aggressive strategies (e.g., ...showed she cared about me vs. ...pushed or shoved me). Again, due to requirements from participant recruitment sources, the most aggressive strategies were removed from the CTS questionnaires. Both the parent-child and child-parent versions of the CTS had two blank items added for parents and adolescents to include other strategies which may have been missed in the original questions. This addition was meant to ensure that a respondent would have the opportunity to add their own, perhaps more aggressive, items to replace items which had been deleted or omitted. Each parent and adolescent completed the appropriate form of the Revised Conflict Tactics

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Scales (CTS-R) in order to examine their report of conflict resolution tactics used at home between parent and child (Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, Runyan, 1998; Strauss, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996).

All families who received questionnaire packages were asked to indicate if they would be willing to participate in a subsequent portion of the study involving the completion of a Daily Log by the three identified family members. "Completion of daily records about marital events in the home by spouses has a long history in marital research...advantages include less demand on memory than questionnaires and the ability to assess specific events rather than global impressions" (Cummings & Davies, 2002, p. 37).

Phase Two: Instruments and Data Collection Tools

Daily Log

The Daily Log was a semi-structured web-based survey form with both open-ended and forced choice questions, which was developed in order to probe the daily conflicts of parents and adolescents. The question development for the Daily Log reflects current theory around the effects of differences in perceptions of conflict and the resultant challenges in conflict resolution when perceptions differ (Loriane, 1991, Robin & Foster, 1984). The Daily Log collected qualitative data through the use of open ended questions about conflict and conflict resolution, Likert ratings of stress both in and outside the home, and happiness with the resolution of a described conflict over seven consecutive days (Appendix B). The advantages of this type of data collection were both the immediacy of collection and the requested specificity of data. In addition, it allowed participants to reflect

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and respond about their perceptions of conflict in their parent-adolescent relationship relatively soon after a conflict occurred. Participating members were asked to detail the conflicts they encountered within the parent-child dyad each day at bedtime. Participants were also asked to give details about specific conflicts each day versus a general impression of their day, week, or the preceding months.

All five families completed the Daily Log. Each parent and the target adolescent independently completed the Daily Log pages for seven consecutive days (two families had missing data). Parent and adolescent forms of the Daily Log varied slightly. Parents and adolescents were given the choice of completing the Daily Log in computerized or pencil and paper format. All families chose computerized completion of the Daily Log. Each participant was given the Internet address where the Daily Log could be accessed and was assigned an individual password to access his or her Daily Log in survey format. After completing the Log on-line, the participants submitted the information, which was subsequently stored in database form on the server and backed up on disk media. Participants did not have access to their Daily Log information after it was submitted, but were advised that they could review their information with the researcher at any time. No participants asked to review their Daily Log data. The utilization of password functions and immediate submission of each day's information was added to ensure maintenance of confidentiality and helped guarantee that log pages were completed by each intended family member. The goal, through increased security regarding the contents of participants' log records, was that participants would demonstrate a willingness to openly express their feelings about the daily conflict as they experienced it without fear of repercussion from parents or spouse.

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Adolescents and their parents were asked, in the completion of the log tasks, to reflect on their daily experiences of conflict and disagreement. A log approach was selected to examine how adolescents and their parents viewed the inevitable disagreements that make up a part of their daily relationships within the context of family. Log measures can provide valuable information that minimizes the problems of retrospective data collection that may exist in interview type data collection (Almedia, Wethington, & Chandler, 1999). Indeed, as interview data would later reveal, this more immediate reporting of conflict did seem to be an easier and perhaps more accurate method of having participants, at least several of the parents, share information regarding conflict and its resolution in the parent-adolescent relationship.

Family Interview

After Phase One and the initial portion of Phase Two was complete (the Daily Log), families met with the researcher to review their questionnaire data and to participate in interviews designed to allow families to elaborate further on their experiences and perceptions with conflict and its resolution within their family setting, in particular in the parent-adolescent dyad, and to elicit their experiences of completing the study materials. The interview was made up of three parts including a joint family session and two separate sessions in which the teen and parents were seen independently to discuss conflict and conflict resolution (see Interview Guide in Appendix C). This interview was conducted in a semi-structured and open-ended format. Questionnaire data was shared at the beginning of the interview for the first three families and at the end of the interview for the remaining

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two families in an effort to balance the effects of the questionnaire data on the interview information provided by the participants.

In summary, five families with early adolescents participated in this study designed to explore both the conflict and conflict resolution experiences of parents and early adolescents. The family units included in the analysis below comprised either one or both biological parents and one early adolescent (four 13-year-olds – two females and two males and one 12-year-old male). All participants completed a package of questionnaires including the FAM III, the CTS2 and a demographics questionnaire. Families then completed a Daily Log reporting conflict and conflict resolution and associated variables. Finally, all families participated in an interview with the examiner that lasted, on average, 2 hours.

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CHAPTER THREE: DATA ANALYSIS

Questionnaire, Daily Log, and Interview Data

In this chapter the data analysis procedures are described. Given the multiple types of data collected (questionnaire data, Daily Log Data, Interview data), data analysis was a necessarily many-sided endeavor. In approaching this collective case study, the researcher was interested in both within case analysis and also between case analysis, with the goal of developing a better understanding of the experience of conflict in the parent-adolescent dyad (Stake, 1994).

Questionnaire Data

The use of questionnaire type data in this dissertation was used to serve several purposes. First, questionnaire data served as a focal point for discussion with the family about their experiences of conflict and conflict resolution as well as their individual perceptions of family functioning. The questionnaire data, when examined alongside the interviews, also provided an additional means of understanding the functioning and perceptions of each family member within their family unit. The combination of interview technique and questionnaire data collection provided the opportunity to get a sense of family functioning and experiences in much the same manner as a therapist or psychologist might do in a clinical setting (Sattler & Hoge, 2006).

Questionnaire data were scored as per the instrument protocols. The results were then represented graphically (see Appendix E for an example) for presentation to families during the interviews. In organizing and presenting the data from the FAM III, the researcher presented subscale scores that focused on a relative strength and weakness

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identified by each participant rather than present all subscale information. The CTS was scored and depicted by a frequency graph that represented types of conflict resolution identified by each participant (constructive, destructive, and 'no strategy' as well as an overall frequency of conflict reported) (see Appendix E for an example).

Daily Log Data

Data from the Daily Log were managed in several ways. Descriptive interpretation is provided for the data to indicate the degree to which parents and teens agreed about conflict day-to-day across the week long collection period, and to describe the relationship within each family between stress, conflict and perceived resolution of conflict (see Tables 1 through 5).

Daily Log data were examined within each 'case' or family grouping and was reported to the family verbally during the interview. Daily stress at home and at school or work was reported by each participant for the week of completed log information. The frequency with which parents and adolescents (within a single case) were in agreement with respect to the occurrence and content of dyadic conflict was also calculated. Agreement with respect to conflict and overall stress at home and outside of the home were verbally communicated to parents. The graphic representations of the questionnaire data were presented to families during their interview, either at the beginning or the end of their interview as a basis for engaging the family in a discussion of conflict resolution.

Open-ended Daily Log questions were coded in the same manner as the interview data, as described below. Families were also asked to provide descriptions of their most significant conflict experience of the day in an open-ended written answer within the log.

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These responses were transcribed and imported as documents into the qualitative data analysis software and then coded in the same manner as the interview data as outlined below. Each family's open-ended questionnaire data was subsumed into a single document per family. The resulting analysis of interview and log data was completed on 10 documents within Nud*ist 5 (interviews with each family and Daily Log information for each family). The use of qualitative techniques in this dissertation is meant to assist in the development of a more cohesive understanding of conflict between the parent-adolescent dyad in the family setting.

> "If humans are studied in a symbolically reduced, statistically aggregated fashion, there is a danger that conclusions – although arithmetically precise – may fail to fit reality. Qualitative procedures provide a means of accessing unquantifiable facts about the actual people researchers observe and talk to...As a result, qualitative techniques allow the researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives (Berg, 1989, p.6).

Interview Data

The primary purpose of data analysis of the five interviews was to "organize the interview to present a narrative that ... provide[s] a description of the norms and values that underlie cultural behaviour" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 229). Qualitative Content Analysis was used to develop an understanding of the meaning inherent in the data. In content analysis collected data is reduced to certain patterns, categories or themes and then interpreted using both a priori and inductive themes (Creswell, 1994; Kvale, 1986; Lacey

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& Luff, 2001; Mayring, 2000). The process of dividing patterns, categories or themes was "an interactive process through which the investigator was concerned with producing believable and trustworthy findings" (Merriam, 1988, p. 120). Kvale's (1986) Ad Hoc Meaning Generalization, "a free interplay of techniques" includes noting patterns and themes, and subsuming particulars under the general themes. This section describes the various processes used to analyze the interview data.

Interviews, with consent, were tape recorded for later transcription. The researcher also took brief notes of important interactions during the interview. Transcription of the interviews was done by the researcher and was completed within 48 hours of each interview such that the interview would be fresh in the researcher's memory at the time of transcription. After transcription, interviews were reviewed for accuracy during the transcription process. The process of listening and re-listening to the interview is a form of familiarization, and proves to be important in the analysis process as it allows the researcher to become immersed in the data, and to listen for both a priori and inductive codes (Lacy & Luff, 2001). Codes to be used in the thematic content analysis were developed both a priori and as the interviews were being transcribed (inductively). A priori codes and themes were developed based on the anticipated findings and literature review. Inductive codes which were included in the code-book were developed as a result of specific statements, comments or themes that emerged within the interview (See Appendix F for a summary of a priori and inductive codes). "The qualitative analyst's effort at uncovering patterns, themes, and categories is a creative process that requires making carefully considered judgments about what is really significant and meaningful in the data" (Paton, 1990, p. 406). Interviews were scheduled at each family's convenience and lasted

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approximately 2 hours. Families had the choice of having the researcher attend their home to participate in an interview or alternatively attending the researcher's office to complete the interview. Four of five families chose to be interviewed in their home, while one family chose an evening interview appointment, which took place in a conference room at the researcher's office. After each interview was analysed, families were provided with a summary, which included the themes that emerged from their interviews so that they could confirm the content of their interview information. No concerns were raised on the part of families regarding interview content.

Dye et al. (2000), use the metaphor of a kaleidoscope to explain thematic analysis, using a constant comparative method. The analysis begins by taking an initial interview and 'sorting' or 'indexing' data into segments, which are then categorized. In this study, data were indexed line-by-line, utilizing the qualitative analysis software package Nud*ist 5. As indicated above, both a priori coding and inductive strategies were used, with a priori codes having been pre-established based on the literature review, and inductive codes being drawn from the presented data. Lines of text were then categorized or coded by placing the data into 'electronic piles,' according either to their look alike, feel alike qualities or their adherence to the a priori established codes (Dye et. al., 2000). Remaining interviews had the existing coding scheme applied and when information suggested that a new category was required, inductive coding was applied. Once all interviews had been coded, the resulting list of categories represented the initial category set. In the development of the initial category set, all interviews were coded or indexed initially by the researcher and then a subsequent time with the researcher and a second researcher with expertise in the area to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the applied codes (Miles & Huberman,

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1994). Each interview was then coded a third and final time to ensure that all inductive codes were applied. Another review of the categories was completed after the final coding which allowed for the refinement of themes and sub-themes.

Credibility, Trustworthiness, and Role of the Researcher

"I do not think qualitative researchers should be satisfied with producing explanations which are idiosyncratic or particular to the limited empirical parameters of their study...Qualitative research should (therefore) produce explanations which are generalizable in some way, or which have a wider resonance" (Mason, 1996, p.6). In order to increase the generalizability of the research findings coming from such a small sample, strategies to ensure credibility and trustworthiness were built into the design of the study and the analysis of the data. It should be noted however, that given the small sample size and the nature of qualitative research, readers should evaluate the applicability of the findings of this dissertation to their own situations. The strategies used to improve generalizability given these caveats included the following: (1) Triangulation, the inclusion of multiple methods of data collection and the collection of data from multiple individuals from the same case; (2) Member checks; each family was provided a summary of their interview transcript and the emergent themes by mail. Families were asked to reply via email or telephone with questions or concerns about the themes and to indicate if the summary adequately described their interview; (3) Peer debriefing through discussion and team coding was utilized; and (4) Finally, an understanding of personal bias of the researcher is important to "place oneself within the data" and follows below.

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The relationships within the family system are, for many of us the most rewarding yet complicated relationships that we have. While friendships and even marriages may come and go, our links to our family shape who we are as adults and in a symbiotic fashion, we too have contributed, and in many cases continue to contribute, to the development of our family members. These complex interactions have long been of interest to me. As a Psychologist serving children and families over the past eight years, I am often left wondering how best to support families as they move through the developmental process that both adolescence and the parenting of adolescence brings. I believe that the period of adolescence carries special challenges for both adolescents and their parents and a deeper insight and understanding of our own as well as others' experiences will lead us each to improved functioning. While the majority of research focuses on children and families with problems that are outside the typical range, I have often been struck by the bewilderment of everyday families who are trying to optimize their experiences as they move, together, through what is arguably the most significant developmental period since infancy (Greydanus, Pratt, & Patel, 2004). Families with whom I have had contact have left me wondering about how best to support and guide the development of the typical adolescent and their parents, and how they might, together, better negotiate the challenges which present as adolescent children make their way to adulthood. It is my belief that through a better understanding of typical process, we can learn how to support families and their teens from both a treatment perspective, and perhaps even more importantly, from the perspective of preventative care. And perhaps, on a personal level, I harbor a hope that by increasing my understanding of family relationships, I can develop a further understanding of my own relationships and experiences. This dissertation is written through the lens of a

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practicing psychologist and has employed techniques that will be familiar and second nature to family therapists, family counselors, social workers, psychologists, and others who work closely with families as they negotiate the typical experiences which are common in the family system.

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CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introducing the Families

The five families who have so graciously given of their time and shared their experiences will be introduced below (names and some details have been altered to protect confidentiality). All adolescents in the study come from Caucasian, middle to upper-middle class families. All children are a product of their parent's first marriage and while one family is negotiating separation and divorce, no adolescents are currently living in blended families with step-parents or step-siblings. The average age of mothers was 41years while the average age of fathers was 44 years. All but one of the adolescents involved in the study were 13 years old, with the fifth teen being 12 years old.

The Francis Family

The Francis family is a middle-class, one income family. Mrs. Francis does not work outside the home. Both parents are university educated. The Francis' have three children, two girls and a boy, aged 7, 9 and 13 years respectively. Jack, aged 13, attends Jr. High School in Grade 8 and is the oldest of the three children.

The Sampson Family

The Sampson Family is a single parent family where the father has no contact. Mrs. Sampson is university educated. There are 4 children, three boys and a girl, aged 6,10,12, and 17. Alex, the 12 year old, was the target adolescent for the study. The family is an upper-middle class family and the children are all very involved in sports activities outside school. Alex attends Jr. High School in Grade 7. He is the second eldest child.

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The Peters Family

The Peters family has 3 children – two girls and a boy aged 7, 13, and 17 years respectively. The Peters' parents are separated, however both parents agreed to participate in the study and agreed to be interviewed together in the same manner as the other four families. The Peters family is made up of two family units, is a middle class family in which both parents are employed outside their homes. Mr. Peters has a high school diploma and Mrs. Peters has university education. The family resides in two households and have a joint custody arrangement for the children. Susan, the target adolescent is 13 years of age and is in Jr. High School in Grade 8. Susan is the second oldest child.

The Allen Family

The Allen family is a middle-class family with two employed parents. Both parents have university education. The Allen's have two children a girl and a boy, aged 9 and 13. Eric, aged 13 is in Jr. High School in Grade 8. Eric is the eldest child in the family.

The Robinson Family

The Robinson family is a middle-class, two-parent family with two children – a boy, aged 8 and a girl, aged 13. Parents are both employed and have university education. The children enjoy sports activities, both school sports and sports teams outside school. Amanda is 13 years old and is in Jr. High School, Grade 8. Amanda is the eldest child in the family.

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Understanding and resolving conflict in a parent-adolescent dyad is a complicated, multifaceted endeavor. The questionnaire data provided initial information that were seen as helpful to families, served to corroborate and expand upon the acquisition of knowledge of the participant families daily functioning, and also served as a focal point in completing the interviews. The themes and sub-themes that emerged in the analysis of parent and adolescent interviews and log information regarding conflict are equally complex and detailed. In presenting the study data, a summary of questionnaire data is provided (FAM III and CTS), followed by a summary of the Daily Log data from the Likert-type questions regarding congruence between family members with respect to the occurrence of conflict as well as stress both at home and away from home. The qualitative content analysis of interview and open-ended Daily Log information comprises the final section of this chapter.

In presenting the qualitative data, I first outline the themes that emerged around the experience of conflict for each parent and the adolescent (see Appendix F for a summary of all themes). The experiences identified by early adolescents and their parents as causing conflict are discussed as will the factors that participants viewed as contributing to conflict as well as the factors that caused frustration throughout the experience and management of conflict. Interview data will also be interpreted with respect the management of conflict as well as parents' and adolescents' reflections on conflict and its resolution and on the experience of participating in the study. Finally, a review of the interview data, with an aim to explore parents' and teens' messages to each other about conflict and its resolution is presented. Methodological considerations and the themes that emerged that speak to methodological difficulties are discussed at the end of this section.

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Summary of Questionnaire Data

FAM III

The FAM III is a clinical questionnaire that is used by psychologists, counselors and family therapists to better understand family and dyadic functioning. The FAM III was scored as per the scoring and interpretation manual instructions and results are presented, by family in the tables below (Tables 1and 2). No clinically significant scores for family functioning problems emerged in any of the families. Several of the families had Borderline scores, meaning that the area is indeed an area of increased problem and warrants attention. It should be noted that scores were presented to families with a single relative strength and relative weakness per member, per form (general and dyadic). As such, many of the scales which were presented as weaknesses indeed fell within the Average range and were not problematic in any way. The purpose of presenting the data to families in this way was to talk about their within family strengths and weaknesses and families were all made aware that many scales which were discussed were, in fact, still within average functioning when compared to norming groups as per scoring criteria. An example of the visually presented charting which was used with families can be seen in Appendix E.

Finally, it is interesting to note, in review of the scores on the FAM III, that often there was reasonable agreement between family members with respect to areas they saw as relative strengths and areas they saw as relative weaknesses.

