Exploring Young Adult Conflict Management Skill Development

Pauline Marcoux

*Edith Cowan University*

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Exploring Young Adult Conflict Management Skill Development

Pauline Marcoux

A report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Award of Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) Honours,
Faculty of Computing, Health and Science,
Edith Cowan University

October, 2008

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Dated: 19-12-08
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Table of Contents

Abstract ..................................................................................................... 2
Introduction ................................................................................................. 3
Issues Surrounding the Study of Young Adult Conflict Management Skill Development.....4
Young Adult Development and Conflict Management.................................................... 4
Conflict Management Research Issues, Complexities and Theories................................. 5
  Limitations of conflict management experimental study designs .................................... 6
  Potential mediating factors ..................................................................................... 7
  Defining and using conflict management in research ................................................. 8
Theory of Conflict Management Skill Development .................................................... 9
  Social learning theory .......................................................................................... 10
  Cognitive-contextual theory ............................................................................... 10
  Attachment theory ............................................................................................. 11
Research Findings on Young Adult Development of Conflict Management Skills .............11
Marital Conflict ............................................................................................... 13
Parent-child Conflict ......................................................................................... 16
Sibling-child Conflict ......................................................................................... 19
Family-of-Origin Characteristics ........................................................................... 19
Attachment Orientation ....................................................................................... 22
Conclusion ...................................................................................................... 23
References ...................................................................................................... 26
Guidelines for Contributions by Authors .................................................................. 30
Abstract ...................................................................................................... 33
Introduction .................................................................................................... 34
Conflict Management Skills: Family Influences ....................................................... 34
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Management Skills: Individual Factors/Influences</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Adult Conflict Management</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Current Study</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials and Procedures</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings and Interpretations</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Formation</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of focus</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-identity</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Systems</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-child conflict</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital conflict</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Situation Characteristics</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict opponent</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior experience</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain emotional control</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict topic/goal</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT AND YOUNG ADULTS

Conflict Management Skill Development and Young Adults: Identifying Theories, Influences and Developmental Pathways

Pauline Z Marcoux
Conflict Management Skill Development and Young Adults: Identifying Theories, Influences and Developmental Pathways

Abstract

This paper explores conflict management skill development of young adults. Although conflict management is a life-span issue, conflict management skills are of particular importance to young adults as they develop their identity and explore romantic relationships. The study of conflict management skills is complex and is underpinned by different theoretical approaches. These complexities and theories are presented. Findings from childhood to young adulthood are reviewed and summarised. Marital conflict, parent-child interactions, family-of-origin characteristics and attachment orientation are all factors that influence the development of conflict management skills. The family-of-origin characteristics seem to provide the most meaningful results in relation to young adults in romantic relationships. Additional research is still required to identify specific pathways of conflict management skill development.

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Submitted: August, 2008
Conflict Management Skill Development and Young Adults: Identifying Theories, Influences and Developmental Pathways

Introduction

Young adulthood is a critical time for making some life-long decisions, one of which is entering into a romantic relationship (Arnett, 2000; Rutter, 1989). The development of a romantic relationship is partly determined by how conflict within the relationship is managed (Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998). If conflict is resolved, it can contribute to relationship growth (Adler & Rodman, 2006; Goeke-Morey, Cummings, & Papp, 2007; Selman, 1980). Likewise, if conflict is managed poorly, it can damage a relationship (Adler & Rodman, 2006; O'Leary, 1988). It is therefore necessary to understand how individuals develop their conflict management skills. If developmental pathways can be understood, psychologists will be in a better position to assist young adults in understanding and developing effective conflict management skills prior to committing to long-term romantic relationships.

This paper reviews the psychological literature on conflict management development, with a specific focus on young adults. The purpose is to understand how a young adult develops their own conflict management skills before entering into or during the early stages of an enduring relationship. Part of this review is informed by studies pertaining to children and adolescent conflict management skill development as these skills relate to life-course development.

This area of research is broad in that conflict management skill development is a life course issue. As such, there are many different approaches and influences included in the research, which makes an overall review of the research problematic. Therefore, this review has been presented in two sections. The first section considers why young adulthood is a critical time for understanding conflict management and then discusses the general issues,
complexities, and theory associated with the study of conflict management. The second section presents the findings of the conflict management literature.

Issues Surrounding the Study of Young Adult Conflict Management Skill Development

Young Adult Development and Conflict Management

Conflict management skills, although required throughout the life span, are particularly critical to young adults, because of the life-course decisions being made by them. Starting in adolescence and continuing into young adulthood, individuals are creating their identity and exploring romantic relationships (Arnett, 2000). These are two vital developmental processes that can be influenced by the way an individual manages conflict. For example, a person who is aggressive in most daily conflicts will likely be seen as having an aggressive identity and, thus, may have difficulty finding a romantic partner. Erikson’s (1968) social development framework describes the importance of these two developmental processes and how they are connected.

According to Erikson (1968), adolescence (12 – 18 years) is characterised by an identity crisis, while young adulthood is characterised by an intimacy versus isolation conflict. A cutoff between these two stages is not clear, nor does Erikson commit an age group to young adulthood, because the negotiation of the intimacy versus isolation conflict depends on the success of the individual’s identity formation. According to Erikson, a relationship is successful if the individual parties in the relationship are able to maintain their own individual identities and form a new identity as partners.

The inability to form a successful intimate relationship can have two developmental consequences for an individual (Erikson, 1968). First, if a relationship is not formed, the individual runs the risk of being isolated from psychological intimacy. Second, if the individual cannot maintain his/her own identity in conjunction with the new relationship identity, a person’s sense of self may be lost. The processes of identity and relationship
formations are, thus, entwined. It is this developmental aspect of young adults dealing with identity and relationship formation that holds potential for understanding conflict management skill development at this time in the life span.

Conflict Management Research Issues, Complexities and Theories

Conflict management skill development is a life span issue and it is believed that the development of these skills begins in early childhood (Cowan & Cowan, 2002; Robinson, 2000; Rutter, 1989). Family provide much of the social development context for children (Robinson, 2000). Although, the family context is the agreed starting point for developing conflict management skills, the developmental pathways through to young adulthood can be quite different for every individual (Cowan & Cowan, 2002; Rutter, 1989).

The way in which an individual learns or develops conflict management skills is complex because developmental pathways are influenced by combinations of different factors (Cowan & Cowan, 2002; Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 2000; Rutter, 1989). Factors such as marital conflict management (Reese-Weber, 2000; Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998; Stocker & Youngblade, 1999; Van Doorn, Branje, & Meeus, 2007; Whitton et al., 2008), parent-child conflict (Herrara & Dunn, 1997; Kim, Conger, Lorenz, & Elder Jr., 2001; Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gillies, & Fleming, 1993; Robinson, 2000) and, family-of-origin characteristics (Andrews, Capaldi, Foster, & Hops, 2000; Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder Jr., 2000; Levy, Wamboldt, & Fiese, 1997; Robinson, 2000; Story, Lawrence, Karney, & Bradbury, 2004) have all been identified in the literature as being influential. These identified factors are often further mediated by other variables such as gender (Kim et al., 2001; Kobak et al., 1993; Levy et al., 1997; Robinson, 2000; Story et al., 2004), conflict resolution (Cummings, Kouros, & Papp, 2007; Goeke-Morey et al., 2007) and parent-child relationship (Kim et al., 2001; Seiffge-Krenke, Shulman, & Klessinger, 2001). The result is that there are different and often complex developmental pathways proposed by researchers.
In addition to the numerous pathways for conflict management skill development, research is further complicated by limitations of experimental study designs, potential mediating factors that remain untested, the different ways that conflict strategy is used and defined in research. The remainder of this section is dedicated to discussing these complexities.

**Limitations of conflict management experimental study designs.**

Currently, conflict management study designs tend to fall into two main types: self-report and laboratory setting. In a self-report study, young adult participants complete questionnaires and surveys about present and/or past conflict behaviours in a romantic relationship, in a family dyad and/or the parents' marital relationship. These studies are limited by the fact that the participants are required to make retrospective and self-report assessments of past conflicts and of conflicts that he/she is not a party to (e.g., mother-father conflict). Self-report information from children, adolescents and young adults may be difficult to interpret as there is insufficient research available to support a reliable interpretation of their perceptions and ability to report on conflict behaviours of parents (Dadds, Atkinson, Turner, Blums, & Lendich, 1999). The laboratory setting design, however, improves upon these self-report, retrospective limitations.

The conflict management laboratory setting design requires participants to engage in a laboratory conflict task in addition to self-reports about their romantic and/or family relationship. The laboratory conflict task entails participants problem solving an issue, which is usually a mutually agreed, recurring issue between the parties. For example, each young adult in the romantic couple will provide the researcher with a list of common conflict issues. The researcher will then select a topic based on a criteria set by the researcher. The participants are then asked to try to resolve the issue in a set time (10 – 15 minutes). This
laboratory setting design allows the researchers to observe the participant’s conflict management behaviour and combine their observations and rating with the self-reports.

The laboratory setting design can include a retrospective, self-report component or be used longitudinally. For example, a study may require young adult participants to self-report past family conflict behaviours but will include the laboratory setting design for the conflict behaviour in a current romantic relationship. Alternatively, the laboratory setting design can be used in a family setting when the participant is a child or adolescent and then repeated when the participant is a young adult in a romantic relationship setting.