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Table 1: FAM III Relative Strengths and Weaknesses: General Scale

Family		FAM III Results – General Scale
The Francis Family:		**Overall Functioning – Average Range for all members**
Strengths:	Teen:	Values and Norms – Average Range
	Mom:	Values and Norms – Average Range
	Dad:	Values and Norms – Average Range
Weaknesses:	Teen:	Role Performance – Average Range
	Mom:	Role Performance – Average Range
	Dad:	Affective Expression – Borderline Clinical Range
The Sampson Family:		**Overall Functioning: Mom – Average Range; Teen – Borderline Clinical Range**
Strengths:	Teen:	Affective Expression – Average Range
	Mom:	Involvement – Average Range
Weaknesses:	Teen:	Role Performance – Borderline Clinical Range
	Mom:	Task Accomplishment – Borderline Clinical Range
The Peters Family:		**Overall Functioning: Average Range for all members**
Strengths:	Teen:	Affective Expression – Average Range
	Mom:	Involvement – Average Range
	Dad:	Involvement – Average Range
Weaknesses:	Teen:	Control – Borderline Clinical Range
	Mom:	Role Performance – Borderline Clinical Range
	Dad:	Affective Expression – Average Range
The Allen Family:		**Overall Functioning: Average Range for all members**
Strengths:	Teen:	Affective Expression– Average Range
	Mom:	Involvement– Average Range
	Dad:	Values and Norms – Average Range
Weaknesses:	Teen:	Communication – Borderline Clinical Range
	Mom:	Role Performance / Control – Borderline Clinical Range
	Dad:	Task Accomplishment – Borderline Clinical Range
The Robinson Family:		**Overall Functioning: Average Range for all members**
Strengths:	Teen:	Control/Task Accomplishment/Role Performance – Average Range
	Mom:	Involvement – Average Range
	Dad:	Affective Expression– Average Range
Weakness:	Teen:	Values and Norms – Borderline Clinical Range
	Mom:	Communication / Affective Expression – Average Range
	Dad:	Role Performance – Average Range

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Table 2: FAM III Relative Strengths and Weaknesses: Dyadic Scale

Family	FAM III Results – Dyadic Scale
The Francis's:	**Overall Mom –Teen: Avg. / Dad –Teen: Avg. / Teen-Mom: Avg. / Teen – Dad: Avg.**
Strengths: Teen - Mom:	Role Performance – Average Range
Teen – Dad:	Role Performance – Average Range
Mom –Teen:	Role Performance – Average Range
Dad - Teen:	Role Performance – Average Range
Weakness: Teen – Mom:	Involvement – Average Range
Teen – Dad:	Involvement – Average Range
Mom –Teen:	Affective Expression – Average Range
Dad - Teen:	Affective Expression – Average Range
The Sampson's:	**Overall Mom –Teen: Avg. / Teen-Mom: Avg.**
Strengths: Teen - Mom:	Role Performance – Average Range
Mom –Teen:	Involvement – Average Range
Weakness: Teen – Mom:	Values and Norms – Average Range
Mom –Teen:	Communication – Average Range
The Peters':	**Overall Mom –Teen: Avg. / Dad –Teen: Avg. / Teen-Mom: Avg. / Teen – Dad: Avg.**
Strengths: Teen - Mom:	Communication – Average Range
Teen – Dad:	Communication – Average Range
Mom –Teen:	Values and Norms – Average Range
Dad - Teen:	Involvement – Average Range
Weakness: Teen – Mom:	Values and Norms – Borderline Clinical Range
Teen – Dad:	Task Accomplishment / Involvement – Borderline Clinical Range
Mom –Teen:	Task Accomplishment – Borderline Clinical Range
Dad - Teen:	Control – Average Range
The Allen's:	**Overall Mom–Teen:Avg / Dad–Teen:Avg. / Teen-Mom:Avg. / Teen – Dad: Borderline**
Strengths: Teen - Mom:	Communication / Affective Expression/ Control – Average Range
Teen – Dad:	Values and Norms – Average Range
Mom –Teen:	Communication / Affective Expression / Control – Average Range
Dad - Teen:	Values and Norms – Average Range
Weakness: Teen – Mom:	Role Performance – Average Range
Teen – Dad:	Communication / Involvement – Borderline Clinical Range
Mom –Teen:	Role Performance – Average Range
Dad - Teen:	Communication / Involvement – Borderline Clinical Range
The Robinson's :	**Overall Mom –Teen: Avg. / Dad –Teen: Avg. / Teen-Mom: Avg. / Teen – Dad: Avg.**
Strengths: Teen - Mom:	Role Performance – Average Range
Teen – Dad:	Role Performance – Average Range
Mom –Teen:	Role Performance / Involvement – Average Range
Dad - Teen:	Affective Expression – Average Range
Weakness: Teen – Mom:	Control – Borderline Clinical Range
Teen – Dad:	Affective Expression / Values and Norms – Average Range
Mom –Teen:	Communication – Average Range
Dad - Teen:	Role Performance – Average Range

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CTS

The CTS is designed to examine parent to child and child to parent conflict. Each parent and the adolescent completed a CTS measuring their perception of conflict in the parent-adolescent dyad. Participants answered questions referring to their own actions and to their perception of the actions of the other member of the dyad. The CTS2, parent to child version and child to parent version was revised to exclude items which were deemed to be too controversial as was described in the methods section. Scoring of the tool generally followed the manual instructions although some subscales scores had to be transformed due to items which had been removed from the questionnaire. Parents responded to a version of the CTS that asked them to rate the frequency with which they had used 15 strategies for managing conflict in the previous year. Adolescents responded to a slightly different version that asked them to rate the frequency with which each of their parents had used 15 strategies as well as the frequency with which the adolescent had used the same 15 strategies with each parent (see Appendix A to review the CTS questionnaires). Once questionnaires were scored, subscales were summed to indicate the following scores: Total Frequency of Conflict Resolution, Constructive Conflict Resolution Strategies, and Destructive Resolution Strategies. Destructive resolution strategies were further broken down into psychological, physical and avoidance strategies. Parents and adolescents were presented with a graph during the interview to display their responses on the CTS (see Appendix E). For discussion purposes, Constructive, Destructive, Psychological, Physical and Avoidance scores have been expressed in percentage of total conflict frequency.

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For all two-parent families (4 of 5 families), both parents and the adolescent indicated that the mother managed more instance of conflict (see table following). Also, for all families but the Sampson's, adolescents indicated that constructive strategies were more frequently utilized over destructive strategies. Several parents were somewhat more critical in their self-evaluations. Mrs. Allen evaluated her own use of destructive strategies as slightly outweighing constructive strategies, while Mr. Francis gave himself equal weighting for use of constructive and destructive strategies.

Families' perceptions of their use of conflict strategies through the CTS were similar to their reporting during interview. As indicated in the table following, Alex Sampson and his mother both indicated they have had more instances of conflict than the other families. By Alex Sampson's rating, destructive strategies were employed by both him and his mother with greater frequency than constructive strategies. Indeed it was felt that this family was struggling the most with respect to conflict resolution, and this is reflected in all the data they provided. In the interview setting, Alex indicated that he felt that his family had more conflict than families of his peers. See the tables following for a summary of the CTS data (Tables 3 and 4):

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Table 3: CTS -Total Frequency of Conflict as Reported by Parents and Adolescents

Family		Total Frequency of Conflict Resolution
Francis	Mom	19
	Dad	4
	Teen:	
	Mom-Teen	16
	Teen-Mom	12
	Dad-Teen	10
	Teen-Dad	10
Sampson	Mom	153
	Teen:	
	Mom-Teen	190
	Teen-Mom	157
Peters	Mom	80
	Dad	68
	Teen:	
	Mom -Teen	80
	Teen-Mom	59
	Dad-Teen	68
	Teen-Dad	58
Allen	Mom	122
	Dad	81
	Teen:	
	Mom -Teen	182
	Teen -Mom	124
	Dad-Teen	128
	Teen -Dad	122
Robinson	Mom	64
	Dad	22
	Teen:	
	Mom -Teen	90
	Teen -Mom	80
	Dad-Teen	64
	Teen-Dad	60

In examining the conflict resolution strategy by percentage of total reported resolution strategies, we can see that mothers were generally more likely to endorse an avoidance strategy than fathers were, with only one father reporting that he used avoidance to manage a conflict. Physical strategies, while used infrequently by several families, overall made up only a very small percentage of the responses to conflict in the family setting. Overwhelmingly, when families (both mothers, fathers and adolescents) utilized a

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destructive strategy in managing conflict, it took the form of a psychological strategy. Psychological strategies included yelling, threatening and name-calling. As noted above, with somewhat less consistency across families, constructive strategies were used with greater frequency than destructive strategies.

Table 4: CTS - Conflict Resolution Type by Percentage of Total Frequency

Family	Constructive	Destructive	Psychological	Physical	Avoidance
Francis					
Mom	64%	36%	21.5%	0%	14.2%
Dad	50%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Teen:					
Mom-Teen	92%	8%	8%	0%	0%
Teen-Mom	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Dad-Teen	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Teen-Dad	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sampson					
Mom	53%	46.2%	42.9%	0%	3.2%
Teen:					
Mom-Teen	42%	58%	32%	7%	19%
Teen-Mom	47%	53%	37%	3%	13%
Peters					
Mom	71%	29%	19%	2.5%	7%
Dad	71%	29%	25%	4%	0%
Teen:					
Mom-Teen	95%	5%	5%	0%	0%
Teen-Mom	86%	14%	5%	0%	9%
Dad-Teen	97%	3%	3%	0%	0%
Teen-Dad	97%	3%	3%	0%	0%
Allen					
Mom	48%	52%	35%	17%	0%
Dad	58%	42%	34%	6%	2%
Teen:					
Mom-Teen	78%	22%	17%	0%	5%
Teen-Mom	72%	28%	21%	0%	7%
Dad-Teen	66%	34%	25%	0%	9%
Teen-Dad	65%	35%	26%	0%	9%
Robinson					
Mom	69%	31%	8%	2%	2%
Dad	71%	29%	26%	3%	0%
Teen:					
Mom-Teen	66%	34%	32%	2%	0%
Teen-Mom	76%	24%	24%	0%	0%
Dad-Teen	85%	15%	12%	3%	0%
Teen-Dad	94%	6%	6%	0%	0%

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The Daily Log

All families chose to complete the Daily Log on-line and families reported that it was quickly and easily submitted. Families were asked to complete the log for 7 consecutive days, and with the exception of two families (one who had missing data for one day, and a second who had missing parent data for two days), families submitted data as requested. Open-ended questions were analyzed along with the interview data by using the qualitative data analysis strategies described in the above methods section of this document. The descriptive type data that were collected are presented below.

Overall, families reported between one and six conflicts during the week of data collection, with one family reporting a single conflict, two families reporting two conflicts, one family reporting five conflicts, and one family reporting six conflicts (See Table 3).

Table 5: Number of Conflicts Reported in Daily Log by Participant and Family

Family	Conflicts reported by Mother	Conflicts reported by Father	Conflicts reported by Teen
The Sampson Family:	6	Single family	6
The Francis Family:	5	0	1
The Peters Family:	1	0	1
The Allen Family:	2	1 same conflict as mom and teen on a single day	2
The Robinson Family	2	0	1

When examining reported conflict in the log, as it compared to family factors as measured by the FAM III, it is demonstrated that the family with the most difficulties with respect to family functioning also reported the highest number of conflicts in the reporting week. This family also expressed the most concern, during interview, for how they are functioning. Almost all conflicts described by participants in the Daily Log were between mothers and adolescents (16 conflicts were reported in total), with a father describing being

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involved in the same conflict as the mother in a single instance. Parents and adolescents were largely consistent in their reporting of conflict with the following rates of agreement reported (see Table 6)

Table 6: Parent-Adolescent Agreement in the Daily Log

Family	Agreement
Sampson Family:	Mother/Son agreement: 7 of 7 days* *Father did not participate and is not involved in family
Francis Family:	Mother/Son agreement – 3 of 7 days Father/Son agreement – 7 of 7 days
Peters Family:	Mother/Daughter agreement – 4of 4 days* Father/Daughter agreement – 4 of 4 days* *Parent data was missing for two days for this family
Allen Family:	Mother/Son agreement – 6 of 6 days* Father/Son agreement – 6 of 6 days* *Parent and adolescent data was missing for one day for this family
Robinson Family:	Mother/Daughter agreement – 6 of 7 days Father/Daughter agreement – 7 of 7 days

In every case where there was disagreement between mothers and their adolescents regarding the occurrence of conflict, mothers perceived that there had been a conflictual exchange, while adolescents indicated that there had not been a conflictual exchange. This is consistent with research by Steinberg (2001) which suggests that parents, especially mothers, perceive more conflict and 'storm and stress' than adolescents in their dyadic relationships.

Sibling issues were the single most frequent conflict reported by families with 10 of 16 conflicts reported by parents and/or adolescents. In all but one case where mothers and adolescents disagreed regarding the occurrence of conflict, mothers reported that the

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content of the conflict they perceived was sibling related issues. It may be that adolescents are more desensitized to sibling-based conflict and as a result do not note its occurrence as a problem with the same frequency as mothers.

With respect to stress at home and at work or school, mothers were generally more likely to report feeling increased stress at home while fathers were more likely to report increased stress at work (See Table 7 follows). When adolescents and mothers reported stress at home, it appeared to coincide with days in which they also experienced conflict at home. In every family, mothers reported more instances of increased stress at home than increased stress at work or in activities outside the home, and in most families, mothers reported an increase in stress overall with greater frequency than any other family member. This is consistent with interview data in which mothers generally expressed feeling overwhelmed by their responsibilities, a sentiment not generally expressed by fathers. In all but one case, when adolescents experienced increased stress, it was at home versus at school. In the single case where this deviated, the adolescent rated equal amounts of stress at home and at school (one day of increased stress at home and one day of increased stress at school).

Overall, adolescents noted less stress which they felt was atypical than did mothers. Conversely, fathers were more likely to report increased stress at work than at home, and their rating of stress at work did not seem to correspond with reported conflict with their adolescent at home, in fact, fathers as a group reported virtually no conflict with their adolescents. The Sampson family also stands out when we examine increased stress at home and outside the home. This family is the only family with a single parent, and Mrs.

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Sampson, Alex's mother, rates days of increased stress more frequently than any other parent.

Table 7: Frequency of Reported Increased Stress by Number of Days Reported

Sampson Family	Mother	--	Adolescent
Stress at home	5	--	2
Stress outside home	3	--	1
Francis Family	**Mother**	**Father**	**Adolescent**
Stress at home	2	0	1
Stress outside home	1	2	1
Peters Family	**Mother**	**Father**	**Adolescent**
Stress at home	2	0	1
Stress outside home	0	0	0
Allan Family	**Mother**	**Father**	**Adolescent**
Stress at home	1	0	1
Stress outside home	0	5	0
Robinson Family	**Mother**	**Father**	**Adolescent**
Stress at home	3	1	1
Stress outside home	0	1	0

Qualitative Content Analysis

The qualitative analysis utilized both ad hoc and inductive coding strategies as described in the Chapter 3. Through the process of analyzing the interviews, several main content areas emerged which were then further understood by examining the emerging themes and sub-themes. Figure 2 outlines my conceptualization of the content areas and themes, which emerged as a result of the qualitative analysis.

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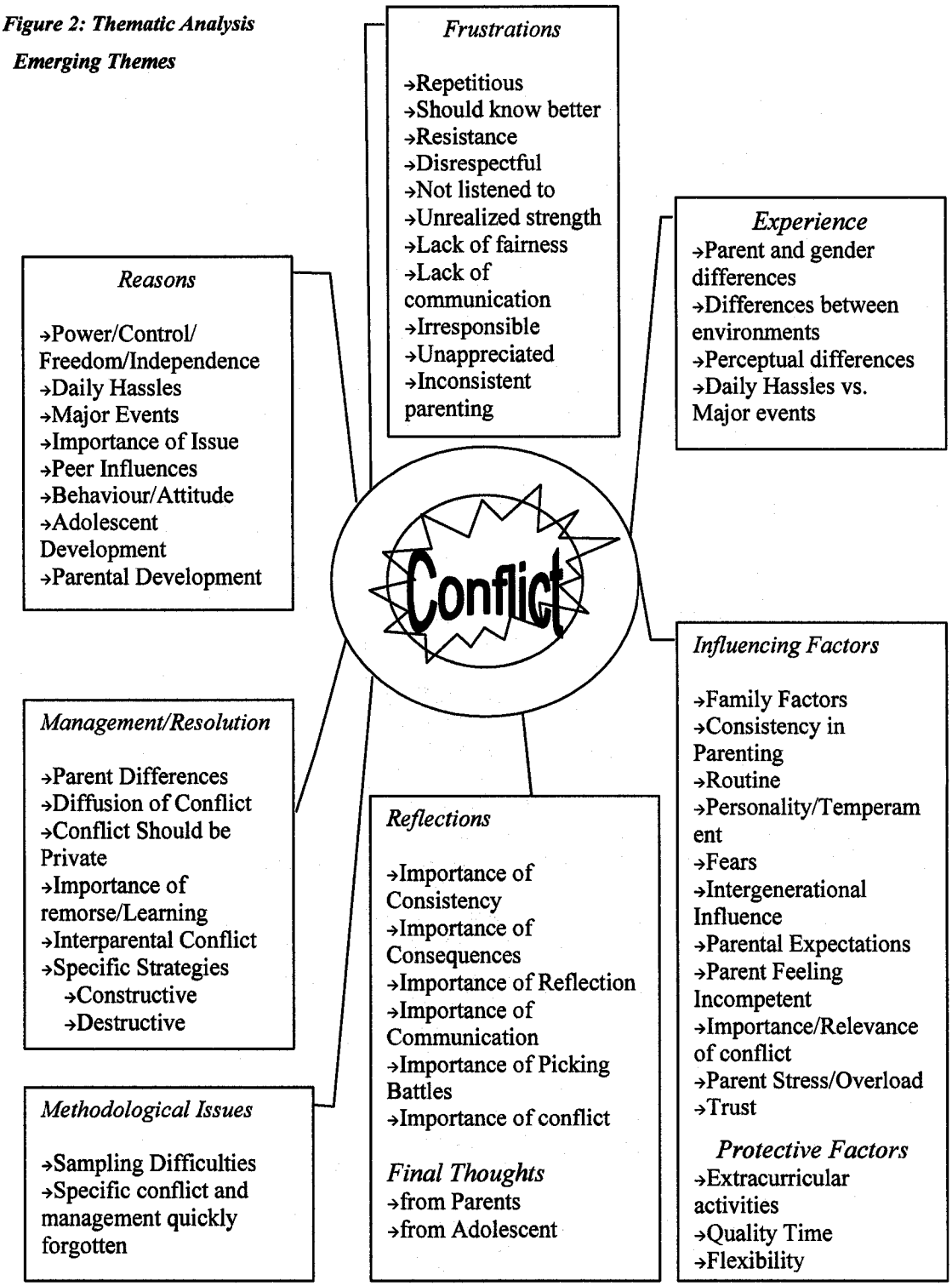
Figure 2: Thematic Analysis

Emerging Themes



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While many of the above areas and themes interact simultaneously, the understanding, which has been developed through the analysis of cases will be presented as a timeline of the development and resolution of a conflict. The next section begins by examining the experience of conflict and the sub-themes that are contained within each case.

Conflict: The Experience

Families identified that the entire overall experience of conflict and the resolution of conflict seemed to be different depending on various factors. The factors that families identified as changing the experience of conflict included different experiences for individual parents; different perceptual notions both of the individual incidents of conflict and perceptions of how conflict should be managed; different experiences depending on the child (i.e., individual children within a single family were often very different when it came to conflict and conflict management and thus required different strategies which added to parental challenges); differences in child behavior which was dependant on the environment (i.e., at home versus at school versus in public); and different experiences with minor, everyday conflict versus more significant or major conflicts.

The perceptual differences that existed in the stories of the interviewed families were considerable for both major and minor conflict issues. Interestingly, with respect to the occurrence of a conflict and the issue that resulted in a conflictual exchange, parents and adolescents were in agreement. It was with the details and more subtle perceptions surrounding the conflict and its resolution where parents and adolescents diverged in their thinking about the situation. To add to the confusion, parents themselves often each held different perceptions of conflict or perceptions around the importance of the conflict, which

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led to considerable frustration in the parental dyad in the management of conflict. Adolescents frequently felt that their parents were unable to see things from their point of view, which exacerbated their experience of conflict. The exacerbation was so much so, that several teens admitted that they eventually simply verbally agreed with their parents to end a conflictual situation despite the fact that they did not, in principle, agree with what their parents were trying to convey.

> Interviewer: What doyou think is usually the cause of these kinds of conflicts?
>
> Eric: Probably I have a different view on it than my parents do, so we argue about, whose view is...sometimes I think something, and my parents think the same thing, but not, but differently, like in the same area, but we have a disagreement about who's view is better. I guess... then that sometimes escalates and stuff...
>
> Interviewer: So what do you think is happening when the conflicts are not easily resolved?
>
> Eric: Our viewpoints are too far apart so it's hard to come to something in the middle... (Allen Family, 2005)

Sometimes teens expressed that their mothers, in particular, had a different perception of the conflict that they had. Specifically, teens most frequently felt that mothers tended to made a big deal about something that the adolescent did not feel was such an important issue: "Susan: umm.. that sometimes it is just a really small thing, so it shouldn't really matter... (Peter's Family Interview, 2005)."

As indicated above, differing perceptions relating to the experience of conflict are not limited to the experiences between parents and children. Individual differences also

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existed in the parental dyad with respect to the perception of a conflict. Fathers, much like adolescents sometimes perceived that mothers became upset more easily than the situation suggested was necessary. These differences in perception were also noted to cause frustration for parents:

> Mr. Robinson: mhhmm...well calmness, I try to be calm and do it the best you can and like I say...I don't know, I don't like to make little things [a big deal] and maybe my perspective is a little different [than mom's], I don't know..., I don't know... I don't worry, like Mrs. Robinson, I don't worry about stuff (Robinson Family Interview, 2005).

In fact, for several families, differing perspectives on the part of parents led to the conflict between a parent and child developing into conflict between two parents. Parents indicated that the interparental conflict that developed as a result of these perceptual differences was frustrating, and they conveyed that they really were not sure how else to approach these differences in perception between parent figures.

> Mr. Robinson: I mean a lot of times if it's a big conflict it ends up between me and Mrs. Robinson and the kids are...I mean I'll stick up for the kids, you know if she yells too much... then that doesn't go anywhere either...she gets mad and leaves, and it solves the problem for the time, and the kids get out of it...and Mrs. Robinson goes to bed and doesn't talk to me...then it's conflict between her and I, and it should have been between [the kids and I or the kids and their mother] but that's because we think differently...(Robinson Family Interview, 2005).

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Despite examples of frequent perceptual differences during the interview session, examination of the Daily Log open-ended questions suggests that parents and adolescents are at least, most usually, in agreement about when a conflict happens and what a conflict is about. Daily Log review demonstrates that the majority of conflict that occurs on a day-to-day basis happens between mothers and their adolescents and that mothers and adolescents largely describe the same conflict when asked to consider their most significant conflict of the day. As predicted by the literature, mothers in this sample indeed provided the majority of discipline in the family unit for daily hassles (Steinberg, 2001). Fathers were more likely to be involved either when the conflict incident was perceived to be a more major hassle or when the adolescent reacted in a more emotionally reactive manner.

Adolescents and their mothers were more likely to engage in conflict that appeared to be the result of the increased frequency of contact over day-to-day issues that were likely to be contentious (i.e. school work, chores, bedtime etc.). As a result, adolescents were more likely to express a desire that their mothers would "lighten up" when it came to areas of typical conflict between them: "Interviewer: if you could share one thing with your parents about conflict and about how your family manages that what would you tell them? Susan: that my mom should lighten up a little bit (Peters Family Interview, 2005)". Interestingly, however, adolescents in two families also noted that their fathers lack of involvement was sometimes problematic and indicated that they wished their fathers would take a more active role or "tighten up" (Peter's Family Interview, 2005).

> Eric: Probably between my Mom, my Dad and me, because my Dad doesn't say much even though my Mom says he does, and that's kind of a problem and that's the worst part (Allen Family Interview, 2005).

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Numerous individual differences were noted by families as they shared their experiences with conflict. Differences included gender differences for both parents and also noted differences between children within a single family during conflict, conflict resolution, and also with respect to regular interaction. "Mr. Peters : yeah, they got a better, a better bond [mom and daughter], but that's good... it's a mom daughter thing, I understand that. But I'm glad that she's not afraid to come to me and talk about things too, and I want to never ever break that (Peters Family Interview, 2005)".

Interviewer: You don't talk about your dad very much, about conflict…

Susan: No, because, if there's something wrong, I always go to my mom I don't really go to my dad, unless I want money…

Interviewer:…why don't you usually go to your dad if there's something wrong?

Susan: Ummm like usually the stuff that happens is more girly than guy related, so I always go to my mom, she's been through the whole guy thing and everything (Peters Family Interview, 2005).

Mrs. Peters: I think it's the daddy little girl thing really, more than a teenager thing. They both have him wrapped, around their little fingers. It's kind a good though, it's kind of good and kind of bad (Peters Family Interview, 2005).

Mr. Robinson: But is that a gender thing again? Because they know they can push Mrs. Robinson's buttons and it will go on and on and on, but with me it's just that I

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don't get mad that often, so that they know if I do then they know...and I don't know...they just don't [go on and on] (Robinson Family Interview, 2005).

Conflict: The Reasons

Parents and teens identified numerous specific reasons that conflict occurred as well as underlying reasons for some repetitive conflicts. Generally, the majority of conflict arose between parents and adolescents (most often with their mothers) over daily hassle type problems. Daily hassles that were noted as occurring most often included conflict over completion of household chores, completion of homework, the use of the computer (most typically the use of MSN chat features), and sibling rivalry. Overall, Power and Control or Freedom and Independence were seen to be the underlying reasons for many of the day-to-day conflicts, including daily hassle type issues that parents and adolescents experienced. Furthermore, parents and teens generally described these conflicts as going unresolved. Indeed, teens and parents both described adolescent refusal behavior. Adolescents simply refused to comply with parent requests, engaged in arguing with parents in an attempt to have their opinions and ideas heard and acted upon, or delayed doing as their parents asked:

Interviewer: I want you to tell me about the most difficult conflict that you had in the last month with your parents. ... The biggest one…

Jack: umm..[long pause]..... Me studying for exams

Interviewer: okay...tell me what happened…

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Jack: Well, they want to me to study for an hour a night and I was only studying for half an hour...so then I just did what I wanted to instead of doing what they wanted me to do. So it never happened (Francis Family Interview, 2005).

Mrs. Allen: He doesn't like when we ask him to do something, he doesn't just think "oh okay"... he has to have an explanation, and our explanation has to be better than his argument... and in his mind, it's not very often that we can win that [laughs]... he's usually got these ideas why he shouldn't have to do that, that are better than why he should...(Allen Family Interview, 2005).

Adolescents often noted that they got tired of arguing with their parents or felt that their position or opinion was not going to be listened to, so several adolescents described finally relenting and agreeing with their parents or complying with the task request although deep down they felt that their opinion on the matter was still correct. Teens generally felt that these issues went unresolved despite the fact that they may have complied with parent request in the end. Of particular note, at times adolescents felt these types of conflict were unresolved even when their parents reported during the interview otherwise. Parents did note, however, that sometimes these types of issues were the ones that tended to repeat.

Mrs. Allen: well the daily stuff is probably more like "oh God, this again...like come on man...how many times do we have to talk about this..." and then he usually [says] "oh I don't know"... I guess we don't have structured conversations about that stuff, like the daily stuff, but often we do say "oh God. How many times,

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> we tell you this all the time, when are you going to get it"...and usually he says. "I don't know"... and then we usually have some comments like "well, you can't do this all the time". So we don't sit down and come to a resolution about these things all the time, it's more like blowing off steam, and going our separate ways to totally cool down, and it's done, so it's a non-issue and we don't really talk about it again... (Allen Family Interview, 2005)

Parents, too, note that they struggle when their children insist on approaching tasks in their own way: "Interviewer: so when you think about the conflicts that you have, what do you think is the root problem when you have these conflicts? Mr. Peters: they want to do it their own way (Peters Family Interview, 2005)". Parents and teens alike further note that they both find arguing with each other frustrating:

> Alex: Well, we just go over and over how about the person's wrong or something. And we never stop, and we keep saying he shouldn't have done something like that...
>
> Interviewer: So it just keeps going on and on and on, it is a kind of... like not listening?
>
> Alex: Yeah, it's like you're never giving up. There's no way you can admit you could be wrong (Sampson Family Interview, 2005).

Parents are generally unsure of how to manage their teens when faced with arguing and they are also dissatisfied with their own approach of arguing back or needing control of a situation. "Mr. Robinson: yeah, you see I don't like it when the kids argue back, you

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know I tell them, 'you gotta listen to your mother' and [they're] getting better...but they still once and a while yell back and that's not good (Robinson Family Interview, 2005)". Despite this, parents who reported arguing with their teens, also reported not being sure what else to do when faced with those situations.

Parents also identified daily-hassle type problems of getting their adolescents up in the morning, and dealing with image or clothing concerns, although with less frequency across families. Adolescents who experienced conflict in these areas with their parents also acknowledged them as problematic. "Mr. Robinson: clothing...Mrs. Robinson: clothing, yup...that's a conflict... Interviewer: So clothing? She wants to wear something that you don't approve of? Mrs. Robinson: [We don't] approve of it, yeah, you know the lower cut tops (Robinson Family Interview, 2005)". Interestingly, parents of adolescent girls and their daughters, both noted concerns over dress, makeup, hair style and ear/body piercing, while parents of adolescent boys did not note concerns in these areas. One of the adolescent girls interviewed was particularly frustrated with her perception that her parents were not reasonable when these issues arose:

> Interviewer: so you don't really agree with their position on piercings?
>
> Susan: ... It's not like I am going to get anything on my face done, except for my ears, because I think the ears are perfectly fine considering they're just ears, but I wouldn't get like my tongue [done] or, I'm not into any tattoos or anything, so I think is just like a little stud...(Peters Family Interview, 2005).

Mothers, in particular, noted feeling ill-at-ease when they felt out of control in their family environment. One mother also noted that issues of control are increasingly

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problematic as her children traverse through the adolescent time period suggesting that the rate of adolescent development with respect to parental development play a role in conflict and the resolution of conflict in the parent-adolescent dyad:

> Mrs. Sampson: It's a control issue for sure... Absolutely, I mean, control is a huge issue for me. A huge issue...and it's gotten worse with time just because I always have to be in control.
>
> Interviewer: And now your kids are pushing you to let go...
>
> Mrs. Sampson: And I'm having a tough time with that absolutely (Sampson Family Interview, 2005)

> Mrs. Allen: It's how I feel... [laughs] I recognize that I'm a control freak, so I think I would recognize that I feel that I don't have enough control because people are still not doing whatever I think it is they should be doing [laughs] (Allen Family Interview, 2005).

Overall, issues of power and control were evident in parent-adolescent interactions and both parents and teens identified that they often had different notions about the importance of a job, task, or request, which often lead to conflict between them. Parents and adolescents in 4 of 5 families noted that a frequent cause of conflict was a dissimilar notion of the importance and/or the expected timing or response to a parental request.

> Mrs. Francis: Yeah, Hurry up, I mean, he's on his own time schedule, and always has been like Pokémon... he always, always has been, I mean, he's obsessive compulsive about making sure his hands are clean, and clothes are clean, and his

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food is clean...he's always been that way and it's just like "arrg" [frustration]... just hurry up, just hurry up... if he wants to do something he's ready, otherwise...

Interviewer: Okay, are there other things that you guys have regular conflict about?

Jack: Probably me not doing some things. Like my parents might have asked me to do something, I might have forgot or maybe I just didn't do it... (Francis Family Interview, 2005)

Similarly, adolescents noted that they were often irritated when their parents expected them to complete a task on a parent schedule versus on their own time-table. In several cases, adolescents noted that the issue at hand was often more important to their parents than it was to them, and this disparity resulted in a conflictual exchange.

Interviewer: Okay... can you think about the deep down meaning of those conflicts.... so maybe your mom asks you to help clean up, and you guys get into a conflict - what do you think is the deep down cause of that conflict?

Alex: It's because I don't wanna do it...and I don't care...yeah...It wasn't really that important... (Sampson Family Interview, 2005).

While parents and teens were in agreement regarding the fact that timing and or importance of a request could frequently be a result of conflict, for the most part, no particular strategy was implemented by either party to resolve the conflict in a manner that appeased both players. As a result, conflicts involving completing parental requests in a timely fashion were frequently reported as recurrent.

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Mr. Allen: he doesn't listen, and when you ask him to do something, it turns into an argument "why?".... it's always "why, why, why" he can't just go and do it...I mean it's the simplest thing, like "go clean up your room"..."why"..." because you need to, because it's dirty".." why"... and then it just turns into a whole conflict in and of itself... (Allan Family Interview, 2005).

Interviewer: Mrs. Francis, your day-to-day conflict with him... how do you usually manage it?

Mrs. Francis: Well, it's usually just saying, come on, we got a hurry up, so it's mostly just talking... like "okay, let's go.... we got a hurry up…Or you gotta get up"… it's kind of constant…

Interviewer: So you're constantly reminding him?

Mrs. Francis: [I'm] hoping that when I talk he gets some action going, but not always…(Francis Family Interview, 2005).

Adolescents noted that sometimes they will use strategies to delay a parent request if they don't see it as important: "Amanda: and sometimes they'll ask me to do something and I don't want to and I say 'I'll just do it later'" (Robinson Family Interview, 2005).

Alex: Well I guess the fact that I didn't really do what she said that much... I probably could have done it if I'd really tried.

Interviewer: So why do you think you didn't do it?

Alex: I was doing it I, just didn't put a lot of effort into it. I thought I'd get around to doing it later on…

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Interviewer: So even though is important to her it wasn't really that important to you

Alex: Yeah (Sampson Family Interview, 2005).

Parents and adolescents also identified behaviours with friends as an area in which conflict sometimes arises.

Interviewer: What kind of things...can you think of [that] become a conflict for your family?

Susan: Going to hang out with my friends. I have to be either at someone's house, or at the movies or something I can't just be hanging out with them. I can't just go hang out (Peters Family Interview, 2005).

Parents identified the propensity of the teen to prefer spending time with friends rather than spending time with parents or family as also opening the door for conflict. Generally, however, parents were able to see the increasing preference for friends over family as an appropriate developmental expectation:

Mrs. Allen: ...we bought a boat this year, and so for us that's fun to be going out all the time, and he thinks he's in hell...he feels a little bit like he's being tortured being dragged out with us instead of his friends... but I would say that's probably fairly normal at this age...That's not cool (Allen Family Interview, 2005).

The use of the computer, most often "MSN'ing" – using chat features in on-line computer mail programs to 'chat' in real time with their friends, but also general computer use, came up in all families as an issue of concern (5 of 5). It was not uncommon for

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families to identify that the suspension "MSN'ing" privileges was commonly used as a parent applied consequence for behavior problems: Susan: "...[they don't like me] going on the computer, and talking on MSN. Interviewer: so generally, they don't like you to talk on MSN? Susan: I'm just on it a lot, too much for my mom's liking (Peters Family Interview, 2005)". "Mr. Robinson: I just don't like the Internet, the MSN...(Robinson Family Interview, 2005). Time spent on the computer doing non-homework activities was also identified as a concern: Mrs. Peters: "...for example, when I say to her, even now, when I tell her one hour on the computer, you can spend that however you want it, but she will still always try [to get more time] (Peters Family Interview, July 05)".

Parents and teens generally did not raise many major conflict issues, the conflict that typically arose in the parent-adolescent dyad was day-to-day hassles, or relatively minor conflict as described above. Interviewer: "So, what kind of things are the most common causes of conflict between you and your mom? Alex: Sometimes homework, sometimes getting stuff done like around the house or again, just little things (Sampson Family Interview, 2005)". By and large, when families mentioned major conflicts they were describing situations that had not occurred and that they were worried about for the future.

> Mrs. Sampson: But I mean, you know, the violent outbursts really concern me. Because I just wonder, is he going to do that with someone else that he's very familiar with. I mean he wouldn't do that with his friends, he wouldn't do it at school, but say he's in a relationship that he's very comfortable with, and what if that becomes a pattern in his interactions. That's what concerns me...
>
> Interviewer: So it's like a long-term worry?

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Mrs. Sampson: It's a huge long-term worry, huge… (Sampson Family Interview, 2005).

Mr. Robinson: you want your kids to do well in life, you don't want them to be down at you know, sitting in a box at IGA there, you know, you want your children to do well, like even though you set expectations and you tell them they've gotta do these, they know in their mind they've gotta try to get there, but without us pushing them, who knows where they'd be…(Robinson Family Interview, 2005).

Mr. Robinson: Well, yeah, I guess you just [worry]...like they all know the rights and wrongs of the world, but then they get…the peer pressure and friends and that's usually when something does go...(Mrs. Robinson- yeah) because you're with a group and there's the group mentality (Mrs. Robinson – yeah)… (Robinson Family Interview 2005).

In a single case, a family described an instance of teen drinking, but even then, parents saw the incident as less major than might have otherwise been the case, as the adolescent tried a sip or small amount of alcohol versus significant drinking. For the most part, parents and adolescents alike identified that they did not have major conflict.

Conflict: Frustrations about Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Parents and adolescents alike identified various frustrations about dealing with conflict in the parent-adolescent dyad (5 out of 5 families). For parents and teens, the most

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frequently noted frustration included the repetitious nature of particular conflicts: "Interviewer: So what frustrates you the most when you think about these everyday conflicts? Mrs. Francis: that they just keep on happening, same thing every day, same thing every day, day in, day out..." (Francis Family Interview, 2005).

> Eric: ...it's just the same argument, just a different version of it, and it seems like it's repetitive even though it's different, like it's the same argument, but it's a different type, with the same thing, but it's about something different than it was before, and that's really frustrating (Allen Family Interview, 2005).

> Interviewer: What frustrates you the most, when you come up against these everyday kinds of conflicts?
> Mr. Peters: That they just continue to keep going..
> Interviewer: same conflict, every day?
> Mr. Peters: ...like a hamster in a cage, you keep running and nothing happens (Peters Family Interview 2005).

> Interviewer: what do you think frustrates your parents the most about those kind of conflicts?
> Eric: That they're so often, and that it's... I guess...to them maybe it doesn't feel like I get it (Allen Family Interview, 2005).

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Parents also noted that it is frustrating to manage adolescent behaviour when they think their adolescents should know better or when they know their adolescent can behave more appropriately or responsibly. "Mrs. Francis: I just wish they would just do whatever it is without me having to point out the list... just check the list and just do it without me having to say" (Francis Family Interview, 2005). Mothers were alone in expressing frustration that their adolescents are, at times, disrespectful towards them and in feeling frustrated that their adolescent (and in several cases, the family as a whole) did not appreciate fully all that mothers contributed to the family.

> Mrs. Sampson: [long pause] a lot of what gets me going is their lack of appreciation…You know, that I carry the household... and I wouldn't mind a little help... you know, some consideration that everyday things need to get done…and I shouldn't have to ask, they should be able to walk in and see that the kitchen is a disaster. Can you just put the dishes in the dishwasher…(Sampson Family Interview, 2005).

Most of the adolescents were particularly frustrated with their sense of unfairness in the management of conflict in the family, especially with respect to sibling conflict, and fairness was raised as a frequently in the analysis (5 of 5 families). Eric: "I guess sometimes, like, it's like we have a conflict about something…[and] deep down, it doesn't seem fair… so sometimes it's about my sister, but I don't feel they treat me fair, as fair as her." (Allen Family Interview, 2005). Another teen similarly noted: Alex: "Like I do a lot more than my brothers do, and I just want them to do their part, so it kind of frustrates me…it's not fair" (Sampson Family Interview, 2005).

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Parents and adolescents both indicated struggles with communication, with adolescents feeling as though their parents did not listen to them and parents noting general problems with communication. Interviewer: What frustrates you the most when you come up against these everyday conflicts? Alex: "I guess that we always have them and no one really listens to me..." (Sampson Family Interview, 2005).