Although the laboratory setting design improves upon the researcher’s assessment of conflict behaviour, it tends to be artificial and contrived. The use of a recurring conflict issue and providing 15 minutes to resolve a conflict does not reflect reality. If an issue is recurring, it can be assumed that the parties have not, in the past, been able to resolve it. In the face of that possibility, it would seem that poor conflict management behaviour may be provoked. The limitation in study designs in this area is further limited by the numerous factors that may influence conflict management behaviour, but remain relatively untested.

Potential mediating factors.

There are several factors that have been identified as influential to conflict management development, as described above. There are, however, other factors that have been analysed in only a very limited number of studies, such as the participant’s emotions (e.g. mad or scared) (Davies, Myers, Cummings, & Heindel, 1999) and perceptions (e.g. blame or threat) (Dadds et al., 1999; Richmond & Stocker, 2003; Stocker & Youngblade, 1999) in relation to family conflicts. It has been found that siblings can perceive their parent’s conflict differently (Richmond & Stocker, 2003; Stocker & Youngblade, 1999) and report experiencing different levels of exposure to marital conflict (Richmond & Stocker, 2003). In addition, increased exposure to adult destructive conflicts tends to create increased negative
emotional reactions in children (Cummings et al., 2007; Dadds et al., 1999) and adolescents (Cummings et al., 2007; Davies et al., 1999). Although these findings indicate that emotions and perceptions of conflict may influence individuals differently, the research is very limited and no conclusions can yet be drawn on their mediating effects on conflict management skill development.

Defining and using conflict management in research.

Defining conflict management behaviours and how these behaviours are used in conflict management studies differs between studies. For example, anger may be observed in conflict, but anger that is assessed as hostile will be labeled as a negative conflict strategy while anger that is controlled and shows assertiveness will be labeled as a positive conflict strategy (Kobak et al., 1993). In addition, these two ‘types’ of anger in conflict can be used to assess the quality of a relationship. While hostile anger may indicate a poor quality relationship, assertive anger may indicate a high quality relationship (Levy et al., 1997). Thus, these differences in terminology and how conflict strategy, as a construct, is used in the research creates complexities in analysing the conflict management skill literature. A brief summary of the conflict strategy constructs and how they are used in the literature is provided.

Overall, the literature reveals that there are mainly two categories of conflict strategy: constructive and destructive. Constructive conflict strategy includes, but is not limited to, behaviours that promote problem solving, control anger, validate opinions and are supportive. Constructive conflict strategies have been termed as compromise (Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998), facilitative (Andrews et al., 2000), other-oriented (Herrara & Dunn, 1997), functional anger (Kobak et al., 1993) and positive problem solving (Van Doorn et al., 2007). Destructive problem solving behaviour includes, but is not limited to, verbal or physical abuse, defensiveness, hostility, losing self-control and threatening. Destructive conflict
strategies have been termed as attack (Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998), aversive (Andrews et al., 2000), dysfunctional anger (Kobak et al., 1993), self-oriented (Herrara & Dunn, 1997) and negative problem solving (Van Doorn et al., 2007). In addition, a third category, namely, avoidant is sometimes used (Dadds et al., 1999; Van Doorn et al., 2007). Avoidant behaviour includes deflection from the conflict, withdrawal from the conversation and becoming distant. When this third category is not used in a particular study, avoidant behaviours tend to be classified as a destructive conflict strategy (Cummings et al., 2007; Kobak et al., 1993).

In addition to the different terminology, conflict strategies have been used as predictor or outcome variables or used as a measure of relationship quality. For example, to measure the quality of a romantic relationship, the researchers may observe a laboratory conflict task (e.g. Andrews et al., 2000). Observations of conflict management strategy and other factors, such as marital satisfaction, are then compiled to assess the quality of the relationship. This paradigm is used quite regularly throughout the literature particularly with young adult participants. Using conflict strategy as a way of assessing relationship quality may provide insight into the association between the predictor variable and conflict management as a relationship measure, but, it does not identify the developmental pathway of conflict management skills.

The study of conflict management development is therefore complex. Numerous developmental pathways have been identified. Designing adequate experimental studies is difficult due to the limitations of self-report, retrospective information and the standard laboratory conflict task. The different terminology and uses of conflict management strategy in research make it difficult to compare findings between studies. Some of these complexities may also be attributed to the different developmental theories used by researchers.

Theory of Conflict Management Skill Development
A review of the literature reveals that there are many different theories to explore the development of conflict management skills, which impacts research methodology. The three most common theories used to underpin the research and development of conflict management skills are social learning theory, cognitive-contextual theory and attachment theory. A summary of these three theories is presented.

*Social learning theory.*

Social learning theory is a theoretical framework that is used to study a variety of social behaviours that a person learns throughout the life span (Bandura, 1977). The theory explains social interactions in terms of cognitive, behavioural, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1977). The main processes of learning involve observational, vicarious and self-regulatory functioning (Bandura, 1977). Researchers of conflict management skill development tend to focus on the observational and vicarious aspects of the theory (Herrara & Dunn, 1997; Reese-Weber, 2000; Van Doorn et al., 2007). For example, a researcher using social learning theory will hypothesis that a child will learn the appropriate conflict behaviours of a romantic couple by observing how his/her parents behave during conflict. The cognitive (e.g. understanding how a marital conflict relates to the child) and environmental (e.g. frequency of marital conflict) determinants of the theory are often overlooked in the research, whereas, the cognitive-contextual theory has the cognitive component at its core.

*Cognitive-contextual theory.*

Cognitive-contextual theory was created by Grych and Fincham (1990, 1993) as a framework to understand the impact of marital conflict on children’s adjustment. Children’s adjustment includes the development of behaviours that are appropriate and adaptive in relationships (Grych & Fincham, 1990). The framework has thus been used to research the effects of marital conflict on a child’s conflict management behaviour (Dadds et al., 1999;
Davies et al., 1999). The theory states that the child will first cognitively process aspects of the marital conflict and its context in what is referred to as the primary processing stage (Grych & Fincham, 1990). If the child’s assessment is that the conflict is not benign to him/her, then a secondary processing stage is performed which includes further contextual aspects of the conflict as well as the child’s own emotions in relation to the marital conflict. The two cognitive processing stages then result in the child’s choice of behaviour to cope with the marital conflict (Grych & Fincham, 1990). The complexity of the framework, thus, allows for the growth and change of conflict management skills as an individual expands his/her experiences with conflict and develops more emotional security. An alternative to a cognitive approach to understanding conflict management skill development is attachment theory.

*Attachment theory.*

Attachment theory originated with the work of Bowlby and Ainsworth (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). The attachment process is based on the social interaction and responses of a primary caregiver and the effect that this has on an infant child (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Three types of attachment orientations have been found: secure, anxious/ambivalent and anxious/avoidant (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Research has used these attachment orientations to predict the quality of romantic relationships in adulthood (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1994). This association has provided researchers with an opportunity to use attachment theory as a framework to understand the association between a person’s attachment orientation (i.e. secure) and specific relationship characteristics, such as conflict behaviour, that promotes a healthy or unhealthy relationship (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Kobak et al., 1993; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996).

Research Findings on Young Adult Development of Conflict Management Skills
The findings from the different studies are difficult to compare because of the differences in design, constructs studied, theories applied and pathways created to support the results, as discussed. These complexities will not be reiterated here for ease in presentation of the findings. In order to present the findings coherently, age and terminology conventions have been applied to the research reviewed.

Participants between the ages of 19 – 25 years old will be referred to as young adults even though the specific research being reviewed may refer to the participants as adolescents. Conflict strategies can be given different labels. For the purpose of this review, style and strategy are interchangeable terms. When referring to a particular strategy, reference will be made to one of the three overall categories provided earlier (constructive, destructive or avoidant) to provide a common nomenclature without inundating the reader with definitions. For example, if a researcher refers to a parent’s ‘aggressive style’ of conflict management, it has been disclosed in this review as an aggressive style (destructive). This convention will be used only when the researchers construct (e.g. aggressive) is defined in similar terms as the overall construct provided (e.g. destructive). If the researchers’ construct cannot be classified as such, the researcher’s definition will be provided. Similarly, common terminology has been provided to group the different factors being examined in the literature.

The factors found, in the research, to influence conflict management development have been categorized as initial, mediating or potential mediating in order to more easily communicate relationships found in the literature. An initial factor was considered a factor that is either directly associated to a young adult’s development of conflict management skills or is mediated by another variable (mediating factor). Factors that appear to have an influence on conflict management skill development, but the influence is not well understood are labeled as potential mediating factors. A summary of these factors is presented in Table 1. The research findings have been grouped by initial factors for ease in presentation.
*Marital conflict.*

Studies on the association between parents' marital conflict and the development of conflict management skills in young adults demonstrate four main sets of findings. First the research demonstrates consistency between the conflict strategies used in marital conflict and parent-child conflict (Reese-Weber, 2000; Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998; Van Doorn et al., 2007). Secondly, the association between marital conflict strategies and young adult conflict strategy in a romantic relationship and sibling conflict appears to be mediated by the conflict strategy used by the parent in the parent-child conflict (Reese-Weber, 2000; Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998; Stocker & Youngblade, 1999). Thirdly, the association between marital conflict strategy and a child's sibling conflict is mediated by the specific strategy used by and gender of the parent (Dadds et al., 1999). Lastly, studies reveal that marital conflict strategy can affect children's emotional response to the marital conflict differently (Cummings et al., 2007; Goeke-Morey et al., 2007).