> Mrs. Francis: Well I guess there's just a typical get him to do his homework, or knowing if there is homework, you know, I'll ask him... "Do you have homework, and I get "mumhmh" [I don't know]... a typical response... and that just drives me wild...
>
> Interviewer: Do you think that you guys and he would generally agree on the true meanings of your conflicts?
>
> Mr. Francis: I don't know if he agrees or not, like we say, because he never really comes out and says anything, or answers us (Francis Family Interview, 2005).

The Peters Family, in particular noted that inconsistency in the parental dyad with respect to parenting strategies and discipline was a cause of significant frustration. Mrs. Peters: "I think that 95% of the conflict, I feel, that it's because we're not together [consistent], so we end up having more conflict about the situation, and the kids, have kind of forgotten it and moved on" (Peters Family Interview, 2005). This family has recently experienced a marital separation and are negotiating divorce. Parents noted that they had recently begun to focus on increased consistency in parenting to make the dual households easier on both the children and themselves. The focus on the importance of consistency for this family was evident in their interview.

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> Mrs. Peters: Another example, she went and got her ear pierced without our permission, and she was all over me when I came home. "I'm sorry Mom, I realized what I did was wrong, and on and on and on." And I said "did Dad get this song and dance" and she said "No, because he didn't think it was that big a deal". So again, my anger goes from discussing and trying to figure out what she did, and realizing that she knows what she did was wrong, my anger goes to him, because I realize "oh, we're not on the same page" (Peters Family Interview, 2005).

Conflict: Influencing Factors for Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Numerous factors emerged which influenced each individual family member's perception of conflict, their experience of conflict, how they managed and resolved conflict and also their happiness with the outcomes of conflict in the adolescent-parent dyad. Family factors were specifically addressed through the FAM III questionnaire and were presented at the start of this chapter. In coding the interview, family factors were applied to the data as inductive themes. For several families, the areas, which were identified as weaknesses on the FAM III, were areas that sometimes caused conflict. It seemed, in families who had more typical functioning, that conflicts were less likely to be related to specific family factors, whereas the family with the most problematic functioning also described more difficulties with specific areas of family functioning.

By and large, parents were much more likely than adolescents to identify factors which influenced their conflict and conflict management with their children. Again several parents indicated that consistency in parenting and maintaining a routine both for parents and children so as to head off conflict before it happened was a factor in the degree and

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amount of conflict they experienced with their adolescents. The more routine a family had and the more consistent parents were in their discipline, the more easily they felt they managed the inventible daily conflicts. "Interviewer: is that true with both your kids that if it's more routine it tends to be easier, less hassle? Mrs. Peters: yes, yes, and that's where we're really struggling, as a family, but we recognize that we need to get back together, and were not together, but we have to, otherwise we'll fail". One parent noted the connection between feeling in control and in having a routine at home and the importance of this in her own feelings of how things were going at home: "Interviewer: what frustrates you the most when you come up against everyday conflicts? Mrs. Robinson:....because I don't have control...it's basically it's...like my routine is messed up..." (Robinson Family Interview, 2005).

> Mrs. Peters: That's one of our weaknesses, even in marriage, and now, that we're not going to [be married], we both agree that we are going to have to come together more on that, we're going to have to find a way to be more of one system, so that they can't play us, because that's obviously going to happen (Peters Family Interview, 2005).

Parents (in 4 of 5 families) also identified that personality of the child played a big factor in mediating conflict. In many cases they were able to reflect that an adolescent's style in managing conflict was individual, in the sense that it wasn't the same as their siblings, and furthermore parents often identified that their adolescent's approach to problem solving and conflict was consistent since younger childhood. Parents frequently were able to identify how their adolescent was more or less like themselves and more or

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less like their spouse. "Mrs. Sampson: I see a lot of characteristics of my husband...[in Alex] (Sampson Family Interview, 2005)." Almost all the families identified these consistencies as a factor of personality development or temperament.

> Mrs. Francis: Yes, but I think it's a shyness that gets him places, in that people think that he's shy, and so they leave him alone, or they don't talk to him because they think that he's going to be upset or whatever to talk to them, so they just have left him, and that's the way I was with kids...
>
> Interviewer: So he kind of holds back and watches and makes sure?
>
> Mrs. Francis: That it's a safe environment...which is definitely, exactly like me, and his sister, is more like him [Dad].
>
> Interviewer: So even though it's frustrating to you. He's very much like you, so can you kind of relate to it?
>
> Mrs. Francis: Well yeah, and that's why it is frustrating...

> Mrs. Allen: It's very easy to see if you spent an extended period of time at our house, I think it's very obvious how similar Eric and Mr. Allen are in personality. I think the things that irritate Mr. Allen about Eric are the things that irritate me about Mr. Allen [laughs]... [mom says to dad] and you just don't wanna admit that they irritate you about you to. (Allen Family Interview, 2005).

Parents also frequently identified intergenerational influences on their parenting (in 4 of 5 families). Parents typically were trying to parent in a better manner than their parents

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before them, but they frequently found themselves reacting in manners which they identified as being less than adequate and which they associated with their own parents strategies.

> Mrs. Sampson: I'm... I don't know what... I do a lot of screaming. It's a pattern that I learned from my parents and I just never really overcame it. It's really hard for me to sort of in turn, to say to myself. Don't go there, don't do this, it's not helpful...my kids hate it, I hate it...there's no point in engaging, because it's going nowhere. Neither way is effective but those are the strategies I have. They're learned behaviors on my part (Sampson Family Interview, 2005).

Some parents were happy to identify that they had improved their adolescent management/parenting strategies, while other parents were frustrated that they were repeating these strategies that they were not particularly happy with, but they also felt as though they were not sure what else to do.

> Mr. Peters: My parents were kind of heavy-handed.
>
> Mrs. Peters: Yeah, mine too...I'm actually impressed with myself how much I didn't come from a family that talked or solved problems, and [now] we don't go anywhere until we solve it. Actually, quite the opposite, so we don't have "no you can't do it and I'm your parent, so that's the end of it", where as I want her to know exactly why we're saying no. And I want her to help me come up with a solution about what we can do to make it better next time (Peters Family Interview, 2005)

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In the same instance however, some parents expressed that they also had a sense that their children should be expected to act to the same standards that they themselves had to in adolescence.

> Mrs. Francis: Well, I just think, well yeah, I think it's a respectful thing, I mean, if someone asked you to do something, you just did it - as us as kids, of course. It always comes back to that right, when my parents asked me to do something... I mean you didn't even need to be asked. You just knew what needed to be done and you did it. It just drives me crazy that you can't see to put the dishes in the sink, or those things, or those clothes need to be picked up, now we have a schedule thing that says this is your day to do this and this, so now it's why do I have to look and why do I have to say, "OK whose day is it"... like you guys can read just as well as I can, so I think it is just taking responsibility on your own without always having to be reminded. And then that's when I kind of get up and I just start doing stuff on my own, stomping around like some wild woman, because it's just like "arrg" [frustration], I just can't believe it (Francis Family Interview, 2005).

Parents, especially mothers, also expressed a lack of confidence at least occasionally in managing their adolescents (3 out of 5 families). "Mrs. Allen: Sometimes, you're just trying to wing it day by day." (Allen Family Interview, 2005).

> Interviewer: Okay, how do you guys handle…every day stuff? Everyday conflict?
>
> Mrs. Robinson: hmmm...I'm not very good...
>
> Interviewer: what do you mean by that?

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> Mrs. Robinson: well, I get...I yell...when I get angry...and I find that um...if I've had a bad day or if I'm worried about one of them that's how I kind of handle it...I'm not very good, Mr. Robinson's awesome ...he's very calm cool and collected... (Robinson Family Interview, 2005).

> Mrs. Sampson: Yeah... it's trying to find a different way... and I just don't feel like I've got the repertoire or the resources like the emotional resources to do it, you know... you know, I'm stressed all the time... always a really high level of stress and exhaustion. And so I fall back into the path of least resistance. Or... or maybe it's about taking the energy and making the effort to change... I guess that's what I don't do, and I need to... I mean, I know on one level that's what I need to do, but I just don't put into practice (Sampson Family Interview, 2005).

Mrs. Sampson also expressed that in addition to being unhappy with how conflict was resolved with her adolescent, she also felt she did not have the resources to learn or apply different strategies. For Mrs. Sampson, it seemed that the lack of confidence often gave way to a full blown fear of being incompetent: "Interviewer: What frustrates you the most about these conflicts? Mrs. Sampson: That I don't feel that I'm a good enough parent to find a better solution in how to resolve them. (Sampson Family Interview, 2005)."

Parents noted that their expectations of their adolescent in a particular situation often guided how they responded to a conflict and how they acted to resolve a conflict. Parents also noted that sometimes their expectations were likely too high which also contributed to conflict:

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Mr. Allen: We probably treat him like he's older than he actually is, maybe responsibility wise...we probably gave him too much responsibility, sometimes, for his age…

Mrs. Allen: Yeah, because he is so responsible in some areas. Probably, I think we do give him a little too much slack sometimes, and it just gives him enough to get himself into trouble, because in the end, he still a kid… I think, I don't know, I just think that because he's always been such a good kid, that he really tries hard... maybe we expect that just to continue along with no bumps, and I think that's why we react sometimes with him like that…(Allen Family Interview, 2005).

Mrs. Sampson: And I guess the other part of it too, and this is all that with all three of my kids, is that I expect a tremendous amount in terms of performance and probably my expectations are unrealistic. I am very demanding and it frustrates me when he doesn't comply, because I know, when he does comply, I know what he's capable of. ..and so I don't like the slacking business (Sampson Family Interview, 2005).

Finally, some parents, again especially mothers, identified a feeling of stress or overload in trying to fulfill the many roles they were taking on. Mothers identified significant feelings of stress and burnout in 3 of 5 families. This in general was accompanied by frustration with the family and or the adolescent for not sufficiently appreciating all that the mother was trying to accomplish on behalf of individuals in the family: "Mr. Robinson: You know, because I think we're too rushed all the time, and this

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stress in everyone's lives... you know I think Mrs. Robinson, she has so much stress, because I think she puts so much on herself...(Robinson Family Interview, 2005).

> Interviewer: What do you think is happening when [conflict is] not easily resolved?
> Mrs. Sampson: I'm walking into a situation already at the edge and so it takes very little to tip me over... it's usually just everything else. It's the culmination of the day, and you know, I come in with expectations, and I guess I'm getting is a huge sense of disappointment. And I can't cope. I just feel overwhelmed (Sampson Family Interview, 2005).

A last set of factors that were identified, for the most part, exclusively by the Robinson family stand out in important contrast to the other interviews. While all families identified factors and stressors that exacerbated conflict and interfered with conflict management, the Robinson family (and to a lesser degree the Peters family) specifically identified several protective factors that they felt had offered them and their children support in the parent-adolescent dyad in preventing conflict in the first place. In particular, they noted that extracurricular activities kept their adolescents busy enough that they lacked sufficient time to get into serious trouble. These parents also invested significant time becoming involved in their adolescents after-school activities which gave the parents a sense of knowing what was going on in their adolescent's life. Parents in both the Robinson and the Peters families also noted that they tried to focus on maintaining some quality time with each of their children. The Robinson family described a ritual of nighttime tuck-ins that was still common for even their oldest adolescent. The father in this family found this

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time especially important in connecting with his children and in allowing an opportunity to instill family values while also allowing the children a set-aside time for discussion of daily events and happenings.

The Robinson family noted that they felt blessed to live in a community where their family was well known. They stated that a sense of community allowed for adult influence to be exerted on their children even when they themselves were not present, essentially creating an extended family that allowed for enhanced supervision and support for their adolescents. Finally, the parents in the Robinson family were cognizant of the need for flexibility in parenting and noted that when they could be more flexible, within boundaries, that the inevitable discipline and conflict management were made easier.

Conflict: Management Strategies

Families in this study noted a variety of strategies that they utilized in managing conflict with their adolescent. The following responses by parents in managing conflict were reported the most frequently (5 out of 5 families reported regular use of the following strategies): Communication, Psychological Strategies (mostly yelling, name calling, and threatening to remove privileges) and No Strategy. Parents and adolescents both expressed dislike at using destructive strategies (Psychological, Passive and Nagging) although all families still reported using these types of strategies at least some of the time (Psychological Strategies – 5 of 5; Passive Strategies –5 of 5; Nagging – 4 of 5). "Interviewer: What you think is hard about the communication between you and your mom? Alex: We always yell at each other (Sampson Family Interview, 2005)."

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Mrs. Sampson: On the one hand, I might be yelling and screaming on the other hand, sometimes I just don't talk to him. So it's like the silent treatment, and until he sort of starts to realize that I'm not happy, that I'm really not happy and he needs to think about what he's doing here (Sampson Family Interview, 2005).

Mrs. Peters: ...sometimes [Mr. Peters will] come home and see us and he'll think "whoa what did I walk into" because we could be yelling at each other, which sometimes we do, but 10 minutes later, we go "well that was silly, and let's talk it out" (Peters Family Interview, 2005).

Interviewer: How do you and your family usually handle everyday conflicts?
Susan: we just discuss it, unless she's really annoying, and I yell at her (Peters Family Interview, 2005).

Eric: My mom and I had a disagreement/argument over me not getting home on time for my sister. It was a very big argument, there was no hitting or screaming just raising of the voice, and crying. I didn't think that I was completely in the wrong...(Allen Family Interview, 2005).

Mrs. Sampson: I got angry with Alex regarding how much time he takes when getting ready in the morning. It is an ongoing problem which he chooses to continue doing. I yelled at him to get him to hurry up. He yells back to say he's coming but when he gets upstairs he's not ready. I remind him it's important to take less time in

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> the morning but it doesn't seem to have much effect. I left frustrated (Sampson Family Log 2005).

Parents expressed frustration with the use of destructive strategies and also suggested that their desire to not use destructive strategies often led to them using no strategy, or walking away from the conflict without dealing with it. Using no strategy was more commonly described by mothers over fathers and again, in general, fathers indicated they do not have the same frequency of conflict with their adolescents as mothers described.

Constructive strategies were also regularly employed, with families endorsing Negotiation (3 of 5), Communication (5 of 5), Consequence use (4 of 5) and Redirection (1 of 5) as regularly employed management tactics.

> Mr. Robinson: oh, well usually, when Mrs. Robinson is gone, you know with the kids I sit and visit and I still tuck Amanda in and I sit and talk to her for a while and we talk about things and you know that's how we do it...and you know once in a while you have to get stern...and say this is gonna go one way or the other or one reason or another...but usually I just talk to her (Robinson Family Interview, 2005).

Parents and adolescents both noted that parents demonstrated differences in their response to conflict: Amanda: "well, my mom usually yells, and then my dad just like, talks...(Robinson Family Interview, 2005)." Again, parents and adolescents generally indicated that mothers and adolescents experienced conflict most frequently. As a result, mothers were seen to be more likely to engage in conflict than fathers. Parents also identified intervening in each other's discipline when they felt that the other parent had gone too far. Of interesting note, it seemed that mothers were more likely to engage in

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conflict with their adolescent over the principle of an action (or more likely an inaction), whereas fathers were more likely to evaluate the benefit of the conflict versus the task which had been requested of their adolescent. Fathers then, in 3 of 5 families described trying to diffuse conflict by intervening in the conflict situation in some manner. Mothers, it seemed, generally did not appreciate fathers' attempts at intervening.

> Mr. Francis: If it's going to cause a conflict between him and her then sometimes I'll just end up doing to myself...so if I know, for example, it's his turn to put the dishes away, I'll start doing them, and then she'll say to me. "What are you doing that for? It's his turn!" And so not to cause a conflict I'll just do it myself... it doesn't really matter who does that as long as someone does it...so what difference does it make if I put his dishes away, but she then is saying "you don't have to do that..." (Francis Family Interview, 2005).

> Mr. Peters: I guess the difference is, I'm willing to negotiate because as long as it gets done. I don't care how it gets done.
>
> Mrs. Peters: Yes, we're opposite that we, because I'm like, "it does matter how it gets done, because it has to get done this way" and when I say do the dishes, I want them done after supper, not 10 minutes before bed. (Allen Family Interview, 2005).

The differences between parents in the management of conflict often led to secondary interparental conflict. Mr. Peters, from the Peters Family also identified the fact that he gets less time with his children which factors into his reluctance to argue with them when he does spend time with them. He acknowledges that his propensity for negotiating with them for additional privileges causes conflict between himself and Mrs. Peters:

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Mrs. Peters: He's definitely the negotiator... I will negotiate on a lot of things, but on certain things…if Susan wants to negotiate the big things like going out, or boyfriends or big issues, then we'll negotiate, but little things are that are daily… "no it's bedtime" so there isn't 5 more minutes to cuddle, where as she could talk you [Mr. Peters] out of 15 more books, eight glasses out of water, three pee breaks, and a cuddle...

Mr. Peters: And some popcorn [laugh] …

Mrs. Peters: Yeah, but that's bad, we need to come together, and be on the same page.

Mr. Peters: Yeah, I know, but if I'm gone all day, I like to spend some time that way with them, you know…

Mrs. Peters: Which is fine, but if the roles were reversed, and you were the one getting her out of bed in the morning, then I guarantee you'd have a different attitude about her bedtime (Peters Family Interview, 2005).

Both mothers and fathers were frustrated when their strategies for managing conflict were in opposition and it seems that neither parent felt happy regardless of how the situation was managed:

Mrs. Peters: Yeah, so it's not so much his views on things. I just think he could be more on my side. I could think he was 100% off base, but as long as I'm in front of them [kids], I'm with him. And then after she's gone, we can go back and say, "you know that you were kind of hard, or maybe we should have re-thought that, or I totally disagree with you" and I think sometimes, you're [Dad] more inclined to sort

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> of fix things right there, and it seems like you're kind of defacing me because it seems like you're taking her side (Peters Family Interview, 2005).

> Mr. Robinson: My weakness, well, I think that my biggest fault is that I try to mediate, like you know I try to solve things and then a lot of times the conflict ends up between Mrs. Robinson and I, and then I've got to mediate the whole circle eh...it's sometimes it's tough... and sometimes you know Mrs. Robinson will be on the kids and I'll just [try to] keep on what I'm doing instead of participating because whenever they are arguing, you know I don't think it's that important...(Robinson Family Interview, 2005).

Two of the five fathers also noted their preference for managing conflict at home, or in private versus out in public or in the presence of their adolescents friends: "Interviewer: what do you think impacted the decisions that you made about how things were handled? Mr. Peters: it was already done, and there were friends involved..." (Peters Family Interview, 2005)

> Mr. Francis: well you know, we really don't solve conflict out in public, we kind of handle it when we get home, and I see other people who are out in public, and they have conflict with their kids, and they just yell and scream at them, and I think basically they're just more scaring them and they know when they get home they are in big trouble. I mean, I just don't go for that (Francis Family Interview, 2005).

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Discussion and Implications for Practice

Researcher Reflections on the Data

Family Functioning and Family Systems Theory

Conflict in the family setting is an important learning opportunity for children and adolescents. With their parents and siblings, adolescents have an opportunity to observe and practice conflict resolution strategies that they will continue to utilize as they move through adolescence and into adulthood (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Davies & Cummings; Shantz & Hartup, 1992). The skills demonstrated in the management of conflict are important teaching tools for parents and equally important learning opportunities for adolescents. This study aimed to develop an understanding of these processes in a small sample of families. As Family Systems and Developmental Contextualism theorists could have anticipated, conflict and conflict resolution proved to be complicated and interactive processes with multiple influences, sometimes difficult to understand at first glance (Lerner, et al., 1995), and often emotionally laden for both parents and adolescents. Indeed, examination of the daily hassles-type conflict that was predominant in the interviews and daily logs, demonstrates the multiple contexts and dynamic interactions present in each conflictual experience.

In support of the Family Systems theory perspective, several families indicated anecdotally that external influences on day-to-day life had an impact within the family unit. Several families identified that stress in their work lives often leads to decreased capacity to manage the challenging situations that sometimes developed in their family lives, especially with respect to parent-adolescent conflict. Families also identified how maternal feelings of stress and a sense of being overwhelmed often led mothers to feel less than

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adequate as parents and to manage conflict with their adolescents using strategies they could identify were not ideal. Stress in the context of the daily log did not seem to be related to parent and teen report of conflict. Because stress and its relationship to conflict did emerge a prominent theme in the interviews (especially for mothers) it should be revisited in future studies. It may be especially interesting to examine the perceptions and experiences of stress and stress management in the context of multiple family roles. It may be, that for single fathers and stay-at-home dads that a similar pattern of stress due to role overload may be evident, and the overload of stress could be less related to gender and more related to roles and responsibilities within the family system.

Behavioural Family Systems Theory

The three factors that Robin and Foster (1989) propose through the Behavioural Family Systems Theory (family structure, belief systems/cognitive distortions, and problem solving/communication skills) indeed proved to be important in understanding conflict and conflict resolution in the parent-adolescent dyad. Several families noted the increasing independence of the adolescence as a change factor in the family structure which was sometimes challenging, and 4 of 5 sets of parents noted the influence of inter- or multigenerational expectations or patterns that influenced parenting strategy use. In examining the interactions between parents and their adolescent, many examples of how beliefs and expectations guided parent and adolescents in their problem solving emerged. Parents, in this sample, commonly identified that the failure of the adolescent to adhere to parental expectations was frequently a point of conflict. Also, especially in the families who experienced challenge in their conflict experiences, negative beliefs about the

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relationship could be leading to an increase in negative feelings within the parent-adolescent dyad. Finally, every parent pair and several adolescents indicated that they perceived that problem solving/communication skills were the most fundamental component for conflict resolution and improved family functioning. While all families acknowledged that they, at least sometimes, were not as successful as they would like to be in managing conflict, families also consistently indicated that improving communication and developing joint problem solving strategies were important methods to improve how the parent-adolescent dyad functioned.

Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Development

The period of early adolescence was seen by families to have brought with it some mild increase in day-to-day conflict, which is consistent with a modern view of storm and stress endorsed by several adolescent researchers (e.g., Arnett, 1999; Laursen et. al., 1998; Montemayor, 1983; Robin & Foster, 1989; Smetana, 1989). Participating families characterized the early adolescent period as one of more frequent daily hassle type conflict (over homework, housework and the like) and punctuated only infrequently by conflict over more major events (such as drinking and the like). In fact, parents concern and worry for future major conflicts (drugs, alcohol, sex, lack of motivation to succeed) and fears for what could happen to their adolescent in light of these conflictual issues were much greater than the actual experience of the same types of conflict. As work by Laursen et al. (1998) demonstrated, conflict was more likely to occur with mothers than fathers, and was more likely to be over daily hassle type issues for all families in this sample. Parents noted the increase in mild conflict as their children moved along the developmental pathway into

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adolescence. Furthermore several of the families indicated that they viewed these changes as normative and even desirable. For the families who viewed these changes as normative, it may be that these parents had already accomplished the necessary developmental changes in their own roles to accommodate to the changing role of their adolescent (Galinsky, 1987). A better understanding of adolescent development, as well as the expectation of mildly increased frequency of conflict and expectation of the restructuring of family boundaries seemed to help mediate the experience of parent-adolescent conflict for some of the parents in this sample. That said, the adolescent period, and the changes that resulted, were not easy for all families. While several families specifically addressed their adolescent's increasing push for independence, two of the participating families noted that the move from a hierarchical family structure to more egalitarian family structure was difficult to negotiate. From a clinical planning and parent education perspective then, education about the development of adolescents and the development of families of adolescents might well support improved management of conflict.

Early adolescents were selected as the population of focus (along with their parents) for several reasons for this study. As has been previously addressed, the early adolescent period within a family setting is thought to be a developmental time period which demonstrates an increase in mild but frequent conflict, mostly around day-to-day hassles, more so than any other age period (Laursen, et. al., 1998). From a cognitive development framework, adolescence marks the beginnings of Formal Operations, which brings with it the ability to utilize abstract thinking with greater proficiency. As such, it was felt that early adolescents would be able to begin to reflect back and think about their own contributions to conflict and conflict resolution with greater proficiency (Piaget, 1972; or Thomas, 2006

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Muss, 1996). Indeed, several of the adolescents were observed to engage in reflective thought about their own behaviour and the contributions they made to the parent-adolescent relationship, at least with regards to conflict and conflict resolution. Future studies may wish to include greater numbers of adolescents aged 11-14 to further examine how changes in developmental level and cognitive ability alter the conflict process and experience for parents and adolescents.

Behavioural Family Systems and Parent-Adolescent Conflict

Families who reported more sophisticated problem solving abilities (i.e. they described negotiating and compromising with their adolescents in resolving conflict), who felt they had a decent communication pattern, whose belief systems included the notion of conflict as an opportunity for learning, and who had a stable family structure, seemed also to experience less difficulty managing the destabilization that early adolescence brought about. Robin and Foster's (1986) model of Behavioural Family Systems and Family Conflict (see Figure 1, page 13) supports this finding. Robin and Foster further surmised that the pervasiveness of disruption, degree of affect intensity, and duration of disequilibria for families, would be mediated by the degree to which families were able to utilize effective problem solving, communication, adapt their belief systems and family structure (1989). For example, we see substantially different functioning with respect to the pervasiveness of disruption caused by the parent-adolescent conflict, and the degree to which it was destabilizing to the family between families who participated in the interview. Generally, families who demonstrated more proficient conflict resolution skills, which were tended to be more constructive versus destructive in style, also demonstrated better

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communication and problem solving abilities and more flexible beliefs and family systems. By contrast, families who expressed significantly more unhappiness at the parent-adolescent relationship and conflict management process, also reported significantly greater use of destructive versus constructive resolution strategies, and seemed to have had a higher frequency and intensity of adolescent-parent conflict.

In Robin and Foster's framework, family structure is an important factor that influences how parent-adolescent conflict is managed. This layer of complexity, especially in the case of single-parent families, can be predisposing to the increase in problematic functioning across the dyad with respect to conflict. It seemed that when a family experienced increased stress and decreased supports (which may be more likely for single-parent families) there appeared to be a corresponding negative affect on the family's ability to manage parent-adolescent conflict in an effective and constructive manner. While previous research does suggest that adolescents of single parents have no more total instances of conflict with their parent than do their two-parented peers, the single parent bears total responsibility for managing the parent-adolescent conflict. The suggestion that single-parent families might find conflict resolution more problematic, at least in part due to role overload, suggests that important clinical goals can be set for preventative treatment for an identified population.

Gender Differences in Parent-Adolescent Conflict

The suggestion that adolescents would perceive and report significantly more conflict with their mothers than their mothers would report with them was not supported in this small sample of families (Calian & Noller, 1986). In fact, quite the opposite trend

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presented itself, with mothers tending to identify more frequent conflict than adolescents, and also tending to identify more aggravation at the frequent occurrence of conflict than either adolescents or their fathers. The literature review also suggested that while mothers and fathers would experience differing frequency of conflict with their adolescents, that conflict between adolescents and their fathers would be more difficult for fathers and more seriously rated than conflict between mothers and adolescents. Overall, fathers in this sample did, indeed, rate their interactions with their adolescent as less conflict laden. In fact, but for one case, fathers during the log indicated they had no conflict with their adolescent over the week of data collection. The CTS data also support the notion that fathers and adolescents experience less frequent conflict with mothers in this sample reporting between 1.18 times and 4.75 times more instances of conflict between adolescents and their mothers than adolescents and fathers. In contrast to previous research however, severity of conflict was also not any greater for fathers than mothers. Of course, the short data collection period of one week for the daily log and small number of participants may not have permitted a view of families that can easily be generalized to the population. It would be interesting to examine the sex-based differences between adolescents and their parents over a greater period of time, to explore more completely, the differences between mothers and fathers in their experience of conflict with their adolescent.

Constructive vs. Destructive Conflict Resolution

The use of constructive versus destructive conflict resolution strategies has been linked to better outcomes in adolescent development and parent-adolescent relationships

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(Chapman & McBride, 1992; Eisenberg et. al. 1996). However, it is important to note that families in this sample described regular use of both constructive and destructive strategies, with mothers tending to report using destructive strategies with greater frequency than fathers. Parents typically described regular use of destructive strategies such as yelling, threatening, nagging, and avoidance. Constructive strategies used by parents included negotiation, communication, consequence use, and redirection. Parents, throughout the interview also suggested that they were more likely to use destructive strategies when they responded impulsively to a conflict, were more likely to use a destructive strategy when they were faced with conflict that was repetitive, and were more likely to use a destructive strategy (especially yelling) when they were feeling stressed. In most instances, the adolescent did not seem to play a leading role in determining the style of conflict resolution. It should be noted that the differences in parental use of constructive versus destructive strategies may, in part, be related to the fact that mothers seem to be faced with the management of adolescent conflict at a much higher rate than fathers.

While parents and adolescents seemed to feel more at ease and more competent when they utilized constructive versus destructive conflict resolution strategies, they also often reported that they felt that they sometimes lacked the emotional resources to interact with each other in these more constructive ways. Mothers, in particular, identified feeling overloaded with responsibilities and felt that their ability to respond to their children in constructive ways was related to their feelings of overall stress in managing the household. These feelings of being overwhelmed lead, in some mothers, to a sense of inadequacy as a parent.

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Fathers, in general, did not report the same conflictual experiences with their children, largely it seems because they were not interacting as the primary disciplinarian when it came to the day-to-day interactions that were more likely to cause conflict. This result is consistent with previous research (e.g., Renk, Liljequist, Simpson & Phares, 2005). Unfortunately, while it would seem to make sense that fathers might ease the burden on mothers with respect to the role of disciplinarian, both mothers and fathers expressed unhappiness with the other's management of conflict and approach to conflict resolution. That is, mothers and fathers in several families were critical of their partner's management of conflict when left to resolve conflict on their own. It seems then, from a practical point of view, that having mothers and fathers engage in communication with each other about their needs, perceptions, and preferences for strategies to manage and resolve conflict could be an important first step in supporting a family towards improved conflict resolution.

Perceptions of Conflict and their Impact on Resolution

While parents and adolescents in this small sample often shared a perception of the cause of conflict, it seemed that the underlying issues were not often explored by either party. Matza (2001) suggested that perceptions are not enough to understand the complex interaction that takes place during a conflict, but expectations are also important. In several examples from families in this sample, it seemed that perception of a conflict alone, did not explain the adolescent and parents' seemingly different understanding of the underlying factors that were driving the conflict. For example, while the Peters family experienced a conflict about Susan and her insistence and ultimate disobedience about ear piercing, they did not explore or reflect, either jointly or individually, the actual underlying issue of the

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conflict. By parent account, Susan should have obeyed them as the ultimate authority (although admittedly Mr. Peters had less of an issue with the piercing than Mrs. Peters). Susan's parents were predominantly angered by the fact that Susan did not abide by an agreement they had jointly made about ear piercings. In contrast, Susan felt that the restrictions her parents had placed on her regarding ear piercings were unreasonable. She indicated that she only conceded to the earlier agreement (no additional ear piercings) so that she could negotiate having a belly piercing instead. Once Susan's belly was pierced, she reverted back to her original stance that her parents were being unreasonable about ear piercing, and were restricting her personal liberties in a manner that was unfair. So while the parents and adolescent did share a perception about the occurrence of a conflict, they did not share an understanding about the underlying issues which drove the conflict. Furthermore, at least in the examples given by families in the sample, while parents and adolescents might have been peripherally aware of the deeper meaning of a particular conflict, the resolution of the conflict seemed usually to be based on the more concrete, and less complicated surface issue rather than the deeper expectation type concerns of power, control, and personal freedoms.

This same type of mismatch between the perception of a conflict and the deeper understanding of the issues driving a conflict are noted in another example from the Allen family. Eric, who was to return home at an appropriate hour to care for his sister after school, contacted his mother's workplace answering machine to advise he had decided to stay at a friend's after school instead. Eric explained that he had thought (incorrectly) that his sister had other plans and would not be home immediately after school. Mr. and Mrs. Allen were angry with Eric for not complying with their instructions and further for not

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being responsible enough to realize that, given that he hadn't contacted either parent directly, he should stick to the original plan. Eric felt that the expectations of his parents were unfair and that he had met his obligations by calling and leaving his mother a message. So while Mr. and Mrs. Allen viewed the resulting conflict to be an issue of non-compliance on Eric's part, Eric viewed the conflict to be about undue parental interference into his personal life. Eric further imbedded more general feelings of anger over a sense that he receives unfair treatment from his parents, in favor of his sister. So again, while parents and adolescent agreed on the main incident of conflict, the actual perception of the underlying issues was different between Eric and his parents. Eric's expectation of personal rights and freedoms did not match with his parents' expectations that he follow through with a request as he had been instructed by them. Within a social cognitive framework, such differences have been proposed by Smetana (1988, 1989) and the above may illustrate, that adolescents and parents interpret some conflicts differently (i.e. conventional versus personal issues), thus making perceptions of and subsequent interpretations of conflict, independently important constructs in the examination of conflict within the family system.

Family Reflections on Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Family Factors

Input was sought from participating family members' at several stages of data collection. In concluding the interview, families were given the opportunity to reflect back on their experience participating in the study and to articulate what, if anything, was helpful about the experience. After reflecting about their experiences, parents and

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adolescents were also asked to provide the messages they would like to share with each other about conflict and conflict resolution as concluding thoughts.

With respect to the experience of participating in the study, parents, in particular, found that participating allowed them to step back and gain some insight into their behaviour, experience, and management of conflict in the parent-adolescent dyad. Parents reflected back several themes about conflict and conflict management including the importance of consistency in parenting, the importance of utilizing constructive strategies in conflict resolution (specifically consequences and communication), the importance of communication within they dyad and within the family in general, the importance of praising the adolescent, the importance 'picking battles', the importance of conflict as a learning experience for their adolescent and overall, the importance of reflecting on their experiences as a way in which to improve how things worked out for them.

In several cases, parents, when responding to the summaries of their interviews, indicated that the interview experience itself was key in helping them to better understand their own behaviour, which and in turn had impacted their interactions with their adolescent. Several parents and adolescents also expressed that the act of simply completing the questionnaires and Daily Log made them more reflective about their own family and helped them to identify areas and skills for future work. While adolescents in several families (3 of 5) were also able to identify how the experience of participating in the study impacted their subsequent experiences or thinking about conflict in the parent-adolescent dyad, by and large, parents (5 of 5 pairs) were more easily able to identify themes and important reflections than were adolescents.

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Parenting Factors, Importance of Reflection, and Noting the Positive

Parents in 3 of 5 families reflected that consistency between parents in the management of conflict, as well as consistency in management styles between instances of conflict, were important mediators of conflict and conflict resolution with their adolescent. Parents identified a desire to be more consistent in overall daily experiences, conflictual or not, and when they reflected on past incidents where they had been consistent, they reported that their experiences with their adolescent were generally more positive. "It made me realize that we need to be so much more together on what we do, [that] is what I thought" (Francis Family Interview, 2005). On the importance of consistency, the Peters family specifically addressed how a regular daily routine played an important part:

> Mrs. Peters: but we could both agree now, that that has a lot to do with us, because, have you ever noticed that I can ask her every day, it could be at four o'clock, or could be at 10 minutes to bed, to go get her clothes out for tomorrow, and there's never a hassle about that, and you know why? Because it's something that we do every day... every single day, and it's routine for her...(Peters Family Interview, 2005).

Parents saw that consistency, overall, in the parent-adolescent relationship and consistency in daily management strategies could help to avoid conflict as well as provide a steady response to conflict that would make parent expectations more clear. In an applied setting, when supporting parents, it is common for a parent educator, or therapist to recommend consistency in parenting. Research into effective parenting styles supports the

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notion that authoritative parents who are consistent in their responding, set and enforce clear boundaries, have high expectations but are not intrusive or restrictive in their parenting have children who have the best outcomes; with generally less behavioural problems in childhood and adolescence (Baumrind, 1996; Baumrind, 1993; Gfroerer, Kern, & Curlette, 2004, Serbin & Karp, 2004). In this small sample of families, the benefits of consistency and clear expectations were reinforced.

Parents also identified the importance of consequence use for problem behaviour. Again, the use of clearly established consequences, especially natural consequences has typically been associated with authoritative parenting and generally more positive outcomes for children and adolescents (Baumrind, 1996). The anecdotal experience shared by parents in this study reiterates the notion that encouraging parents to consistently utilize pre-established consequences can help both parents and adolescents in the management of potentially conflictual situations. That said, even though parents were able to identify that things usually worked out better when they were able to consistently apply consequences, they also identified, that despite this knowledge, they were not always successful in using the strategies that they knew, from experience, worked best.

> Mrs. Francis: the consequences, you know, usually it's just that you yell at them, and then...and then they get away with it and they know that the next time 'Oh well, nothing happened last time, so we can just do it again' ... And I think, if I did stuff differently there, but maybe he would smarten up... (Francis Family Interview, 2005).

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Supporting parents, therefore, to persist in parenting strategies that they know work and that they know reduce problematic interactions becomes an important factor in helping parents and teens to have healthy relationships. For parents in this study, just stopping to reflect on the fact that they were not utilizing strategies that they knew to be more productive was, in and of itself, change inducing. Mr. Peters: "for me, it made me more aware of the things I was doing...[it made me think] maybe I could do that. (Peters Family Interview, 2005). For preventative maintenance of family relationships, it may be helpful for parents to be encouraged to time to reflect as a regular part of their day. In order to support parents and their children as they both negotiate the child's adolescence, it would seem important to assist parents to break the old habits of ineffective and more destructive conflict resolution strategies in favour of more constructive and authoritative strategies.

> Mrs. Francis: all the questions are really eye openers, and I just thought about some of them… it made me think, "oh, yeah... yeah this is really not what I wanted", or "yeah, I never thought of it that way before", so I just think it's important for families to sometimes just sit down and go through that, the questionnaire, or a seminar together, because it does help your family kind of run smoother, or you find out where other people are at, because, I mean lots of days you just take everyone for granted, and yeah, sometimes, we all come from different perceptions, and if you don't sit down and ask people, "well why did you do that", or "how come you didn't do it this way?", or whatever, then you don't learn anything from your family, so I think yeah it was a really positive experience thinking about how to do

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things differently, or what you experience each day. So yeah, I think it's important (Francis Family Interview, 2005).

Several adolescents also noted that the process of completing the questionnaires and the daily log influenced how they thought about their own behaviour during conflictual interactions with their parents. As one teen stated about completing the log: "as soon as I was typing about myself and how I was being, that made me think more about what I can do next time..." (Jack; Francis Family Interview, 2005). Likewise, Alex Sampson noted the following: "some of our arguing has gotten a little bit better. I try and do those things a little bit better" (Sampson Family Interview 2005). Such information from both parents and teens suggests that that the act of reflecting for each individual may indeed act to influence their behaviour in subsequent interactions. This finding has important implications for parents, parent educators and therapists alike, suggesting that simply taking the time to actively reflect on interactions within the family system may be sufficient to initiate a change process.