Table 1

*Initial, Mediating and Potential Mediating Factors Found to Influence the Development of Conflict Management Skills*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Factors</th>
<th>Mediating Factors</th>
<th>Potential Mediating Factors</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parent/child conflict</td>
<td>Parent gender</td>
<td>Emotion (parent and/or participant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital conflict</td>
<td>Participant gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling conflict</td>
<td>Parent conflict strategy</td>
<td>Perceptions by participant of conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-of-origin</td>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>characteristics</td>
<td>Parent/child relationship</td>
<td>Family negative affect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment orientation</td>
<td>Developmental issues</td>
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Moderate correlations have been found between the type of conflict strategy (compromise and attack) used in the parents' marital conflict and each parent-child conflict (Reese-Weber, 2000; Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998; Van Doorn et al., 2007). In other words there is consistency in conflict strategy (compromise or attack) used within the family. If a compromise conflict strategy (constructive) was used in a marital conflict, it was found that the same strategy was most often used by the mother, father, and young adult child in the parent-child conflict. Van Doorn et al. (2007) also found significant correlation in the consistency of conflict strategies, for both the marital conflict and parent-child conflict over a two year period (Time 1 and Time 2). In other words, if mothers used a compromise conflict strategy with the fathers at Time 1, they tended to use the same strategy at Time 2. These results indicate that parents and their young adult child tend to be consistent in their choice of conflict strategy during family conflict over time.

Results from studies also demonstrate that the conflict strategy used by the parent during a parent-child conflict mediates the effect between marital conflict and young adult conflict management strategy in romantic relationships (Reese-Weber, 2000; Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998; Stocker & Youngblade, 1999) and with siblings (Reese-Weber, 2000; Stocker & Youngblade, 1999). For example, the young adult was more apt to use a compromise conflict strategy with a romantic partner when the compromise strategy was used during observed marital conflict and parent-child conflict than when the parent used an attack conflict strategy (destructive) during the parent-child conflict. The mediating effect was found for both the constructive (Reese-Weber, 2000; Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998) and destructive strategies (Reese-Weber, 2000; Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998; Stocker & Youngblade, 1999). The avoidant strategy was either not tested (Reese-Weber, 2000; Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998; Stocker & Youngblade, 1999) or no association was found (Van Doorn et al., 2007).
A study by Dadds, Atkinson, Turner, Blums and Lendich (1999) revealed more detailed interpretations of the mediating effects of gender and a parent’s specific conflict strategy during marital conflict and the avoidant strategy features quite prominently. They found if a father used an avoidant conflict style and the mother used an aggressive (destructive) or compromise (constructive) style during marital conflict, a male child favoured an avoidant style in a sibling conflict. The same was true for a female child. When the mother used an avoidant style while the father used an aggressive style during marital conflict, the female child favoured an avoidant style in a sibling conflict. A surprising finding was that when a father used a compromise conflict strategy, the boys tended to be more avoidant in their conflict with a sibling. The transmission of a parent’s conflict style to the child (10 to 14 years old) of the same gender was not unexpected, but these results raise questions about why one particular style (avoidant) is passed on more readily than another (compromise) (Dadds et al., 1999).

Cummings, Kouros and Papp (2007) found, in their study, that children aged 8 to 18 years old displayed different emotions in relation to their parents’ marital conflict depending on the level of aggression in the marital conflict. The children from homes with high levels of aggressive conflict strategy were more sensitive to signs of conflict resolution (Cummings et al., 2007; Goeke-Morey et al., 2007). In addition, when a constructive conflict strategy was used in marital conflict, children experienced positive emotions (Cummings et al., 2007; Goeke-Morey et al., 2007). A conclusion drawn was that a constructive conflict resolution in everyday conflict in the home can have potential positive benefits on a child’s functioning and development. It can be argued that positive conflict resolution helps the child to maintain emotional security (Cummings et al., 2007; Goeke-Morey et al., 2007). An understanding of the potential mediating effect of emotion on developing conflict management skills would benefit from further research.
Thus, overall, marital conflict appears to play a role in the development of a young adult's conflict management skills. Research also shows that the parents' gender and strategy in the marital and parent-child conflict can mediate the process. In addition, it is understood that a child's emotions in relation to the marital conflict strategy and resolution can uniquely influence each child within the family, but the potential mediating effects of emotions on conflict management development are not known.

*Parent-child conflict.*

The parent-child relationship is the first relationship an individual will experience. It is presumably one of the more direct influences on a child's development of social skills and is, therefore, included in many studies of conflict management skills development. There is also evidence that children and adolescents will use strategies appropriate to their developmental age (Dadds et al., 1999). For example, it may be acceptable for a 3-year-old in a dispute with his parent over eating to push his plate away and refuse to eat (destructive) while it would not be acceptable for a 18-year-old to do the same. Overall, study results tend to support that the parent's interactions with the child during conflict is an influential factor affecting the child's social development. The most common finding is that there are more aspects to the parent-child relationship than just conflict management, such as trust and communication that seem to influence the development of conflict behaviours in a young adult's romantic relationship. The research relating to the developmental issues of the young child and adolescent will first be examined, followed by studies focusing on young adult romantic relationships.

A study by Herrara and Dunn (1997) demonstrated that a young child does not show continuity in conflict behaviour with time, but, rather, later behaviour was associated with the mother's earlier conflict strategy. It was found that the conflict strategy used by children at 33 months old with their mother (Time 1) was not significantly correlated with the conflict
strategy used by the children with a friend at 6 years old (Time 2). This finding indicates that developmental issues exist, such that a child of six years will not show developmental consistency in different social contexts (Herrara & Dunn, 1997). In other words, a child that used self-oriented strategy (focuses on oneself) with the mother in a mother-child conflict did not use that same strategy three years later in a friend context. The child’s strategy at 6 years old was, however, correlated with the conflict strategy used by the mother at Time 1, indicating that the mother’s strategy was modeled.

Although modeling in the mother-child context was found, the predictive ability of the mother’s strategy to that used by the child 3 years later was not strong, indicating that there may be mediating factors affecting development of conflict strategy. Only the mother’s self-oriented strategy (destructive) provided significant prediction to the child’s later destructive strategy. Stronger predictions were found in relation to conflict resolution. The mother’s strategy at Time 1 was a significant predictor of conflict resolution between friends at Time 2. For example, the mother’s use of an other-oriented (focuses on the child) conflict strategy (constructive) at Time 1 was a significant predictor of positively resolved conflict at Time 2 between the child and a friend. These findings indicate that whether a parent-child conflict is resolved, may have more influence than the specific conflict strategy used by the mother during the parent-child conflict and that this influence may be age related.

Age-related differences were also noted by Reese-Weber (2000) for the adolescent age group. She found that middle adolescents (16-year-olds) tended to use more attack styles (destructive) of conflict management than the young adult (22-year-olds) participants during family conflicts. Reese-Weber suggested that the cause for this difference may be related to the developmental issues associated with young adults such as being more autonomous and not being tied to the home in the same way as adolescents. In other words, the young adult is able to physically disassociate himself from the conflict and the family, thus, in order to
maintain family relations it is more important for him to resolve a conflict constructively than for the adolescent (Reese-Weber, 2000).

Most parent-child conflict studies have not found any parent gender mediating effects (Kim et al., 2001; Reese-Weber, 2000; Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998). Robinson (2000), however, found that the quality of the young adult’s relationship with the mother, but not the father, was significantly related to the quality of the young adult’s intimate relationship. Robinson used conflict behaviours as one measure of the quality of the parent-child and romantic relationship. If the young adult displayed destructive conflict behaviour, the quality of the relationship was assessed as low for this measure. Because conflict behaviours were only one measure of relationship quality, these findings do not necessarily contradict the gender results found by Kim et al. (2001), Reese-Weber (2000), and Reese-Weber and Bertle-Haring (2001). Robinson’s (2000) findings do indicate, however, that parent-child relationship aspects in addition to parent conflict strategy may mediate the quality of a relationship and, thus, the way conflict is managed in that relationship.

Parent-child relationship aspects, such as trust, negative communication and parenting behaviour, have been found to have a potential mediating effect on a young adult’s romantic relationship and how conflict is managed in that relationship. Seiffge-Krenke et al. (2001) found that participants’ relationships with their parents remained relatively stable over a six-year period and that reliable alliance with their parents during adolescence was a significant predictor of connectedness in their young adult romantic relationships. Seiffge-Krenke et al. describe reliable alliance as “protective relationship qualities such as closeness and basic trust with parents” (p. 341). Conflict behaviour in the parent-child relationship formed part of the reliable alliance construct. Kim et al. (2001) identified that negative communication, such as hostility and coercion, in a parent-adolescent relationship that continues into young adulthood, can lead to poor social functioning in a young adult intimate relationship. If the
negative communication lessened by young adulthood, the young adult displayed better social functioning in a young adult romantic relationship. Conger et al. (2000) found that parenting behaviour, specifically how the parents monitored, disciplined and showed affect for their child, was the only significant predictor of a youth's conflict behaviour in a later young adult romantic relationship. Overall, the parent-child conflict interaction as well as the quality of that relationship appears to have an influence on the way a young adult manages conflict in a romantic relationship.

**Sibling-child conflict.**

There are limited studies that address siblings' conflict management as a factor influencing conflict management skill development. Herrara and Dunn (1997) did not find that the sibling's conflict management skills, evaluated when the child was 33 months old, had any predictive outcome for the child's conflict management strategies or conflict resolution with a friend three years later. The only significant outcome in their analysis was that, when the child used an other-oriented (constructive) conflict strategy with their sibling at 33 months, it contributed to the resolution of a conflict with a friend three years later.