Parents also identified that it is sometimes easy to focus on the negative interactions with an adolescent instead of positive interactions. They further indicated that when they focused on at least some positive behaviours, they noticed a decrease in conflict in the parent-adolescent dyad. Again, this focus on positive behaviours reinforces many current practices of therapists and parent educators as they strive to reframe the experience of parents in the parent-child relationship. Keeping perspective too was noted as parents tried to decide how to respond to their adolescent's behaviour. Mr. Robinson: "you know the yelling...I don't like the yelling because I don't think it solves a whole lot and yelling over

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little things...you know, there's time to pick when you want to do something; when you want to get your point across..." (Robinson Family Interview, 2005). Mothers, in particular seemed to be more likely to indicate that they overreacted and were more likely to admit that they sometimes regretted their response to their adolescent during conflict. This is likely due to the fact that mothers in this sample, tended to have more instances of conflict with their adolescents than did fathers. Mrs. Allen: "I'm very reactive, and I've had to backpedal lots of times with my kids because I look at the situation and automatically in my head I know I'm giving the kid trouble, I think they deserve trouble in my mind, and then I find out after talking to them that really, that isn't exactly what happened" (Allen Family Interview, 1995). It may be that the multiple roles that many of the mothers in this sample had (most worked outside the home) exacerbated their feelings of stress and burnout.

Conflict as a Developmental Task

Finally, parents in 3 of 5 families specifically identified conflict as an opportunity to learn and develop, and saw it as a natural process of the adolescent-parent relationship. These parents did not see conflict as a solely negative experience. This attitude towards conflict for these parents left a sense that they did not feel all was lost because of a conflict with their adolescent; rather these parents seemed to be more at peace with the notion that they do have, and would continue to have, conflict with their adolescent. They saw the independence striving by their adolescent as a normal developmental process and they wanted their adolescent to know that it was okay to disagree: Mrs. Allen: "because being

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13, and wanting to become his own man, he doesn't just accept that as his parents, that he should just do what he's told" (Francis Family Interview, 2005).

> Mr. Robinson: Conflict is good at certain times because you learn from it, [Mrs. Robinson - yes, right] or hopefully you learn from it, and I think learning is growing...like growing up... so...and that's what I think the kids do, like it's part of adolescence and maybe Mrs. Robinson and I don't handle them all the right way but I think it's just normal stages of life ...(Robinson Family Interview, 2005).

Parents and Adolescents: Final Thoughts

In closing the interviews, each adolescent and each parent were asked individually, what message they wanted the other partner in the dyad to have from participating in the research. Family members' reflections back to each other can be important directions for parent educators, family counsellors, therapists, and families themselves, to examine in managing the day-to-day conflicts that are inevitable in the parent-adolescent dyad. The question asked and subsequent responses are outlined below:

> *If you could share one thing with your teen (or your parents) about your family and dealing with conflict, what would it be?*

The Francis Family:

The Francis parents indicated that overall they found their son's communication style was difficult for them. They indicated that they do not feel they receive much

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consistent feedback from Jack, and parents identified that sometimes, as a result, they are then unsure how to approach Jack:

> Mr. Francis: well you know, we often say that we love him and stuff like that. We don't get much response from him, it's sort of like he ignores you, I mean, he probably hears you, but it will be nice to kind of have a response from him... (Mrs. Francis: yeah) (Francis Family Interview, 2005).

Jack also identified that there was a difference in communication styles between he and his parents, which was difficult for him. He often felt that his parents would repeat requests multiple times and he expressed a desire that he be allowed to do things on his own timeline instead of on theirs. He admitted to not responding to his parents requests and avoiding tasks, and he further expressed a wish that his parents would request compliance a single time rather than multiple times. In this case, the parent-adolescent dyad is out of synch with respect to expectations around communication as well as expectations around a timeline for completion of tasks. From both a practical perspective as well as a therapeutic standpoint it underlines the importance of working towards common expectations and acceptable goals for important family factors such as communication styles.

The Sampson Family:

Mrs. Sampson, Alex's mother described significant ongoing conflict in the parent-adolescent dyad and also indicated both frustration with how to manage this conflict, and a sense of weariness and stress which she felt was impacting her ability to utilize more constructive strategies. She too, identified communication with her adolescent as

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problematic, and wished that they could develop a relationship where they could communicate more openly with each other. In addition, throughout the course of the interview, Mrs. Sampson came to realize that old conflicts she had had with her husband, and her notion that sometimes her children emanate characteristics that remind her of him, interfered with her relationship with her adolescents. Her message to Alex was around the need to work on their relationship:

> Mrs. Sampson: I think then, what I would hope to achieve from this is engaging him in discussion where he expresses the concerns he has, rather than him trying to say what he thinks I want to hear or some sort of prepared answer... you know, I'd like to hear an honest response from him that's really sincere and what he really thinks. Not anything else; and I think if I can engage him in that sort of way then I think we can move on…building a relationship.. I think I have a very bizarre relationship with Alex. I mean, I love him like more than I can express...uhmmm... I just have a vision of him that he's not complying too... and so somehow, I have to back off…and he has to come a little bit closer to the middle ground. But somehow [at this point] we're not communicating that... (Sampson Family Interview, 2005).

Interestingly, Alex also identified communication in the adolescent-parent dyad as problematic. He, like some of the other teens, indicated that he just wants wanted to feel as though he was listened to. Alex: "I think maybe she could give me more chance to talk sometimes" (Sampson Family Interview, 2005). This need to be truly listened too came out in several of the adolescent interviews along with the sense that even though their parents listened to what they had to say, adolescents felt that they did not really have an

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opportunity to maintain their own opinion about issues. They felt instead, that their parents listening to them was more about their parent's desire to make them (the adolescent) come to see that the adults point of view was more correct that their own. Adolescents in several families indicated they often gave in to parents' insistence about this and agreed with their parents' during a conflict despite the fact that they felt their opinion had been disregarded and that they did not actually agree. Adolescents in several families specifically indicated that they often agreed with parents in this manner in order to end a conflict. Parents, on the other hand, did not seem to be aware that the agreement from their teens was not 'true' agreement. This underlies again, the need for therapists, and other helpers, to support families in their development of listening and communication skills.

The Peters Family

The parents in the Peters family also felt that openness in communication was the most important thing they could share with their daughter as a result of participating in this study. This openness in communication was something parents were working on in their own relationship and could be seen throughout the interview as a main theme for this family. They replied with the following comments when asked what they would like to share with their adolescent about conflict and conflict resolution:

> Mrs. Peters: To always be open [Mr. Peters - yeah], express your feelings, don't hide them, don't think you're better than anybody else, don't think it's going to go away if you don't talk about them, that's my new motto and Susan knows it...
>
> Mr. Peters: Yeah - it's easier to say it now, and get it over with, rather than try and sort it out later...(Peter's Family Interview, 2005).

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Interestingly, both adolescent girls who participated in this study had similar messages for their mothers – they felt their mothers needed to 'lighten up'. The parents of adolescent girls (2 of 5 families) did seem to identify more conflict around personal freedom type issues of clothing, makeup, and jewellery in addition to the other daily hassle type issues they had in common with families of adolescent boys. As has been suggested by Renk, Liljquist, Simpson and Phares (2005), it may be that gender differences exist in the parenting of girls and boys, which is reflected by these adolescent girls notion that their mothers are too strict. When asked what message Susan would like to share with her parents about conflict, she replied:

Susan: that my mom should lighten up a little bit (Peters Family Interview, 2005).

The Allen Family:

The Allen parents, as well as the Robison parents both made specific note of importance of conflict as a part of development for adolescents. In the Allen family in particular, Mrs. Allen noted that conflict was normal and even productive with respect to developmental progress and she (especially) seemed more at ease with conflict exchanges than the other mothers in the sample were. Likewise Mr. Robinson (the Robinson family) noted the same sentiment and he also seemed to be less perturbed by conflictual exchanges with his adolescent than other parents. Interestingly, in both families, the other parent (Mr. Allen and Mrs. Robinson) seemed to be more stressed over parent-adolescent conflict than did their parenting partners (Mrs. Allen and Mr. Robinson). Mr. Allen and Mrs. Robinson also noted other messages (besides the message that conflict is important for

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learning/development) for their adolescent during the interview. This is an important factor clinically as it may suggest that a more positive view of conflict in the parent-adolescent dyad can lead to more functional interactions between parents and adolescents and lead to less stress on the part of parents when conflict does arise. This difference would seem to exist even between parents in the same family.

> Mrs. Allen: I would say that it's normal, and it's healthy to have conflict, and as long as we work together to find a solution then we'll both come out knowing each other better from it.
>
> Mr. Allen: I think I tell him that he needs to be more understanding of our side, of where were coming from, that we're not trying to be mean, but we're just trying to do what's best for him (Allen Family, 2005).

For Eric, fairness was a consistent theme throughout his interview and was addressed numerous times with respect to his perception of inequality between him and his sister. It was no surprise that Eric identified equal treatment as part of the message that he felt was most important to convey to his parents. What was interesting was that Eric also identified the sense that while his parents claimed to listen to him, he felt they did not particularly take what he had to offer in a discussion seriously. He felt that his parents most frequently used discussion as an opportunity to impress upon him the 'correctness' of their views over his. Eric was one of the adolescents that indicated that often he would break down and agree with his parents so as to simply end a conflict. Both of these themes are reflected in Eric's message to his parents: Eric: "[I'd like them] probably to be more equal, and like be more, like be more open-minded about the actual argument itself, instead of

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having a, you know, it's 'this way or no way idea'" (Allen Family Interview). It was even more telling when Eric's mother stated the following changes in her own thinking and behaviour in response to her participation in the study:

> Mrs. Allen: I think that I have been more aware of when we have conflict and I think I've been trying to be more fair in dealing with him because sometimes I think, as a parent, we just only see our own side, and in as much as I try to give him his own time to talk, I don't always open my mind to what he's saying, I give him the time because I know that he deserves it, but sometimes I don't find that I'm really opening myself to listening to him. But I think I've been trying to do that more, just trying to respect his side, and try to understand or remember what it was like to be a 13 year old, and to feel like all the adults around you aren't listening (Allen Family Interview, 2005).

The Robinson Family:

The Robinson parents, most especially Mr. Robinson (like Mrs. Allen), identified that the experience of conflict in the parent-adolescent dyad as part of a normal developmental process. Mr. Robinson: "I think the kids are growing and they are trying to feel where they belong and what they should do..." (Robinson Family Interview, 2005). Mr. Robinson also described a more casual and easygoing relationship with his children which led to less stress on his part about conflict and further seemed to allow him a closer relationship to his children in which they were more open communicators. Mr. Robinson also underlined the importance of open communication in the parent-adolescent dyad. Mr.

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Robinson: "well I'd just like Amanda to talk about it, tell us the truth and be open...you know [Mrs. Robinson: mhmm, yeah] (Robinson Family Interview, 2005).

Amanda, like her parents, stated that she and they did not have a lot of conflict and further that she felt pretty luck to have such generally understanding parents. She still did, like Susan, identify a desire that her relationship between herself and her mother evolve to a more easygoing and relaxed state. When Amanda was asked what message that she wanted to share with her parents about conflict and conflict resolution, she stated "uh...that my mom needs to lighten up...and uhh...[long pause] I don't know...that's probably it" (Robinson Family Interview, 2005).

Across all the families, the importance of communication and improving communication within the parent-adolescent dyad came across as the most significant theme of importance that family members wanted to share with each other. This highlights the importance of communication skill teaching in both family education and clinical practice.

Original Contributions and Final Conclusions

Feldman and Gehring, (1988) identified the importance of examining the non-clinical family to begin to demonstrate the influence of the family systems constructs in everyday life. The purpose of this study was to explore and come to a better understanding of conflict between the parent and the early adolescent with the notion of multiple family systems influencing how parents and adolescents negotiate their way through conflict and conflict resolution. It was also to better understand each dyadic participant's perceptions of conflict within the parent-adolescent pair and to examine family functioning as it pertained

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to conflict resolution. Unique and important features of this study included the collection data from both the adolescent and their parent(s) and the use of multiple methods to gain a more full understanding of the parent-adolescent conflict experience. Data collection tools were similar to those used in clinical practice and included retrospective questionnaires, interview methods, and also through more immediate daily log data, which were completed by both adult and adolescent participants. The importance of multiple methods of data collection in both clinical practice and research was highlighted by the enhanced understanding of parent-adolescent experiences of conflict in this study, which was provided by the inclusion of several different data collection tools. This study focused on families that were selected from non-clinical populations for a specific reason – all families experience conflict. Often, families who are studied are those who are experiencing the most difficulties in our communities, and the strategies and information we learn from them may or may not extend to supporting the typical family unit. The data derived from these efforts have delineated numerous practical and clinical (or therapeutic) implications:

Consistency in parenting and daily routine was viewed by parents as an important mediator and preventive factor for conflict in the parent-adolescent dyad. Despite being seen as important, consistency was still sometimes difficult for parents to achieve and maintain. Regular use of constructive versus destructive conflict resolution strategies was also seen by families to be important, however all families described regular use of both types of strategies. Stress, most particularly maternal stress, was also seen to decrease the likelihood that constructive strategies would be used. Stress management, specific skill teaching related to constructive conflict resolution strategies and strategies for consistency are all important factors for parent educators, parents themselves or therapists in clinical

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populations therapists to consider as they develop a plan for parents and adolescents in their practice.

The act of reflection was seen by parents, and to a lesser degree, adolescents as change inducing. Reflection was achieved through the interview session and also through the completion of the clinical questionnaires. It may be that reflection alone could be a powerful initial change strategy in a clinical setting. It is also likely that adolescents become increasingly more proficient at participating in self-reflective activities as they move further along the developmental trajectory into mid-adolescence and beyond. Support for parents to look for positive features in their adolescent's behaviour and in the parent-adolescent relationship was suggested by parents as an important factor in keeping the parent-adolescent relationship healthy. A focus on negative interactions was seen, particularly in one family, to be more likely to increase the degree of conflict and negative emotionality in the parent adolescent dyad.

Conflict, when seen as a developmental task, was less stressful to parents. From a practical point of view, education of parents about adolescent development, and the development of the family with an adolescent, as a subsystem, might be an important consideration in supporting improved conflict resolution in the dyad.

Communication was seen by a majority of families as the most important factor in conflict resolution. As such, it likely embodies an important set of skills that both parents and adolescents could formally be taught. It is interesting to note that both adolescents and adults identified communication skill needs, making it important in a clinical setting, to provide training and support to both parent and adolescent family members versus seeing

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the adolescent or parents in isolation from the other family members. This supports the directions of many therapists and helpers in a clinical setting.

The notion that parents and adolescents may well both perceive a conflict to have occurred does not suggest that they interpret the conflict to have the same meaning or to be about the same underlying issue. In some instances, adolescents feel that parents do not truly listen to them and consider their point of view, while parents feel that once they have adolescent agreement, a conflict is resolved. Additional exploration of these issues both within a clinical setting and also within a research environment is important to better understand the interaction that occurs between the adolescent and their parents in the perception, management and resolution of conflict.

Developing an understanding of conflict and conflict resolution is complex and multifaceted. While difficult to conduct, studies which attempt to consider conflict and conflict resolution in broader, multiple factor designs would seem to have the best chance of helping researchers and practitioners alike in their guiding of parents and adolescents as they make their way through the complex experience of conflict and conflict resolution.

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Methodological Considerations and Difficulties

Sampling challenges

Methodological challenges existed in the recruitment of a sample for this study. Despite numerous efforts to recruit families from multiple sources, it still proved quite difficult to attract families who were willing to participate. Informally, I chatted with several of the families that initially agreed to participate but subsequently chose not to complete questionnaire packages or be interviewed for the study to get a sense of what was affecting their decision to participate. In general, several themes emerged regarding participation, some of which were expected and some of which highlight the difficulties in conducting research on sensitive topics such as parent-adolescent conflict, and may guide future projects. The themes which families identified, and were expected to account for some reluctance to participate, included the following:

- Families felt overwhelmed with other obligations and did not feel they had the time to participate.
- One parent was willing (usually the mother) to participate; however either the adolescent or second parent was not willing to participate (usually the father) as they perceived it would be too time consuming.
- Families indicated that they got so busy with other things that they simply forgot to complete the materials (interestingly, several families who indicated this were given second packages to complete and still were not able to return them – it may be that other, unspoken factors also contributed to their difficulty remembering).

Less expected and perhaps more important in the design of future studies included the following: Several parents indicated that asking their adolescent to complete questionnaire

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information which indicated the adolescents' perception of parental discipline strategies which would be held in confidence from the parents was simply too risky. Parents did not feel comfortable allowing the researcher to have access to information in this way and they further felt that they could be at risk of their adolescent reporting information, which would then subject the family to involvement with child welfare agencies. Parents felt this way even when they could identify that they did not use abusive strategies when managing behaviour – they simply did not trust how their adolescent perceived and/or would report parent-adolescent interactions. Further supporting this notion of parent fear of adolescent responses was evident in the fact that mothers in several families who did participate in the study admitted to reading their adolescents responses prior to submitting them to the investigator. This fear of reprisal poses significant challenges in the collection of data from multiple sources in the family and given the responsibility of the researcher to protect the best interests of those less powerful, in this case the adolescent, it is difficult to see how such sampling problems might be avoided in the future. It certainly does point to the importance of the use of qualitative techniques for research into the issues of family conflict, given the sensitive nature of the topic.

Problems with Retrospective Data Collection

Another theme which was consistently addressed amongst 4 of the 5 participating families, involved the difficulties that parents and teens had in remembering instances of conflict when attempting to retrospectively describe an incidence of conflict and conflict resolution between their adolescent and themselves. Even in a family where conflict was

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more frequent, and even when parents and teens were asked to describe an incident from the recent past (the past month) they frequently noted that it was difficult to remember:

> Interviewer: so now I want you to tell me about the most difficult conflict you've had in the past month...think about the last month; the most difficult or biggest conflict you've had with Amanda...and I want you to tell me about it....
>
> Mrs. Robinson: oh...Jennifer, I can't remember yesterday! [Mr. Robinson - yeah]...a big conflict...[long pause]
>
> Mr. Robinson: I haven't run into conflict with Amanda in a long time
>
> Mrs. Robinson: I'm sure I have....[long pause] hmph.....
>
> Mr. Robinson: I can't remember...you and her were in an argument at home, but I don't remember when that was...[long pause] couldn't have been a big one if you can't remember it...[long pause] (Robinson Family Interview, 2005)

Parents indicated that conflict that seemed significant at the time of an incident was often difficult to remember even a short time after. Parents found it easier to report on conflict that had happened either the day of or week of the interview. This supports the notion that a Daily Log type collection of data or some other immediate reporting mechanism may be important to get a true notion of the type, degree and resolution of conflict between parents and adolescents. That said, adolescents were less articulate about their interactions and their experiences of conflict with their parents in both Daily Log and Interview sessions. It seemed difficult for adolescents (at least initially for some) to share the details about conflict and the details about their relationships within the family unit. In these respects, parents were much more open and forthcoming with the same information.

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It may be that adolescents require significantly more time to open up to a researcher than do adults, and this factor could be an important consideration in future research design.

Parent responses:

> Interviewer: Tell me about the most difficult conflict you had in the past month with Alex. The one that stands out the most to you...
>
> Mrs. Sampson: These questions about the most this and the most that...the problem is that when they're in the past, they're extreme at the time, they're intense at the time but once they're gone, they find a kind of find a place for themselves, and they're not as big. You kind of let go of them. Till the next one...So I find that a difficult question...uhmm.. there are lots, I mean we've had huge conflicts over the last month... uhmm...[long pause]
>
> Interviewer: Is there one the kind of stands out to you?...
>
> Mrs. Sampson: I don't know if there's any one particular one. I just can't recall anything, I'll probably remember one after you go...uhmm...[long pause] (Sampson Family Interview, 2005)

> Interviewer: so those are kind of like some day-to-day things that you guys have conflict over, are there any other kind of more major things that you found yourself dealing with in last month or couple of months that you were taken aback by that you had conflict over?

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Mrs. Allen: I can't even remember, I think it was when we were doing the survey, we had a big thing. And I can't remember what it was....(Allen Family Interview, 2005).

Teen responses:

Interviewer: I want you to think for minute back to the most difficult conflict you had in the past month with your mom... can you think about it the most difficult one…

Alex: Not really...(Sampson Family Interview, 2005)

Interviewer: so I want you to think about the most difficult conflict you've had with your parents in about the last month....can you think of one conflict that stands out in your mind?....[long pause]

Amanda: uhmm...not really...(Robinson Family Interview, 2005).

Final Thoughts

While the methodological difficulties proved challenging at times, they also served to highlight several important practical and research implications. Researchers and practitioners commonly use questionnaire forms asking for retrospective data as a more quantitative measure of family problems and child behavioural issues. The difficulties that emerged in this research that were most telling was that family members had considerable difficulty in recalling specifics with respect to conflict resolution. It is likely that these same difficulties exist in a clinical setting. This would seem to suggest the importance of

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having families participate in multiple methods of providing data, including a more immediate data collection or tracking of a problem before a therapist or family counselor begins to work on an issue with families rather than simply relying on referral or presenting problem data which may not accurately reflect a family's current experience. Also, while participant recruitment is generally not problematic in a clinical setting, the openness or reluctance of families or individual family members may indeed present as a problem, especially if families are seeking help as a requirement of another agency (i.e. as required by a child welfare agency). Repeated interaction with families is likely to improve their sense of security and also likely to increase the openness with which they communicate with both the researcher and the therapist. This would seem to be even more important with adolescent clients or participants and still important, although perhaps to a lesser degree, with adult participants.

Families have much to teach therapists and researchers about how to they interact and function. For example, in the past 30 years we have seen much controversy over notions such as the stress and storm of adolescence, which demonstrates how difficult it can be to understand how families function. The challenges of understanding family functioning is reflected in the complexity of interactions that exist in the family and serves to influence how parents and adolescents interact and how therapists and researchers understand families. This study has enabled me to have a small look at a set of typical families and begin to understand how their members relate to each other. The work of understanding families is far from finished. This work will continue for researchers, therapists and families themselves. For researchers, larger samples, additional interview opportunities, and the inclusion of sibling information are all examples of manners in

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which this study could be extended to provide additional detail about conflict resolution in families, within the parent-adolescent dyad and beyond the dyad, in the family unit as a whole. For clinicians and family therapists, this study reinforces the importance of the use of multiple methods of data collection (e.g. clinical interview, questionnaire type data collection, and behavioural tracking) within the family unit in order to get a more in depth understanding of a family's interactions and clinical challenges. For families, the understanding of the complexity of perceptions and the differences that exist between parents and adolescents with respect to experiences of conflict, and in particular with regards to the resolution of conflict may support and assist them to have an improved understanding of their parent-adolescent relationships.

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APPENDIX A:

Phase One – Information Forms and Revised CTS

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Information Form – Phase One

Dear Parents:

I am a PhD student in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Christina Rinaldi. I am researching the conflict resolution strategies between parents and adolescents for completion of the requirements of my Doctoral degree in Educational Psychology.

I am hoping to learn more about how conflict and the resolution of conflict between a parent and their adolescent are affected by overall family functioning and by the parent-adolescent relationship.

There are two phases to this project. In the first phase, I have attended grade 6 and 7 classrooms in your community area, have explained the project to your adolescent asking them to bring this information letter home so that your family can decide if you'd like to participate in my study. You are eligible to participate if you live in a household with two parents and at least one early adolescent between the ages of 11-14. The first phase of the project will involve the completion of several questionnaires by each parent and your son or daughter. If you have more than one early adolescent in the required age bracket you can choose which adolescent you would like to be the target of this project.

Completion of the questionnaires would take approximately 30 minutes of each participating family members time (30 minutes for each parent and 30 minutes for your adolescent). Participation in this project is completely voluntary.

In the second phase of the study, I looking for some families to volunteer to further participate in a series of Daily Log activities. Participation in the Daily Log would again be completely voluntary. If you choose to participate in the Daily Log phase your family members would be asked to independently complete a Daily Log outlining the conflicts or disagreements had during the day. Completion of the Daily Log would take approximately 15 minutes each day for 7 consecutive days. I will meet personally with families who agree to participate in the Daily Log to assist them with any questions about completing the log pages. Daily Log pages may be completed in computerized format or in paper-and-pencil format. You may indicate on the next page which phases of the study you would be willing to participate in. Your involvement in the first phase of the study does not obligate you to participate in the second part.

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At the culmination of the study, a workshop will be provided at your child's school, which will detail the general findings of the study and will provide information about parent-adolescent conflict resolution and the development of effective conflict resolution skills. All participants are invited to attend along with school personnel.

All information that you provide through your participation in this study will be kept confidential. Further, you will not be identified in the thesis or in any report or publication based on this research. There are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. Attached please find a sheet outlining counselling resources in your area if you should wish to discuss further any issues that arise from this study. The data collected through this study will be kept for a period of *5 years* in a secure location.

If you are willing to participate in the first or subsequent phase of the study, please complete and return the enclosed consent forms in the self-addressed, stamped envelope within the next week. If after receiving this letter, you have any questions about this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participating, please feel free to contact myself at (403) 245-8883 or Dr. Christina Rinaldi at (780) 492-7471. You may also email me with questions at jennifer.lindquist@ualberta.ca.

As with all University of Alberta projects involving human participants, this study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Faculties of Education and Extension at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at (780) 492-3751.

Thank you in advance for your co-operation in my research.
Yours sincerely,
Jennifer Lindquist
Ph – (403)245-8883
Email – jennifer.lindquist@ualberta.ca

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Consent Form – Phase One

Please circle your answers:

Do you consent to completing the questionnaires and having your adolescent complete the questionnaires?
Parent One: YES or **NO**
Parent Two: YES or **NO**
Adolescent: YES or **NO**
Have you received and read a copy of the attached Information Sheet?
Parent One: YES or **NO**
Parent Two: YES or **NO**
Adolescent: YES or **NO**

Do you understand that you can quit taking part in this study at any time?
Parent One: YES or **NO**
Parent Two: YES or **NO**
Adolescent: YES or **NO**

Do you know what the information you say will be used for?
Parent One: YES or **NO**
Parent Two: YES or **NO**
Adolescent: YES or **NO**

Are you willing to participate in the Daily Log phase of this study? **YES** or **NO**
**If yes, please provide your contact information so that I may contact you to arrange a training time and to share the materials with you for the log task.

Your phone number:
Good time of day/day of week to phone you:

PRINT YOUR NAME HERE

SIGN YOUR NAME HERE

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Demographic Information Form

Dear Participants,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project. Below you will find some general questions about your family. Please complete each question in full and return this sheet with your questionnaire forms.
Thanks,
Jennifer

Family Info:	Total Number of children (under 18) living in your home:	
	Number of years as a family:	
	Birth order of participating adolescent: □ 1st(oldest) □ middle child □ Last (youngest)	
	Family Income Level: □ less than 30,000 □ 30-60,000 □ 60-90,000 □ Over 90,000	
Parent One:	Age: Sex: □ M □ F	
	1st Marriage? □ Yes □ No Number of marriages:	Number of Children: Ages of children:
	Children living outside the home? □ Yes □ No Ages:	
	Highest level of Education: □ Some High school □ Grade 12 or equivalent □ Some College/University □ College or University Certificate □University undergrad degree □ Graduate Degree □ Other: (describe)	
Parent Two:	Age: Sex: □ M □ F	
	1st Marriage? □ Yes □ No Number of marriages:	Number of Children: Ages of children:
	Children living outside the home? □Yes□ No Ages:	
	Highest level of Education: □ Some High school □ Grade 12 or equivalent □ Some College/University □ College or University Certificate □University undergrad degree □ Graduate Degree □ Other: (describe)	
Adolescent:	Age: Sex: □ M □ F	
	Grade in School: □ 6 □ 7 □ 8 □ 9 Other: My school is a: Jr. High School □ OR a: High school □	

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Conflict Tactics Scales - REVISED

Child-Adult Form (CTS2-CA)

Relationships Between Myself and My Parents

No matter how well you and your parents get along there are times when you disagree, get annoyed with each other, want different things from each other, or just have spats or fights because they are in a bad mood, are tired, or for some other reason. You and your parents also may have many different ways of trying to settle differences with each other. This is a list of things that might happen when you and your parents had differences or were angry with each other.

If your mother and father (or stepmother or stepfather) were not living together in the past year and you were living with your mother, please answer about your mother and the man she was living with then. If you were living with your father or stepfather, but not your mother, please answer about your father and the woman he was living with then.

Please circle how many times each of you did the things on the list in the past year. If neither you or one of your parents did these things in the last year, but it happened in some other year before that, circle "7".

How often did this happen in the past year?

1= Once that year
2=Twice that year
3=3-5 times that year
4=6-10 times that year
5=11-20 times that year
6=More than 20 times that year
7=Not that year, but it did happen before
0=This never happened

1p	Mother showed she cared about me when we disagreed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
1c	I showed I cared about mother even when we disagreed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
2p	Father showed he cared about me even when we disagreed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
2c	I showed I cared about father even when I disagreed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
3p	Mother explained her side of a disagreement to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
3c	I explained my side of a disagreement to mother.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
4p	Father explained his side of a disagreement to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
4c	I explained my side of a disagreement to father	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
5p	Mother insulted or swore at me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
5c	I insulted or swore at mother	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
6p	Father insulted or swore at me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
6c	I insulted or swore at father	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

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How often did this happen in the past year?

1= Once that year
2=Twice that year
3=3-5 times that year
4=6-10 times that year
5=11-20 times that year
6=More than 20 times that year
7=Not that year, but it did happen before
0=This never happened

7p	Mother threw something at me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
7c	I threw something at mother	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
8p	Father threw something at me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
8c	I threw something at father	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
13p	Mother showed respect for my feelings about an issue	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
13c	I showed respect for mother's feelings about an issue	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
14p	Father showed respect for my feelings about an issue	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
14c	I showed respect for father's feelings about an issue	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
17p	Mother pushed or shoved me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
17c	I pushed or shoved mother.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
18p	Father pushed or shoved me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
18c	I pushed or shoved father.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
25p	Mother called me fat or ugly (or another bad name)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
25c	I called mother fat or ugly (or another bad name).	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
26p	Father called me fat or ugly (or another bad name)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
26c	I called father fat or ugly (or another bad name)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
29p	Mother destroyed something belonging to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
29c	I destroyed something belonging to mother.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
30p	Mother destroyed something belonging to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
30c	I destroyed something belonging to father.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
35p	Mother shouted or yelled at me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
35c	I shouted or yelled at mother	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
36p	Father shouted or yelled at me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
36c	I shouted or yelled at father	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
39p	Mother said she was sure we could work out a problem.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
39c	I said I was sure we (mother and I) could work out a problem.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
40p	Father said he was sure we could work out a problem.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
40c	I said I was sure we (father and I) could work out a problem.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
45p	Mother grabbed me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
45c	I grabbed mother	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
46p	Father grabbed me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
46c	I grabbed father	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0

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How often did this happen in the past year?

1= Once that year
2=Twice that year
3=3-5 times that year
4=6-10 times that year
5=11-20 times that year
6=More than 20 times that year
7=Not that year, but it did happen before
0=This never happened

49p	Mother stomped out of the room or house or yard when she had a disagreement with me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
49c	I stomped out of the room or house or yard when I had a disagreement with mother.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
50p	Father stomped out of the room or house or yard when he had a disagreement with me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
50c	I stomped out of the room or house or yard when I had a disagreement with father.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
59p	Mother suggested a compromise to a disagreement with me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
59c	I suggested a compromise to a disagreement with mother.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
60p	Father suggested a compromise to a disagreement with me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
60c	I suggested a compromise to a disagreement with father.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
67p	Mother did something to spite me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
67c	I did something to spite mother.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
68p	Father did something to spite me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
68c	I did something to spite father.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
77p	Mother agreed to try a solution to a disagreement suggested by me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
77c	I agreed to try a solution to a disagreement suggested by mother.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
78p	Father agreed to try a solution to a disagreement suggested by me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
78c	I agreed to try a solution to a disagreement suggested by father.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	In case we have missed anything, please use the items below to fill in other things that may have happened durin an argument:	
	OTHER thing mother did to me during an argument:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	I did it to mother	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	Father did it to me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	I did to father	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	OTHER thing mother did to me (Please fill in what happened) during an argument:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	I did it to mother	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	Father did it to me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	I did to father	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0

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Relationships Between Myself and My Child (CTS Parent – Child form)

Children often do things that are wrong, disobey, or make their parents angry. We would like to know what you have done when your child did something wrong or made you upset or angry.

The following is a list of things you might have done in the past year. Please circle how many times each of you did the things on the list in the past year. If you did not do these things in the last year, but it happened in some other year before that, circle "7".

Please answer these questions thinking about the last year:	1 time	2 times	3-5 times	6-10 times	11-20 times	More than 20 times	It happened but not this year	Never happened
1. Explained why something was wrong	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
2. Put him/her in "time out" (or sent to his/her room)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
3. Gave him/her something else to do instead of what he/she was doing wrong.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
4. Shouted, yelled, or screamed at him/her	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
5. Spanked him/her on the bottom with my bare hand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
6. Swore or cursed at him/her	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
7. Said you would send him/her away or kick him/her out of the house	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
8. Threatened to spank or hit him/her but did not actually do it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
9. Slapped him/her on the had, arm, or leg	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
10. Took away privileges or grounded him/her	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
11. Pinched him/her	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
12. Called him/her dumb or lazy or some other name like that	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
13. Slapped him/her on the face or head or ears	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
14. Discussed the issue and came up with a compromise	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
15. Did nothing when they disobeyed me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
In case we have missed anything, please use the items below to fill in other things that may have happened during a disagreement:								
16. **OTHER:**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
17. **OTHER:**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

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APPENDIX B:

Phase Two Information Forms and Daily Log Samples

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Information Form – Daily Log – Phase Two

This letter will be sent to those participants who complete the questionnaire and agree to participate in the Daily Log task.

Dear *Surname* Family:
I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in the follow-up Daily Log task. The task is a fundamental component of my Dissertation research investigating conflict resolution skills between parents and early adolescents. The purpose of the Daily Log is to examine in more detail the actual types of conflict that exist between parents and adolescents and to explore the kinds of strategies families use in solving these conflicts. Participation in the Daily Log is complete voluntary. You will be completing a Daily Log page each day for 7 consecutive days. Completion of each page is expected to take about 15 minutes of your time each day. All the information you provide will be held in the strictest confidence. You will not be identified in any thesis, report or publication resulting from this study.

The survey is designed so that it may be completed through Web. However, if you would rather complete the survey in paper and pencil form, I will provide you with the survey and stamped return envelopes. Furthermore, the survey web-site is password-protected, and programmed to collect responses on the survey items alone. That is, the site will not collect any information that could potentially identify you. If you choose to use the computerized transmission, each of your family members will be given an individualized password, which will enable you to access the survey.

You will receive a training session for completion of whichever type of Daily Log format you choose. If you would like to use the computerized format, you will require an internet enabled computer that each participating family member can access each day for the prescribed 7 days.

The data collected from this study will be accessed only by the researcher named above and will be maintained on a password-protected computer database. As well, the data will be electronically archived after completion of the study and maintained for two years after the research study has been completed and any submissions to journals have been completed.

This dissertation has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Faculties of Education and Extension at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at (780) 492-3751. If you have any questions regarding the research itself, please contact either myself at (403) 245-8883 or by email at jennifer.lindquist@ualberta.ca. or my supervisor, Dr. C. Rinaldi at (780) 492-7471.
I thank you in advance for your assistance,

Yours sincerely,
Jennifer Lindquist
Ph – (403)245-8883; Email – jennifer.lindquist@ualberta.ca

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Consent Form – Phase Two

Please circle your answers:

Do each of you consent to completing seven consecutive days of the Daily Log?
Parent One: YES or **NO**
Parent Two: YES or **NO**
Adolescent: YES or **NO**

Have you received and read a copy of the attached Information Sheet?
Parent One: YES or **NO**
Parent Two: YES or **NO**
Adolescent: YES or **NO**

Do you understand that you can quit taking part in this study at any time?
Parent One: YES or **NO**
Parent Two: YES or **NO**
Adolescent: YES or **NO**

Do you know what the information you say will be used for?
Parent One: YES or **NO**
Parent Two: YES or **NO**
Adolescent: YES or **NO**

First Parent PRINT YOUR NAME HERE	First Parent SIGN YOUR NAME HERE
Second Parent PRINT YOUR NAME HERE	Second Parent SIGN YOUR NAME HERE
Adolescent PRINT YOUR NAME HERE	Adolescent SIGN YOUR NAME HERE

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Daily Log

Parent Log

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Daily Log - Parent Version

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the daily log project. Below please find some important instructions regarding completing these pages:

***Please complete this survey for the next seven days in a row - just before bedtime each day. Please do not miss completing any day of log writing.**

***Please consider only the current day when you complete each log page. Do not include information about disagreements from previous days unless the disagreement also happened today.**

***Please complete the log pages on your own.**

***REMEMBER - A disagreement or a conflict is any major or minor interaction that involves a difference of opinion, whether it is mostly negative or mostly positive.**

1. Please rate your day in terms of feelings of stress at home:

- ☐ little or no stress
- ☐ Medium Stress
- ☐ Slightly more stress than usual
- ☐ A lot more stress than usual

2. Please rate your day in terms of feelings of stress at work

- ☐ little or no stress
- ☐ Medium Stress
- ☐ Slightly more stress than usual
- ☐ A lot more stress than usual

3. How many disagreements did you have with your child today? If the answer is none, please proceed to question 12

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1-3
- ☐ 4-6
- ☐ 7-9
- ☐ 10 or more

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4. Consider each disagreement separately. How many disagreements with your child occurred when only you were present (your spouse was NOT there)?

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1-3
- ☐ 4-6
- ☐ 7-9
- ☐ 10 or more

5. How many disagreements with your child occurred when BOTH you and your spouse were present?

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1-3
- ☐ 4-6
- ☐ 7-9
- ☐ 10 or more

6. Did any of the disagreements with your child occur DURING an argument with your spouse?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

7. Please consider the most serious disagreement you had with your child today. Describe it as fully as possible in the box below (The box will scroll down as you type)

8. How would you rate the severity of the above disagreement you had with your child today?

- ☐ minor disagreement - typical

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- ☐ moderate disagreement - somewhat typical
- ☐ serious disagreement - only infrequently happens
- ☐ Very severe disagreement - usually never happens

9. How did you and your child deal with the disagreement described

- ☐ Discussion and mutual agreement
- ☐ I withdrew from the discussion and refused to continue
- ☐ My child withdrew from the discussion and refused to continue
- ☐ My child insisted on having their way and I consented even though I didn't want to
- ☐ Verbal aggression (shouting, yelling, name calling)
- ☐ Physical aggression (hitting, kicking)
- ☐ Parent privilege - ie - the decision was a parent decision
- ☐ Other - please fill in what you did below:

Describe

10. Do you feel that the disagreement described was resolved or not?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

11. Was the way the disagreement resolved mostly positive or mostly negative?

- ☐ Positive
- ☐ Negative

12. Did you see or speak with your child today?

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- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

13. Please rate the number of disagreements you and your child had today:

- ☐ Very low number of disagreements - fewer disagreements than usual
- ☐ Very typical number of disagreements - usual number
- ☐ Somewhat higher number of disagreements - slightly more than usual
- ☐ Much higher than usual – many more disagreements than usual

Click here to finish

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Daily Log

Adolescent Log

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Daily Log -- Adolescent Version

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the daily log project. Below please find some important instructions regarding completing these pages:
****Please complete this survey for the next seven days in a row - just before bedtime each day. Please do not miss completing any day of log writing.**

****Please consider only the current day when you complete each log page. Do not include information about disagreements from previous days unless the disagreement also happened today.**

****Please complete the log pages on your own.**

****REMEMBER - A disagreement or a conflict is any major or minor interaction that involves a difference of opinion, whether it is mostly negative or mostly positive.**
Please answer every item

1. Please rate your day in terms of feelings of stress at home:

- ☐ Little or no stress
- ☐ Medium stress
- ☐ Slightly more stress than usual
- ☐ A lot more stress than usual

2. Please rate your day in terms of feelings of stress at school and with your friends:

- ☐ Little or no stress
- ☐ Medium stress
- ☐ Slightly more stress than usual
- ☐ A lot more stress than usual

3. Did you have a disagreement with your MOTHER today? If no, then go to question #10.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

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4. If yes, to the above question, how many disagreements did you have with HER?