Reese-Weber and Bertle-Haring (1998) in a young adult self-report study found that conflict in the sibling relationship was significantly associated with attack (destructive) and avoidant conflict styles in a subsequent romantic relationship. It was believed that a direct experience of compromise with the parents, not the sibling, was required to mediate the compromise strategy in the romantic relationship. With the limited information provided by these studies, the influence of the sibling relationship to young adult conflict management skills cannot be determined.

**Family-of-origin characteristics.**

Different family-of-origin characteristics, such as, family negativity and involvement, have been found to affect young adult relationships. These characteristics are not easily
defined and include numerous subjective constructs. For example, the family-of-origin characteristic of family adaptability used by Robinson (2000) was determined by assessing participant self-reports on family cohesion, adaptation to stress and levels of bonding. Family adaptability in adolescents was found to be significantly related to a later young adult intimate relationship, in that positive family adaptability led to a better quality intimate relationship. Also, Andrews et al. (2000) found family-of-origin aversive communication to be a significant predictor of aversive communication, low satisfaction and aggression in an adolescent's later young adult romantic relationship. These more complex predictor and outcome variables inherently create difficulties in interpreting specific processes and pathways for development of conflict management skills.

Family-of-origin research demonstrates family-of-origin characteristics that represent a warm, trusting environment promote the development of constructive conflict management skills (Halford et al., 2000; Levy et al., 1997; Robinson, 2000; Story et al., 2004), while negative affect and hostility tend to promote destructive conflict management skills in young adult romantic relationship (Andrews et al., 2000; Halford et al., 2000; Levy et al., 1997; Story et al., 2004). These associations, however, were mediated by participant gender with regard to the specific conflict behaviour used in a romantic relationship by the participant (Halford et al., 2000; Levy et al., 1997; Story et al., 2004).

Story et al. (2004) found that reported negativity in the male's family correlated significantly with a male's later displays of anger and contempt in the young adult relationship. Negativity reported in the female's family correlated significantly with psychological aggression in her young adult relationship. Levy et al. (1997) found that the woman's reported family-of-origin affective involvement and general functioning were significantly correlated with anxiety, progress to resolution and satisfaction with current partner's behaviour during a conflict task (the current relationship characteristics). For men,
however, the reported family-of-origin characteristic of behaviour control was significantly correlated with all of the current relationship characteristics. Halford, Sanders and Behrens (2000) found that couples in which the man reported family of origin parental violence, displayed more negative affect and poorer communication in a partner conflict task than couples that reported no family-of-origin violence. When couples reported female family-of-origin parental violence, the females reported more negative cognitions than both the male family violence group and groups without family violence. It seems that men and women bring different family-of-origin characteristics into their social interactions with future partners.

The idea that positive family-of-origin aspects have a positive effect on conflict management skill development and the quality of a young adult’s romantic relationship is consistent with the parent-child relationship findings. It could be that family-of-origin and parent-child relationship have reciprocal effects. The strength of these positive qualities on conflict management skill development was demonstrated in research conducted by Levy et al. (1997). It was found that the reported positive general functioning family-of-origin characteristic for women correlated significantly with women that responded positively or without negativity after antecedent negative conflict behaviour by her partner. It was concluded that positive general functioning in a women’s family-of-origin can possibly provide skills to help stop a cycle of negative communication (Levy et al., 1997). The results provide evidence that family-of-origin characteristics can have a protective influence in a potentially destructive relationship conflict.

Although the family-of-origin characteristic studies can be difficult to interpret, they provide some meaningful results to understand conflict management skill development in relation to young adults. It can be seen that more nurturing family characteristics such as cohesion, general functioning and positive communications seem to make unique
contributions to young adults' development of quality relationships and how conflict is
managed in those relationships.

Attachment orientation.

Overall, a secure attachment orientation has been associated with constructive conflict
management strategies, while the anxious/ambivalent attachments lead to avoidant and
destructive conflict management strategies (Creasey, 2002; Creasey & Hesson-McInnis,
2001; Kobak et al., 1993; Simpson et al., 1996). In particular, ambivalent young adult’s
tended to withdraw more often than those of other attachments (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis,
2001). This research has also identified that emotional regulation is influential in the selection
of conflict behaviours.

It is believed that secure attachment allows young adults to better regulate emotion
during conflict which may account for them using constructive strategies during conflict
(Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Kobak et al., 1993). Moreover, Kobak et al. found that
adolescents that were able to regulate emotions used less avoidant behaviour and
dysfunctional anger (destructive). When a romantic relationship laboratory conflict task was
highly emotional, it was found that both young adult women and men with an ambivalent
attachment used poorer conflict management skills, but these women used more destructive
conflict management skills than those in any other condition (gender x orientation x task
emotional level) (Simpson et al., 1996). Gender would appear to mediate the regulation of
emotion and, thus, strategy choice, in a conflict.

The mediating effect of gender was found consistently between those with an insecure
attachment orientation and the specific destructive conflict behaviour used in conflict. For
example, adolescent males with insecure attachment tended to problem solve using
dysfunctional anger, while the females tended to submit (destructive) to their mother’s
dominance during parent-child conflict (Kobak et al., 1993). Both skills displayed would be
considered destructive conflict strategies, but are very different approaches. Kobak et al. and Simpson et al. (1996) proposed that cognitive processes during conflict may differ between individuals depending on gender and attachment orientation.

Creasey and Hesson-McInnis (2001) researched emotion, cognitive appraisal and confidence of the young adult during relationship conflict to understand their potential mediating effects between attachment orientation and conflict behaviour. It was proposed that the development of conflict management skills commences with the individual's attachment orientation and then follows a complex path system triggered by emotions and level of confidence. It is believed then that each conflict context can trigger different emotions and confidence levels leading to different conflict behaviours.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this review was to identify the processes involved in the development of conflict management skills of young adults. It is argued that developing constructive conflict management skills will assist the young adult to negotiate the developmental stages of identity and relationship formation. Halford et al. (2000) states that there are "many influences that affect the development of conflict management" (p. 220). The numerous pathways in the literature reviewed here support this statement and contribute to the complex nature of research on development of conflict management skills.

Although, the research and the results are complex, there are some overall findings that are consistent. Firstly, family systems influence an individual’s conflict management development, in particular the marital relationship and the parent-child relationship. Correlations between the strategies used by parents and their young adult children are consistently found and have been shown to be stable over time. There is some evidence that the parent-child relationship carries a unique influence on young adults over and above that of the marital conflict situation.
Secondly, family-of-origin characteristics have been consistently associated with the quality of a young adult’s romantic relationship. It has been found that positive characteristics, such as warmth, predict a better quality relationship, while negative characteristics, such as hostility predict a poorer quality relationship. Thirdly, secure attachments tend to support constructive conflict strategies in young adult romantic relationships, while insecure attachments tend to lead to the use of destructive conflict strategies. These findings provide useful information that attachment orientation and overall family characteristics, including conflict management strategies, are generally replicated in later young adult relationships, but they do not provide evidence of specific developmental pathways. Although these consistencies have been identified, inconsistencies exist.

The inconsistencies noted in the literature do not however contradict findings, but tend to indicate that there maybe other mediating factors influencing conflict management skill development. It has been found that parent and child gender may influence the process of conflict management skill development and the specific conflict behaviours used in a later romantic relationship. In addition, the particular strategy used by the parent in marital and parent-child conflict appears to provide a unique influence. Other factors, such as emotions and perceptions, may influence conflict management skill development, but these effects are not well understood and require further research. Limitations in the research have also been noted and highlight other areas where further research is required.

Research does not include the topic of the conflict as a variable, with the exception of Simpson et al. (1996). Simpson et al. found that a high emotional conflict topic was associated with poorer conflict strategies in ambivalent attached women. Additional studies are required to interpret these results in relation to the influence that the topic of the conflict has on individual conflict strategy. Also, no studies could be found that determine how young
adults make their conflict strategy choices and how they perceive their strategies were learned. Qualitative research of this kind may open new experimental designs and theories.

Overall, the research reveals that the understanding of the development of conflict management skills of young adults is a work in progress. It would seem that the family-of-origin research is providing the most meaningful results in relation to the conflict management behaviours of young adults in romantic relationships, but developmental pathways remain to be understood.
References


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Exploring Young Adult Conflict Management Skill Development and the Impact of Identity Formation

Pauline Z Marcoux
Exploring Young Adult Conflict Management Skill Development and
the Impact of Identity Formation

Abstract

Quantitative research on conflict management development suggests that different family factors influence how a young adult interacts in a romantic relationship. The research does not examine whether or not identity formation, which is also a critical process in young adulthood, impacts on conflict management development. Using a phenomenological methodology, this study explored 9 young adults’ (5 men, 4 women, $M = 21.8$ years old) perceptions of their conflict management development and the possible influence of identity formation. Three main themes emerged from the data analysis: identity formation, family systems and conflict situation characteristics. The findings suggest that family systems, for this group of participants, is the base influence on conflict management development, but as an individual matures, identity formation becomes influential to the young adult. Conflict situation characteristics (i.e. emotional control, topic) impact conflict management development differently for each participant. Thus, the pathways of development are thought to be quite complex and dynamic. Overall, the findings from this study support existing research and also reveal that identity formation may have an important influence on young adult conflict management skill development.
Exploring Young Adult Conflict Management Skill Development and the Impact of Identity Formation

Introduction

Conflict management is a pivotal skill for young adults as it facilitates identity formation and relationships. According to Erikson (1968), in order to negotiate successfully the developmental stage of young adulthood, a young adult needs to form a successful intimate relationship while maintaining their own identity. The development of an intimate relationship is partly determined by how conflict within the relationship is managed (Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998). If conflict is resolved, it can contribute to relationship growth (Adler & Rodman, 2006; Goeke-Morey, Cummings, & Papp, 2007; Selman, 1980). Likewise, if conflict is managed poorly, it can damage a relationship (Adler & Rodman, 2006; O'Leary, 1988). If developmental pathways can be understood, psychologists will be in a better position to assist young adults in understanding and developing effective conflict management skills prior to committing to long-term romantic relationships.

Most studies on conflict management skills are based on quantitative methods using questionnaires, surveys and observing participants in structured laboratory conflict tasks (e.g., (Cummings, Kouros, & Papp, 2007; Davies, Myers, Cummings, & Heindel, 1999). Findings from the quantitative research suggest that different family factors influence how a young adult interacts in a romantic relationship. This research, unfortunately, neglects to examine how an individual’s identity formation impacts the development of conflict management skills or vice-versa. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to explore young adults’ perceptions of their conflict management skill development and whether identity formation is related to that.

Conflict Management Skills: Family Influences
Conflict management skill development is a life span issue with its origins in early childhood (Cowan & Cowan, 2002; Robinson, 2000; Rutter, 1989). Although, family provides much of the social development context for children (Robinson, 2000), the contribution of family and other factors on the developmental pathways through to young adulthood can be quite different for every individual (Cowan & Cowan, 2002; Rutter, 1989).

Social learning theory (Andrews, Capaldi, Foster, & Hops, 2000; Herrara & Dunn, 1997; Reese-Weber, 2000; Van Doorn, Branje, & Meeus, 2007; Whitton et al., 2008) and family systems theory (Reese-Weber, 2000; Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998; Robinson, 2000) support the inter-generational transmission of conflict management skills. These two theories state that a hierarchical structure of family relationships exists with the highest level (i.e. the marital relationship) having the most influence on the child (Reese-Weber, 2000). Thus, a child will tend to first imitate or model the conflict behaviours displayed in the marital relationship (higher level) before modeling those in a sibling relationship (lower level). Accordingly, findings demonstrate that marital conflict (Dadds, Atkinson, Turner, Blums, & Lendich, 1999; Davies et al., 1999; Herrara & Dunn, 1997; Reese-Weber, 2000; Richmond & Stocker, 2003; Van Doorn et al., 2007), and parent-child conflict (Herrara & Dunn, 1997; Reese-Weber, 2000; Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998) can influence the inter-generational transmission of conflict management skills. Therefore, if the parents model a ‘compromise style’ (i.e. try to work out a mutual resolution) of conflict management it is likely that the child will practice that same style.

Additional family influences have been found in studies exploring family-of-origin characteristics (Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 2000; Kim, Conger, Lorenz, & Elder Jr., 2001; Levy, Wamboldt, & Fiese, 1997; Story, Lawrence, Karney, & Bradbury, 2004). This research demonstrates that family-of-origin characteristics emphasising a warm, trusting environment promote the development of constructive conflict management skills (Halford et al., 2000;
Levy et al., 1997; Robinson, 2000; Story et al., 2004), while negative affect and hostility tend to promote destructive conflict management skills in young adult romantic relationships (Andrews et al., 2000; Halford et al., 2000; Levy et al., 1997; Story et al., 2004).

Conflict Management Skills: Individual Factors/Influences

Aside from these studies that demonstrate inter-generational transmission as a means of developing conflict management skills, there are several studies that reveal conflict management skill development is much more complex than modeling a parent or a family system in a given situation. Research results reveal that individuals are influenced in different ways by the same conflict experience indicating that individual differences exist. For example, it has been found that siblings' perceptions (e.g. blame or threat) of marital conflict differ (Dadds et al., 1999; Richmond & Stocker, 2003; Stocker & Youngblade, 1999), that children's emotional reactions (e.g. mad or scared) to family conflict can vary (Davies et al., 1999), and children/adolescents may model only certain conflict management skills from a parent depending on gender (Halford et al., 2000; Levy et al., 1997; Story et al., 2004).

Researchers have cited personal development as one explanation of individual difference. For example, Davies et al. (1999) found that adolescents were more sensitive to destructive marital conflict management than 6 and 10 year old children. Davies et al. suggested that although social skills are being developed in middle to older childhood, the more complex inter-personal issues, such as those found in a marriage, may develop during adolescence. The growth of inter-personal skills provides adolescents the skills to interpret conflict between marriage partners more realistically, and, thus, affects how their own conflict management skills continue to develop. Likewise, Reese-Weber (2000) found that middle adolescents (16-year-olds) tended to use more ‘attack’ (i.e. get angry and yell) conflict management behaviours than the young adult (22-year-olds) participants during family conflicts. Reese-Weber suggested that the cause for this difference may be related to
the developmental issues associated with young adulthood, such as, being more autonomous and not being tied to the home in the same way as adolescents. In other words, the young adult is physically disassociated from the family, thus, in order to maintain family relations it is more important for him or her to resolve a conflict constructively than it is for the adolescent (Reese-Weber, 2000), whereas the adolescent remains physically part of the family with ongoing opportunity to resolve the conflict. It is this aspect of personal development that is not well researched in relation to conflict management skill development.

Another possible explanation of individual differences rests on the possibility that individuals are using social interaction experiences not only to develop conflict management skill but also as a way of constructing their identity. Erikson (1963) indicates that the process of identity formation is a merging of all aspects of the self including those that have been constructed from social interactions, including family conflict. He further states the self identity has to be the same inside and outside (Erikson, 1963), indicating that our thoughts and understanding of who we are must match the way we behave externally. The concept of merging thoughts, experiences and behaviours as a process of becoming an adult was supported in a survey by Arnett (2001). The survey results showed that individualism was a prominent factor in determining whether a person has reached adulthood (Arnett, 2001). Three factors underlying individualism were “accepting responsibility for the consequences of your actions”, “decide on personal beliefs and values” and, “establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult” (Arnett, 2001, p. 141). Thus, it can be seen that the process of identity formation and becoming an adult may be interwoven with conflict management skill development.

**Young Adult Conflict Management**

There are few young adult studies that have explored aspects of the family conflict interaction other than conflict management style. These studies reveal that individuals are
indeed influenced by more than just the conflict management style used by their parents. For example, Seiffge-Krenke et al. (2001) found that a ‘reliable alliance’ with parents during adolescence was a significant predictor of connectedness in later young adult romantic relationships. While conflict behaviour in the parent-child relationship formed part of the reliable alliance construct, Seiffge-Krenke et al. described reliable alliance as “protective relationship qualities such as closeness and basic trust with parents” (p. 341). While Seiffge-Krenke et al. explored positive aspects, Kim et al. (2001) examined negative aspects. It was found that negative communication, such as hostility and coercion, in a parent-adolescent relationship that continues into young adulthood, can lead to poor social functioning in a young adult intimate relationship (Kim et al., 2001). If the negative communication lessened by young adulthood, the young adult displayed better social functioning in a young adult romantic relationship (Kim et al., 2001).

Similarly, parents who impart structure, limits and guidance for social interactions has also been thought to influence young adults’ ability to manage relationships. Conger et al. (2000) found that parenting behaviour, specifically how the parents monitored, disciplined and showed affect for their child, was a significant predictor of a youth’s conflict behaviour in a later young adult romantic relationship. Further, family adaptability during adolescence was found to be significantly related to a later young adult intimate relationship, in that positive family adaptability led to a better quality intimate relationship (Robinson, 2000). Robinson defined family adaptability as encompassing “family power (assertiveness, control, discipline), negotiation styles, role relationships and relationship rules” (p. 782). It is believed that the structure provided by parents allows the individual to maintain self-control and thus relate positively with others (Robinson, 2000).

One aspect of self-control is emotional control, which is important to conflict management because poor emotional control has been linked to aggression in the home
(O'Leary, 1988). Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gilles, and Flemming (1993) found that adolescents who were able to monitor their emotions were more apt to manage conflict more constructively than those who were not able to control their emotions. Cummings, Kouros and Papp (2007) found that children in aggressive homes were more likely to control their anger when fathers used a constructive conflict management style to end an aggressive conflict. These children also reported less anger when aggressive conflicts were resolved positively. This study shows that children make choices in what aspects (anger or resolution) of the conflict that they cognitively process. Creasey and Hesson-McInnis (2001) researched emotion, cognitive appraisal and confidence of the young adult during relationship conflict to understand their effects on conflict behaviour. They proposed that the development of conflict management skills follows a complex path system triggered by emotions and level of confidence. It is believed then that each conflict context can trigger different emotions and confidence levels leading to different conflict behaviours.

The Current Study

The complexity of conflict management development is evident. There is no doubt that development is dynamic, begins in the family, and family remains a significant influence as an individual grows. What is not clear is how the personal developmental issues, such as emotional control, perceptions of past experiences and identity formation, affect conflict management skill development. Prior quantitative studies have not been able to fully capture these issues, whereas, a phenomenological approach could potentially elicit this information for further study.

The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative investigation into young adults’ appraisal of their own conflict management skill development. The information gained from young adults may provide a deeper understanding of the influences and processes involved in the development of conflict management skills, as well as providing, for the first time, an
exploration of how an individual’s perception of identity development may influence conflict management skill development. The specific research questions to be investigated are: How does a young adult believe their conflict management skills developed? Do young adults view personal developmental issues, such as identity, influential to their own conflict management development?