- ☐ 1-3
- ☐ 4-6
- ☐ 7-9
- ☐ 10 or more

5. Please consider the most serious disagreement you had with your MOTHER today. Describe it as fully as possible below (the box will scroll down as you type):

6. How would you rate the severity of the above disagreement you had with your MOTHER today?

- ☐ minor disagreement - typical
- ☐ moderate disagreement - somewhat typical
- ☐ serious disagreement - only happens once and a while
- ☐ Very severe disagreement - usually never happens

7. How did you and your MOTHER deal with the disagreement described above?

- ☐ We discussed it and agreed on a solution we both like
- ☐ I went off to my room (or other place) without discussing it further
- ☐ My mom went off to her room (or other place) without discussing it further
- ☐ I convinced my mother to do what I wanted, but she still didn't like it
- ☐ Verbal aggression (shouting, yelling, name calling)
- ☐ Physical aggression (hitting, kicking)
- ☐ Parent decision - ie - my mother made the decision without asking me
- ☐ Other - please describe below

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Describe

8. Do you feel that the disagreement with your MOTHER described was resolved?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

9. How happy are you with how the disagreement with your MOTHER was handled?

- ☐ Very unhappy
- ☐ A little unhappy
- ☐ A little happy
- ☐ Very happy

10. Did you see or speak with your MOTHER today

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

11. Please rate the number of disagreements you and your MOTHER had today:

- ☐ Very low number of disagreements - fewer disagreements than usual
- ☐ Very typical number of disagreements - usual number
- ☐ Somewhat higher number of disagreements - slightly more than usual
- ☐ Much higher than usual - many more disagreements than usual

Please answer the questions below while thinking about your father.

12. Did you have a disagreement with your FATHER today? If no, please go to question #19.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

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13. If yes, to the above question, how many disagreements did you have with HIM?

- ☐ 1-3
- ☐ 4-6
- ☐ 7-9
- ☐ 10 or more

14. Please consider the most serious disagreement you had with your FATHER today. Describe it as fully as possible below (The box will scroll down as you type):

15. How would you rate the severity of the above disagreement you had with your FATHER today?

- ☐ minor disagreement – typical
- ☐ moderate disagreement - somewhat typical
- ☐ serious disagreement - only happens once and a while
- ☐ Very severe disagreement - usually never happens

16. How did you and your FATHER deal with the disagreement described above?

- ☐ We discussed it and agreed on a solution we both like
- ☐ I went off to my room (or other place) without discussing it further
- ☐ My dad went off to his room (or other place) without discussing it further
- ☐ I convinced my father to do what I wanted, but he still didn't like it
- ☐ Verbal aggression (shouting, yelling, name calling)
- ☐ Physical aggression (hitting, kicking)
- ☐ Parent decision - ie - my father made the decision without asking me
- ☐ Other - please describe below

Describe

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17. Do you feel that the disagreement with your FATHER described was resolved?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

18. How happy are you with how the disagreement with your FATHER was handled?

- ☐ Very unhappy
- ☐ A little unhappy
- ☐ A little happy
- ☐ Very happy

19. Did you see or speak with your FATHER today

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

20. Please rate the number of disagreements you and your FATHER had today:

- ☐ Very low number of disagreements - fewer disagreements than usual
- ☐ Very typical number of disagreements - usual number
- ☐ Somewhat higher number of disagreements - slightly more than usual
- ☐ Much higher than usual - many more disagreements than usual

Click here to finish

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APPENDIX C:

Semi-Structured Interview Outline

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Semi-Structured Interview Outline: Phase Two

With parents(together) and adolescent individually:

- Share individual Questionnaire Data results. Review questionnaire data with family member/s. Show FAM III profile for discussion. Possible questions:
    - Is there anything surprising about the results of your FAM III or CTS data?
- What types/kinds of conflict are most common for your family?
- Are there other types/kinds of conflict that are less frequent?
- How do you usually resolve common everyday conflict? Less frequent conflict?
- What things do you think usually cause these common types of conflict? What usually underlies these common conflicts? What frustrates you the most when you come up against these everyday conflicts? What do you think frustrates your teen/parent the most?
- When conflict is easily resolved, why do you think this is? What do you think is happening when it is not easily resolved?
- Do you think you and your teen/parent generally would agree on the 'true' meaning of your conflicts? Do you think this is important?
- Think about the most difficult conflict you have had and resolved in the past month. Describe how it was resolved. Were you satisfied with the resolution? Would you do anything different next time? What do you think impacted how things worked out?
- Did you learn anything or make any changes to your conflict management as a result of participating in this study?
- Is there anything important about conflict and its resolution that you think hasn't been addressed in your participation in this study?

Meet with family as a whole to close:

- Share CR resources with family including worksheets on Constructive Conflict Resolution, Family Meetings and Effective Communication (Appendix F).

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APPENDIX D:

Family Conflict Resources

The following print resources were provided to families who participated in both the questionnaire and interview portions of the study:

Usher, Carolyn, M. *Family-Life Skills: Creative Conflict Resolution.* BC Council for Families, Vancouver, BC.

Usher, Carolyn, M. *Family-Life Skills: The Family Council.* BC Council for Families, Vancouver, BC.

Usher, Carolyn, M. *Family-Life Skills: Effective Listening/Effective Talking.* BC Council for Families, Vancouver, BC.

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APPENDIX E:

Data Display Examples

FAM III Display Example

Conflict Tactics Display Example

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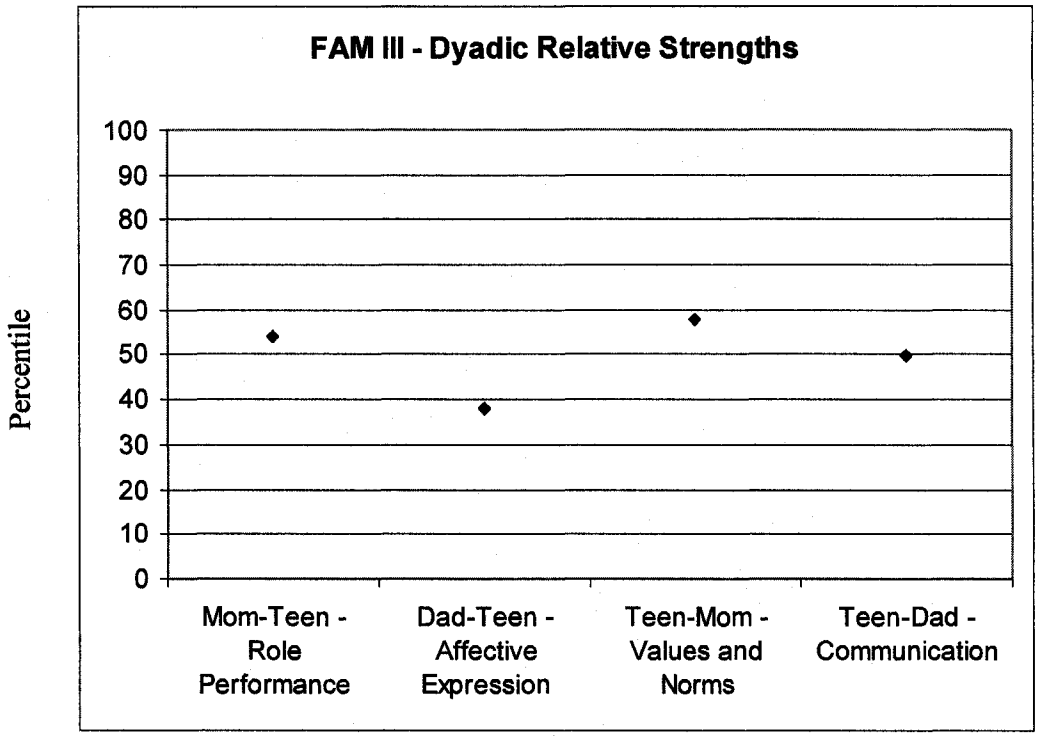
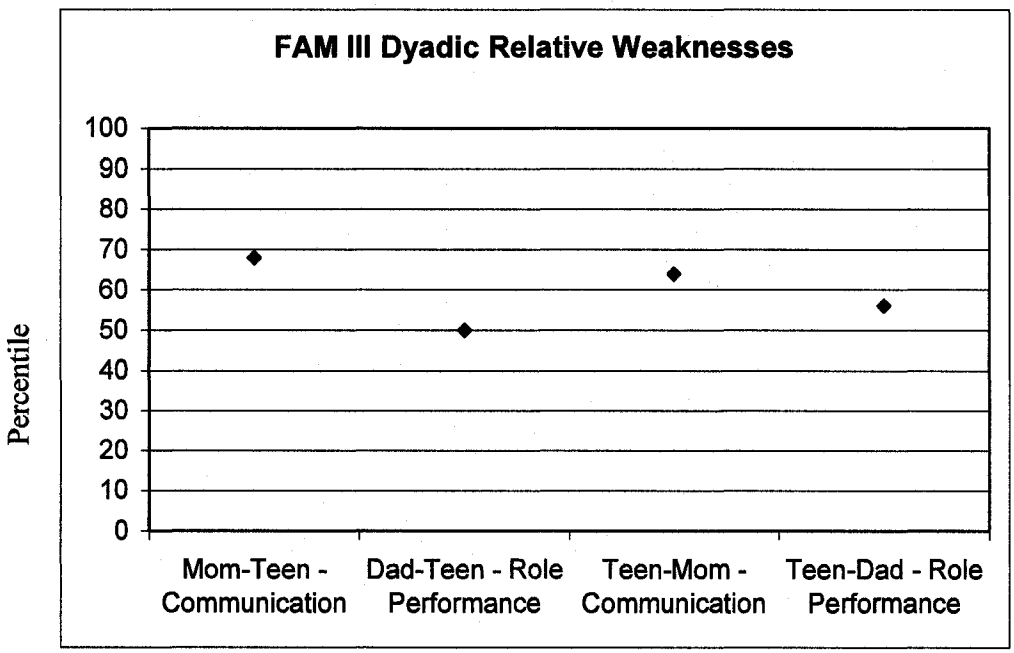
FAM III Display Example





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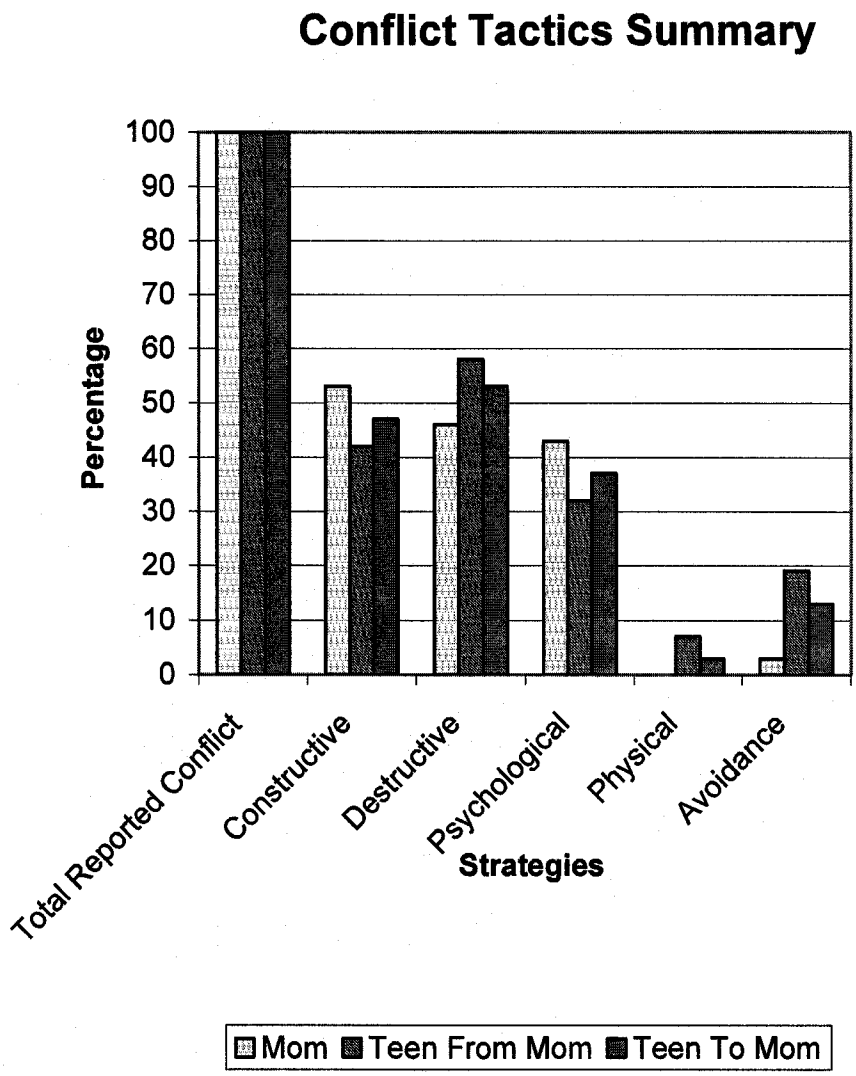
CTS Display Example



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APPENDIX F:

Coding Information

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A Priori Codes

Conflict Experience Parental Differences Perceptual Differences Reason Power / control Daily Hassles Homework Housework Sibling issues Major Conflict Frustrations Repetitious nature Teen resistance Interparental Conflict/differences Factors Family Factors Task Accomplishment Role Performance Communication Affective Expression Involvement Control Values and Norms Parent stress/spill over Interparental conflict Intergenerational Influence Developmental influence of Adolescence/ parenthood	Management Parental differences Constructive CR strategies Negotiation Communication Consequences Redirection Negative CR Strategies Psychological Strategies Physical Strategies Passive Strategies No strategy Nagging Wishes for future Parents Teens Parent/ Teen Reflections

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Inductive Codes

Conflict Experience	Protective Factors
Gender Differences	Extracurricular activities
Behaviour differences between environments	Spending quality time
Differences between children	Flexibility
Major events vs. daily hassles	Not isolated
Reason for Conflict	Management of Conflict
Daily Hassles	Parental differences
TV/Computer time	One parent diffusing conflict
Image/Dress	Conflict management is private
Getting up in the morning	Importance of remorse/learning
Purposeful conflict/arguing	Interparental Conflict
Mood swings	Reflections on Conflict and Conflict Resolution
Timing/importance of issue	Importance of consistency
Behaviour/attitude	Importance of consequences
Peer influences	Importance of reflection
Frustrations	Importance of Communication
Disrespect	Importance of praise
Feel not listened too	Importance of picking battles
Unrealized strength	
Lack of Fairness	
Lack of communication	
Insufficient responsibility	
Feel unappreciated	
Inconsistent parenting	
Factors influencing Conflict and Conflict Resolution	
Consistency of Parenting	
Importance of routine	
Personality/temperament	
Fears	
Parental expectations	
Parent feeling incompetent	
Importance of conflict	
Birth Order	
Trust	

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Emergent Themes and Endorsement by Family

Theme	Family
101: Francis Family 102: Sampson Family 103: Peters Family	104: Allen Family 105: Robinson Family L: Log entry
Conflict Experience	
Parental Differences	101, 103, 104, 105
Gender Differences	101, 103, 104, 105
Behaviour differences between environments	101, 102
Differences between children	102, 104
Perceptual differences	101L, 102, 102L, 103, 103L, 104, 104L, 105
Major events vs. daily hassles	102, 103, 104, 105
Reason for Conflict	
Power/control/freedom /independence	101, 102, 102L, 103, 104, 104L, 105
Daily Hassles	101, 102, 102L, 103, 104, 104L, 105, 105L
School work	101, 102, 103, 104, 105L
Housework	101, 102, 102L, 103, 104
TV/Computer time	101, 102, 102L, 103, 104, 105
Image/Dress	103, 105
Purposeful conflict/ arguing	101, 102, 103L, 104, 104L, 105
Mood swings	102, 103
Getting up in the morning	101, 102, 102L
Sibling issues/conflict	101, 101L, 102, 102L, 104, 104L, 105
Timing/importance of issue	101, 102, 103, 105
Behaviour/attitude	103, 104, 105, 105L
Peer influences	103, 104, 104L, 105
Adolescent and Parental development	102, 103, 104, 105
Major Events	105
Frustrations	
Repetitious nature	101, 101L, 102, 102L, 103, 104, 105, 105L
Should know better	101, 102, 103, 104
Teen resistance	101, 102, 104
Disrespect	101, 102, 102L, 103, 105
Feel not listened too	101, 102, 102L, 104, 105
Unrealized strength	102
Lack of Fairness	101, 102, 103, 104, 105
Lack of communication	101, 102, 104
Insufficient responsibility	101, 102, 103, 104L
Feel unappreciated	101, 102
Inconsistent parenting	103

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Factors influencing Conflict and Conflict Resolution	
Family Factors	
Involvement	101, 102, 104, 105
Role Performance	101, 102, 103, 104, 105
Task Accomplishment	103
Control	103, 105
Values and Norms	103
Consistency of Parenting	101, 103
Importance of routine	103, 105
Personality/temperament	101, 102, 104, 105
Fears	101, 102, 105
Intergenerational Influence	101, 102, 103, 105
Parental expectations	101, 102, 103, 104, 105
Parent feeling incompetent	102, 103, 104
Importance of conflict	101, 103, 104, 105
Birth Order	102, 104
Parent stress/overload/ frame of mind	101, 102, 105
Trust	103, 104, 104L, 105
Protective Factors	
Extracurricular activities	105
Spending quality time	103, 105
Flexibility	105
Not isolated	105
Management of Conflict	
Parental differences	101, 103, 104, 105
One parent diffusing conflict	101, 103, 105
Conflict management is private	101, 103
Importance of remorse/learning	103L, 104, 105
Interparental Conflict	102, 103, 103L, 105
Conflict Management Strategies	
Constructive	101, 102, 105
Negotiation	101, 103, 104
Communication	101, 102, 103, 103L, 104, 104L, 105
Consequences	101, 103, 103L, 104, 104L, 105
Redirection	101
Destructive	102
Psychological Strategies	101, 101L, 102, 102L, 103, 104, 104L, 105, 105L
Physical Strategies	--
Passive strategies	101, 102, 103, 104, 105
No strategy	101, 102, 102L, 103, 104, 105L
Nagging	101, 103, 104, 105

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Reflections on Conflict and Conflict Resolution	101, 102, 104
Importance of consistency	101, 104, 105
Importance of consequences	101, 104
Importance of reflection	101, 103, 104, 105
Importance of Communication	102, 104, 105
Importance of praise	104
Importance of picking battles	104, 105
Conflict as a learning experience	103, 104, 105
Wishes for future/message to other	101, 102, 103, 104, 105
Conflict is Quickly forgotten	102, 103, 104, 105

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