**Method**

*Research Design*

A phenomenological qualitative research approach was used to gather young adults’ perceptions. This approach allowed the researcher to explore what young adults understand about their own conflict management skills and how they have come to develop them (Daly, 2007). Phenomenological studies often use interviewing to elicit a detailed understanding of the individual’s experiences and reality (Daly, 2007). This approach should allow for interpretations of conflict management experiences and development that both support influences tested in a positivistic framework as well as investigate the possible influence of identity formation.

*Participants*

Nine young adult participants, 19 to 24 years of age, were recruited for this study from the student population at the Edith Cowan University. The personal nature of the phenomenological interview allows for small sample sizes (Daly, 2007). Participants consisted of five males and four females and ages ranged from 19 to 24 years ($M = 21.8$). Participants came from different cultural backgrounds: five Australian, two Asian, one English and one Seychellois.

*Materials and Procedures*

Following approval from the Faculty of Computing, Health, and Science Ethics Committee of Edith Cowan University, participants were either contacted through the student
pool or by invitation extended to students at lectures. All participants were provided with an information letter (Appendix A) explaining the research, that their participation was voluntary, the information they were to provide was confidential and that they could terminate their participation at any time. All participants were interviewed separately at an Edith Cowan University Campus. Interviews were conducted and digitally recorded by the researcher and ranged from 14 to 53 minutes ($M = 27$). Informed consent (Appendix B) and demographic information (Appendix C) were obtained from each participant. Participants were then instructed that this research focused on the management of conflicts with close friends and family members and that conflict meant all disagreements even small issues such as selecting a movie to see. Prior to commencing the interview, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions. The semi-structured interview (Appendix D) consisted of five open-ended questions. Each interview commenced with the question “Tell me a little bit about how you manage conflict with friends or family”. Probing questions were used to elicit the participant’s own understanding of their conflict management skills in different contexts and at different times in their life. Summarisation was often used to ensure that the researcher understood the participant’s perceptions of the experiences disclosed. Through these rich experiences, the participant and the interviewer attempted to identify the conflict management skill developmental process as it related to the participant.

After completion of each interview, the digital recording was transcribed by the researcher for data analysis. The researcher analysed the data after each interview to determine whether saturation had been reached and to identify any possible themes that should be explored in subsequent interviews.

**Data Analysis**

Prior to commencing the data analysis, the researcher went through the process of *Epocche* (Daly, 2007; Patton, 1990). This process, which reinforces rigour in research analysis
(Daly, 2007; Patton, 1990), required the researcher to evaluate her own preconceptions and potential biases about the participants, their stories and the research question as it relates to her. Once these preconceptions and biases were blocked, by owning and monitoring them, the data was analysed.

Consistent with the phenomenological methodology, a thematic analytic approach was used to analyse the data (Daly, 2007; Patton, 1990). The interviews were replayed several times and transcribed. Transcriptions were checked for accuracy against the recording. Transcriptions were then coded, line by line, to identify the significant issues or processes. After all transcripts were coded, the coded data from all nine transcripts was grouped by emerging categories onto a separate document. In order to keep an audit trail, this categorizing document included line by line references back to the specific transcript source. The next step was to summarise each interview in such a way that directly answered the research questions. These summaries were then coded to identify overall themes. These themes were then compared to the categories identified from the individual transcripts. Through a reduction process, the data was then organized into three themes and nine subthemes. To establish additional reliability and validity, two colleagues reviewed interview transcripts to ensure comparability with the themes.

**Ethics**

A low risk was present that the discussion of past experiences could elicit negative emotions in the participants. In the event that distress was experienced by the participant, the participant was allowed to discuss such concerns. A list of referral agencies (Appendix E) was available for participants to seek assistance.

**Findings and Interpretations**

Emerging from the young adult interviews were three recurring themes. The themes (see Table 1) did not emerge in isolation of one another but overlapped, demonstrating that
conflict management skill development is complex and dynamic. The first and most central theme was ‘identity formation’. Identity formation appeared to be an important influence on the development of conflict management skills and has not been previously researched. The other two themes, ‘family systems’ and ‘conflict situation characteristics’ related more so to the existing literature.

*Identity Formation*

All participants revealed that their conflict management behaviours with friends and family reflected their identity. In addition, their perceptions were that conflict management behaviours developed as their adult identity formed. The three sub-themes identified, ‘maturity’, ‘change of focus’, and ‘self-identity’, reflect different aspects of identity formation and becoming an adult.

Table 1

*Themes and subthemes*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<td>Identity formation</td>
<td>Maturity</td>
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<td>Change of focus</td>
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<td>Self-identity</td>
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<td>Family systems</td>
<td>Parent-child conflict</td>
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<td>Marital conflict</td>
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<td>Family support</td>
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<td>Conflict situation characteristics</td>
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<td>Prior experience</td>
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<td>Maintain emotional control</td>
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<td>Conflict topic/goal</td>
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Maturity.

Maturity refers to thinking more like an adult and taking responsibility for one's actions, similar to the factors underlying individualism identified by Arnett (2001). Consistent with findings by Reese-Weber (2000), participants recognised that as adolescents they tended to demonstrate more aggressive behaviours during family conflict, but as they matured they tended to use more discussion and less aggression during conflict. Tom described how a recurring conflict with his mother about night time curfews as an adolescent was finally resolved:

*It was only when she, she let me be on my own that I started becoming more responsible. It was because I had a good head and then I realised that I had to do my part and not take advantage of the situation [missing curfews]. . . . I became more responsible.*

Once Tom realised that he needed to be part of the solution and be responsible, the conflict moved away from being managed aggressively and he was able to demonstrate more effective behaviours to resolve the conflict. Susan also had aggressive conflict with her mother during adolescence and likewise felt that this was a stage that she developed out of:

*... as I got older when I finished school and was out in the workforce, things started to change . . . I don't argue with my parents as much as I used to when I was younger. I think the main reason is because I've taken on more responsibility now.*

These excerpts demonstrate that through maturity, conflict management develops (Davies et al., 1999; Reese-Weber, 2000). The simple act of growing out of adolescence and away from family appears to shape their identities as responsible individuals that have to take ownership of their part in a conflict (Arnett, 2001; Erikson, 1963).

Change of focus.
Maturity and accepting responsibility also seems to coincide with the individual’s change in focus from internally to externally. A change of focus allowed the participants to develop more effective conflict management styles as well as their own identities. Steve captured this change of focus quite succinctly and linked it to his emerging as an individual distinct from his parents’ identity:

_Basically, my conflict resolution with my family is [sic] kind of evolved over the years . . . when I was growing up and living with my parents to now where I am living out of home. And I do actually see things a lot differently and therefore the way that I kind of deal with stuff that comes up is very different as well. . . . The way that they [parents] deal with stuff . . . I can understand now. I treat them more as just humans rather than kind of Mom and Dad._

Susan, when explaining why she believed her aggressive conflict behaviours with her parents changed to more effective conflict resolution behaviours, shared how becoming a mother allowed her to change her focus from herself to others which in turn affected her conflict management development:

_I just think that since I’ve had my daughter, it’s just opened my eyes to a lot of things. . . . I’ve become more observant. I observe the way people just do things. . . . I wasn’t very focused when I was a teenager but now I am more focused_

These descriptions of connecting with family and society from an external perspective instead of a child’s internal perspective demonstrates that this change in focus assisted the individual in becoming an adult while at the same time allowed them to develop more effective conflict management skills.

_Self-identity._

Participants perceived that their outward behaviours reflect their self-identity. There was a feeling that their behaviours, particularly in social situations with friends, showed their
personality. This perception allowed participants to purposely choose the way they manage conflict and thus, how their conflict management skills developed. Paul was very upfront with regard to the association between conflict behaviour and identity:

_Who you are is how you display yourself to others. You may be a very calm, nice person on the inside, but if all the people around you are angry and get you on the defensive, you'll be seen as an angry, defensive person._

Brian, while discussing friends with conflict management styles different from his own stated "I guess that makes them sort of, you know, who they are . . . how you see them." This last statement indicates that participants are evaluating others' behaviours as a means to understanding their identities.

Furthermore, when discussing the choice of one conflict management style over another, participants stated: "That's not who I want to be" (Paul), "I don't want that [way of handling conflict]" (Linda), and "It just makes more sense to me to do it [manage conflict] that way" (Steve). These young adult participants appeared to be choosing conflict behaviours that reflect who they want to become as an adult. This is similar to Arnett's (2001) findings that to be an adult you need to take responsibility for your actions, including conflict management behaviours.

_Family Systems_

The family systems discussed in the interviews were parent-child, marital (parent-parent) and sibling conflicts. It was found that the parent-child conflict situation was perceived as having more influence on the participants' conflict management development than any other relationship. Participants did not perceive sibling conflict as influential and marital conflict did not appear to hold much significance. Furthermore, participants provided evidence that support, or lack thereof, within the family and in particular from the parents had a unique influence on conflict management development.
Parent-child conflict.

The literature is quite clear that the parent’s style of conflict management during parent-child conflict influences conflict management development (Herrara & Dunn, 1997; Reese-Weber, 2000; Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998). What is not as clearly stated in the literature is that the developing child, in the process of becoming a young adult, can be selective in which parent’s conflict management style to learn from. In other words, the development of conflict management skills is not necessarily an automatic modeling of a parent, the individual can evaluate and select the style that is considered appropriate to them. This selection process can be based on identity, as previously discussed, or factors such as effectiveness and emotional control.

While discussing how Steve learned his current reasoning style of managing conflict, he stated “I think my parents were the greatest influence on it [his conflict management skills].” Steve, however, made a distinction between each parents’ conflict management style even when his parents tended to handle conflict with him in a similar way: "Because in the end he’s [Dad] a bit more rational . . . whereas my Mum definitely does [let emotion guide her actions], so that’s definitely why I’ve tried to be a bit more like my Dad cause my Mum still has that emotional element where she can’t really control her actions."

This distinction between parent styles was more salient for participants whose parents did manage conflicts with them differently. Mike stated that he did not learn his conflict management skills from his mother “cause my Mom . . . she follows emotions. My Dad is more rational thinking. . . . How my Mom talks and how my Dad talks is totally different”.

Although, parents have a powerful influence on conflict management skill development, these individuals demonstrated that they have some control to make choices as to which skills they choose to develop.
Alternatively, several participants perceived a parent's conflict management style as ineffective but used that same style when in conflict with that parent or a romantic partner. These participants found it difficult to manage their conflict behaviours: "No, it's [the mother's conflict management style] not effective. It doesn't work on any one. . . . They [mother and brother] just shout and even if it's not at you it's annoying so you end up shouting with them" (Brian) and "It's [conflict management style used with partner] exactly the same as I act with my Mum. . . . [that style] is a really bad conflict resolution style because it gets nothing solved" (Linda). Although these individuals recognised that a parent's conflict management style is ineffective, they tended to automatically use that style in certain conflicts even though in other circumstances they chose more effective conflict management skills.

Marital conflict.

The information provided by the participants, does not support marital conflict as an influence to conflict management development (Dadds et al., 1999; Richmond & Stocker, 2003; Van Doorn et al., 2007) as only one participant believed that witnessing parents in conflict influenced their conflict management skills. This lack of support could be because four of the nine participants did not witness or recall marital conflict in the home. Additionally, only one participant was in a current, long term romantic relationship and, thus, the influence was not yet evident in the other participants' lives. The information disclosed by the participants, who did witness marital conflict, does provide two aspects of marital conflict that may potentially influence conflict management development. First, witnessing marital conflict presents the participant with an example that relationships can withstand the pressures of conflict and, second, that conflict is expected in marriage. For example, when discussing his parent's daily conflicts, Steve summed it up by saying "At the end of the day I
will know that they still love each other and obviously these little things don’t really matter to them. It is more like just appearances more than anything else”.

Family support.

Most participants made reference to certain characteristics of a parent or in general about the home environment in relation to their development of conflict management. It was evident that when a participant felt that they could trust the parent and felt understood and supported in the home, they developed an effective conflict management style, when these aspects of parent and home were missing, they tended to describe more ineffective conflict management styles, which reflects prior finding of family-of-origin studies (Andrews et al., 2000; Halford et al., 2000; Levy et al., 1997; Robinson, 2000; Story et al., 2004).

Susan attributed her aggressive conflict management style during adolescence to a lack of family support, “I felt like no one was understanding me as a person”. Later as her conflict management style became more ‘discussing’ than aggressive, she attributed part of this development to a new perspective of her family support. She said that the catalyst for her re-evaluating the way she managed conflict was “the fact that my family didn’t really talk to me that much. I missed that, missed my family. . . . I missed that love that they used to give me.” She realised to reconnect with her family’s love and support, she needed to change her way of managing conflict with them.

Linda really struggled to resolve conflict with her mother. In these mother-daughter conflicts, they both tend to use ineffective conflict management styles. When she was in conflict with her Aunt, however, a more discussing style of conflict management was used. At different points in the interview Linda described each one’s characteristics quite differently. “My Auntie is really caring, really cares about us [her and siblings]” while with regard to the mother “There’s [sic] issues that I just don’t want to talk about with her. . . . I know that my Mom won’t change. It’s an uphill battle.” The apparent lack of support from
the mother to the daughter may not have allowed Linda to develop an effective conflict management style in that particular relationship, whereas, conflict appeared easier to resolve with the supportive aunt. A supportive family environment may help young adults feel confident to raise conflicts and therefore, expand their conflict experiences.

Conflict Situation Characteristics

Consistent with existing literature, participants identified with one preferred conflict management style (Herrara & Dunn, 1997; Reese-Weber, 2000; Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998). It was found, however, in this study, that participants actually used a variety of conflict management styles and the choice of style was affected by the characteristics of the conflict situation. It is unclear developmentally how the participants learned to manage conflict differently in different situations. These results are possibly linked to the developmental pathways suggested by Creasey & Hesson-McInnis (2001). They suggest that individuals need to monitor their emotions and make cognitive appraisal of that emotion and then appraise their confidence to resolve the issue before deciding how to manage conflict, creating different choices for different individuals (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001). The conflict characteristics that were most prominent in this study were the conflict opponent, prior conflict experience, the ability to maintain emotional control, and the conflict topic or goal.

Conflict opponent.

Several aspects of the conflict opponent were mentioned by participants as influential to managing conflict. The most prevalent was the perceived relationship with the opponent. Whether the relationship with the opponent was seen to be fragile or secure, affected the choice of conflict management. This was revealed most often with friendships and romantic relationships. If it was important that the participant maintained the friendship, then participant's tended to use more avoidance and compromise behaviours in conflict. Betty
stated “to keep the relationship, I think, you will be very active, you will be the person first to say sorry or compromise.” Tracey expressed that:

With friends there’s that element of uncertainty where it could just end the friendship, so you wouldn’t want to act as rash and as irrational very quickly because you’d be more likely to want to preserve the friendship.

Participants did not express the same relationship concerns with family members and made a clear distinction between how conflict was managed with friends and family. This distinction was not uniform across all participants. Some believed that it was easier to manage conflict with friends while some found it easier with family. It was found that the concept of ‘easier’ can have different meanings, it may mean being allowed to be more confrontational in conflict or having no pressure to resolve the conflict immediately. Mike described why it is easier for him to manage conflict with family as opposed to friends:

The worst to handle is conflict with my friends because it triggers anger at times . . . effects [sic] my self-esteem. But with family I can’t do anything. It’s [conflict resolution] just like that. You know that’s how it’s gonna [sic] be.

For this individual there were a strict set of rules in his home to manage conflict. He knows how a conflict in the home is going to be managed, but in the social world, outside of family, he does not seem prepared as he does not know what to expect from his opponent. This participant’s disclosure also demonstrates how prior experience is important to developing conflict management skills.

Prior experience.

Conger et al. (2000) and Robinson (2000) believed that family structure, rules and roles taught individuals self-control. In this study, it was found that prior conflict experiences provided the structure and rules for conflict development. Prior experience allowed participants to be in control of their conflict behaviours. Likewise, if certain conflict
situations were not experienced in the home, individuals must adapt past experience to their current situation, obtain sufficient experience outside of the home, or continually have difficulties resolving these types of conflicts. Brian described a conflict scenario with a past girlfriend in which he felt he did not know how to manage:

*She would like cry over anything, which like I was sort of uncomfortable with because I didn’t know what to do when she starts doing that. . . I wouldn’t know what to say.*

*... I just give her space.*

Brian did not have a sister nor did his mother cry during conflict, so the absence of this event in the home was important to his conflict management development. He, thus, chose to avoid the conflict with his girlfriend and wait for her to make an effort towards resolution. Therefore, the ability of young adults to manage conflict may be influenced by prior conflict experience, or lack of experience, which provides them with the confidence to manage conflict. Creasey and Hesson-McInnis (2001) found that confidence as well as emotional control were factors influencing conflict management skill development.

*Maintain emotional control.*

Controlling emotions, in particular, anger and frustration was important to the participants as they believed that aggressiveness in a conflict is ineffective, which is consistent with aggression studies (O'Leary, 1988). Thus, they felt the need to control their anger and frustration when managing conflict (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Kobak et al., 1993). For some this was easier to do than for others. Participants found it more difficult to manage their anger and aggressive conflict management styles when their opponent was using an aggressive style. These negative conflict styles created thoughts of self-blame, defensiveness and loss of pride: “*Definitely when I feel like I’m being accused, I definitely act way more irrational than . . . if someone was to sit down and [discuss the issue]***” (Tracey) and “*It’s [choice of conflict management] more like a defense mechanism. It’s how”
I defend myself, how I defend my pride” (Mike) and “Displaying anger immediately means people around you tend to get a little bit more defensive” (Paul).

These comments reveal the complexity of managing conflict when emotions need to be controlled and resulted in young adults using different conflict management style. Some participants would avoid conflict, some would try compromise or combinations of different styles. Others found it necessary to match the other person’s aggressive behaviour as the only way to manage the conflict, even if this was not their preferred way to manage conflict. It seemed that controlling their own emotions and managing those of their opponent was critical to how these young adults managed conflict.

Conflict topic/goal.

The influence of the topic or goal of the conflict was important to participants’ conflict management. Topics relating to fault, importance and emotional sensitivity all affected how a conflict was managed by participants. For example, as an adolescent Tracey would have aggressive conflicts with her parents that would see her walk off to her room. When asked who would try to resolve the conflict she stated:

It depends what the situation was. If I felt guilty, then I would probably be a lot more likely to approach them. . . . Whereas, if I felt I was being hard-done-by, I’d wait for them to approach me.

In relation to topic importance and emotional sensitivity, participants said: “It seems like it [conflict management] depends on your attitude towards the issue . . .” (Betty) and “The things that I . . . have fights about with my boyfriend are things that I get sensitive about” (Linda).

Consistent with the literature an individuals perceptions of the conflict topic influence conflict management behaviour (Dadds et al., 1999; Richmond & Stocker, 2003). These
participants made cognitive appraisals of the topic and decided what impact it had on them. Once the impact was understood, conflict management choices were made.

Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to explore young adults’ understanding of their conflict management development and to establish whether identity formation influences such development. In support of prior literature, it was found that family, in particular the parent-child relationship and parental/family support, influenced the conflict management skill development of this group. Parent-child conflict behaviours appear to be the foundation of conflict management skill development for young adults, while the family relationships provide the structure, roles and rules to develop conflict management skills. Thus, if the family was supportive, a more thorough exploration of conflict management behaviours was allowed than if the family was unsupportive. Likewise, parents needed to demonstrate the various conflict management skills in different situations for development. Reese-Weber and Bertle-Haring (1998) pointed out that for young adults to compromise during conflict, it was necessary for them to experience compromise with their parents. Thus, if young adults are not exposed to different styles or a supportive environment, their experiences may be limited, thus, limiting their developmental pathways.

What became evident in this study was that individuals can be agents of their conflict management development. Participants clearly made decisions with regard to conflict management development based on identity. Participants stated that they chose to develop more effective conflict management styles as they matured, took on responsibilities and realised their conflicts were not just about them. Participants also chose to develop conflict management styles that fit into their growing identities as they believed their conflict management behaviours reflected their self-identity.
Another finding revealed that the characteristics of conflict situations also impacted on conflict management behaviours. Factors such as the importance of the relationship, prior experience in conflict, emotional control and the topic or goal of the conflict all interacted to guide the person’s conflict management behaviours. It was difficult to assess how these factors became influential to conflict management development. They may be simply aspects of conflict experiences the young adult has accumulated or experienced in the family environment. For example, if conflict over money was an issue for family it will be an issue for the young adult. Alternatively, these characteristics potentially fit into the developmental pathway suggested by Creasey and Hesson-McInnis (2001). They may be involved in the individual’s ability to control emotion and build confidence in relation to resolving a conflict (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001).

**Limitations of the Study**

A phenomenological methodology is interpretive by nature. The personal views of the participants are analysed by the researcher. As such, biases of both the participant and researcher can affect the data. Although rigour was incorporated into the research design, biases may exist. In addition, participants were not randomly selected as they volunteered to participate. Therefore their experiences may not be representative of the general population of young adults and, thus, not generalisable. The consistency in themes amongst the participants and with prior research may, however, indicate otherwise.

**Implications**

This study contributes towards a young adult’s perceptions of conflict management development. It identifies those factors that they believe to be influential in their development. The implications are that health professionals can use these findings to assist young adults struggling to manage conflict effectively in their relationships and provide parenting advice in relation to creating a home environment conducive to effective conflict
management development. Additionally, understanding the link between identity formation and conflict management behaviour may also aid health professionals assisting adolescents and young adults who display ineffective conflict management skills in different relational settings. Ineffective conflict management skills may potentially be a result of a poorly formed identity.

Future Research

The present study has addressed the gap in the literature revealing a possible link between identity and the conflict management development process. The link requires additional research to understand the processes involved and if there is a directional influence. Additionally it would be beneficial to perform this study with participants that are in intimate relationships and focus on the conflict management skills with in that relationship rather than in general with family and friends. Narrowing the focus of the design may provide different results. One last area that would benefit from further research is emotional control. It is unclear from this study whether emotional control is a conflict management skill or a separate skill that affects conflict management.

In conclusion, the process of conflict management development was found to be complex and dynamic. The findings illustrated that identity formation, family systems and conflict situation characteristics influenced participants' development in unique ways. The findings will help guide further research into conflict management development and inform psychologists that are assisting young adults to develop and improve conflict management skills.
References


Appendix A

Participant Information Letter

Dear Participant

Student Project Title: A qualitative study exploring the development of conflict resolution style in young adults

My name is Pauline Marcoux and I am a student at Edith Cowan University (ECU). I am requesting your participation in the above named research project being undertaken as part of a Psychology (Honours) course. This project has been approved by the Faculty of Computing, Health and Science Research Ethics Committee. The aim of the project is to explore how young adults developed their conflict resolution styles.

To be included in this study, you must be between the ages of 19 and 24 years. Participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any stage. Participation will include taking part in an interview (30 to 60 minutes) with me. The interview will be mainly a free discussion structured only by some guiding questions. The interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed. I may need to contact you following the interview to check the transcription for accuracy. All information you provide will be kept confidential. Personal details will be excluded from the transcripts and the final written report. After the audio recording of the interview has been transcribed, it will be erased.

Thank you for taking an interest in this research project. The information you provide in the interview may provide a link between established research on conflict resolution style development and the real life awareness of such development in young adults. If you would like to participate in this research, please contact me on 0417 959 864. You may also contact the supervisors of this project Dr Elizabeth Kaczmerek on 6304 5193 or Dr Deirdre Drake on 6304 5020 for additional information regarding this research project.

If you have any concerns or complaints about this research project or wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact the Fourth Year Co-ordinator, Dr Justine Dandy:

Edith Cowan University
100 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup WA 6027
Phone: (08) 6304 5105 Email: j.dandy@ecu.edu.au

Yours sincerely

Pauline Marcoux
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Student Project Title: A qualitative study exploring the development of conflict resolution style in young adults

Student Researcher: Pauline Marcoux 0417 959 864

I ..................... have been provided with an information letter regarding the above titled student project. I have read and understood the participation information letter. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions that I had and they have been satisfactorily answered. I am also aware that I can ask questions of the researcher as they arise.

I understand that my participation in the project will entail an interview lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes and that the interview will be recorded. I am also aware that confidentiality will be upheld with regard to the content of the interview and the information will be used solely for the use of the student project. If the information obtained is required for another purpose, I will be informed and an additional consent form will be provided.

I freely agree to participate in this project and am free to withdraw from this project at any time without the need to provide a reason.

Signed: ________________________
Date: ________________________
Appendix C

Demographic Information

Student Project Title: A qualitative study exploring the development of conflict resolution style in young adults

Student Researcher: Pauline Marcoux 0417 959 864

Name: ____________________________________________

Age: ____________________________________________

Nationality: _____________________________________

Number of siblings: _____________________________ (include yourself)

Birth Order (circle one):

- Only child
- First born
- Second born
- Third born
- Other ____________________________

Preferred contact details: ____________________________
Appendix D

Interview Schedule

The interview schedule is to be used as a guide. Probing questions will be asked based on the informant’s response to the questions.

1. Tell me how you attempt to resolve conflicts?
   - What about with family?
   - What about with friends?

2. How do you think you came to learn that conflict resolution style?
   - What about your parents conflict resolution style?
   - What about how your Mother/Father resolved conflicts with you when growing up?
   - What about how you dealt with conflicts with older/younger siblings?

3. Tell me about a time when you used a different style?

4. Tell me about resolving conflicts with friends?
   - At the present time?
   - As a child?

5. Do you recall any other events/people that influenced your conflict resolution style development?
Appendix E
Referral Agencies

Lifeline WA
Individuals, couples & families counselling
13 1114
www.lifelinewa.org.au

KinWay
Relationship counselling, education & training
9263 2050
www.kinway.org.au

Relationships Australia
Provider of relationship support services
1300 364 277
www.relationships.com.au

LYNKS Counselling (YMCA)
Individuals, couples, parents and families counselling
9325 4245
www.ymcaperth.org.au
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Editor, Journal of Family Psychology
The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia
34th Street and Civic Center Boulevard
Room 1486 CHOP North
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104-4399
E-mail

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Keep a copy of the manuscript to guard against loss.

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Research manuscripts should not exceed a total of 25–30 double-spaced pages typed with a standard font (e.g., Times New Roman 12 point). Make requests for consideration of longer papers in the cover letter, providing justification for the additional length. Manuscripts exceeding this requirement will be returned to the author for shortening prior to peer review.

Review and theoretical manuscripts provide creative integrative summaries of an area of work relevant to family psychology. The text (exclusive of references) should not exceed 25 pages.

Brief reports are encouraged for innovative work that may be premature for publication as a full research report because of small sample size or novel methodologies. Brief reports are also an appropriate format for replications and for clinical case studies. Authors of brief reports should indicate in the cover letter that a full report is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. Brief reports should be designated as such and should not exceed a total of 12 pages.

All research involving human participants should describe oversight of the research process by the relevant Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) and should describe consent and assent procedures briefly in the Method section.

The translation of research into practice should be evident in all manuscripts. Authors should intertwine a discussion of the clinical and/or policy implications and importance of their work throughout the manuscript. Authors should not include a separate section for this material. For further information on content, authors should refer to the editorial in the

Young Adult Conflict Management 66
March 2004 issue of the journal (Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 3–4).

Masked Review

This journal has adopted a policy of masked review for all submissions. The cover letter should include all authors' names and institutional affiliations. The first page of text should omit this information but should include the title of the manuscript and the date it is submitted. Every effort should be made to see that the manuscript itself contains no clues to the authors' identity.

Authors may suggest potential reviewers for their work, to be used at the editor's discretion. Suggested reviewers should not have any known conflict of interest with the authors or the work. Full names, title and institution, and e-mail addresses for suggested reviewers should be provided in the cover letter.

Cover Letter

Authors should indicate in their cover letter that the work has not been published previously and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. The relationship of the submitted manuscript with other publications and/or submissions of the author, if any, should be explained. The cover letter should include a statement indicating that the manuscript has been seen and reviewed by all authors and that all authors have contributed to it in a meaningful way.

The cover letter must include the full mailing address, telephone, fax, and e-mail address for the corresponding author.