



Parent–adolescent conflicts, conflict resolution types, and adolescent adjustment

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ABSTRACT

The current study examined the moderating role of conflict resolution on the association between parent–adolescent conflicts and adolescent problematic adjustment. Participants were 1313 Dutch early and middle adolescents who completed measures on conflict frequency, conflict resolution with parents, and internalizing and externalizing adjustment problems. Using a person-centered approach, five types of adolescents could be distinguished that were characterized by different patterns of conflict resolution. These types meaningfully differed in conflict frequency with parents and adjustment problems. Furthermore, these types moderated the relation between conflict frequency and externalizing problems and internalizing problems. When withdrawal was the only strategy used to resolve conflicts with parents, conflict frequency was more strongly related to externalizing problems, but when withdrawal was used in combination with other styles, conflict frequency was more strongly related to internalizing problems.

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1. Introduction

Teenagers' increasing striving for autonomy can result in a temporary increase in parent–child conflicts during early adolescence (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Laursen, 1995; Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2002) and an increase in negative affect during conflicts until middle adolescence (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998). These conflicts mainly result from adolescents' and parents' discrepant expectations regarding appropriate behavior and the timing of transitions in authority, autonomy, and responsibilities (Dekovic, Noom, & Meeus, 1997; Montemayor, 1983; Smetana, 1989, 1995). Some conflict with parents can thus be regarded as a normal part of family relations during adolescence, and these conflicts have a clear function in adolescent development of autonomy and individuation (Steinberg, 2001). However, too many conflicts may be a risk for adolescent psychosocial adjustment and well-being (Cooper, 1988; Mills & Grusec, 1988). The conditions under which parent–adolescent conflicts are positively versus negatively related to adolescents' psychological functioning are as yet not clearly understood. The present study investigates whether the relation between parent–adolescent conflicts and adolescent behavioral problems depends on the way adolescents handle and resolve their conflicts with parents.

Previous studies have mainly focused on the detrimental relations between parent–adolescent conflicts and adolescent adjustment. Greater parent–adolescent conflict has been associated with increased adolescent externalizing and internalizing problems (Buehler & Gerard, 2002; Pelton & Forehand, 2001; Robin & Foster, 1989). Similarly, greater parent–adolescent conflict has been associated with lower levels of psychological well-being and school adjustment, and higher levels of substance use (Shek, 1997). Adolescents reporting more conflicts with fathers and mothers reported lower self-esteem, and more risky behavior (Tucker, McHale, & Crouter, 2003). The causal direction of these relations may go both ways: Parent–adolescent conflicts have been found to predict more problem behavior over time (Barber & Delfabbro, 2000; Wasserman, Miller, Pinner, & Jaramillo, 1996), but

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problem behavior has also been found to predict more conflicts over time (Barber, 1994). Bidirectional relations between problem behavior and parent–adolescent conflicts have also been reported (Maggs & Galambos, 1993).

The relation between parent–adolescent conflicts and adolescent problem behavior may also depend on the relational context in which the conflicts take place. For example, parent–adolescent conflicts were found to be related to problem behavior for children of alcoholic parents, but not for children of nonalcoholic parents. Furthermore, this relation was stronger in conditions of low parental support than of high parental support (Barrera & Stice, 1998). In a similar vein, mother's acceptance appears to buffer the link between parent–adolescent conflicts and adolescent problem behavior (Galambos, Sears, Almeida, & Kolaric, 1995). Past studies on the relational context have mainly looked at parenting variables as moderators of the link between conflicts and adjustment. The present study will extend these findings by looking at adolescent conflict resolution behavior as a possible moderator of the relation between conflicts and adjustment.

Only one study that we know of has examined the moderating effect of conflict resolution on the relation between parent–adolescent conflicts and adolescent adjustment. Participants in this study were 185 adolescents aged 14.5 years on average from two-parent families who came from working- or middleclass backgrounds. Conflict resolution was measured using an adaptation of Kurdek's (1994) Ineffective Arguing Inventory, which assesses a dysfunctional conflict resolution style. An interaction was found between frequency of conflicts and ineffective conflict resolution with mothers on adolescent depression (Tucker et al., 2003). However, when following up this interaction by considering the moderating role of conflict frequency in the relation between conflict resolution and depression, the authors found that the relationship between ineffective conflict resolution and depression was stronger for a low-conflict group than for a high-conflict group.

Additional support for the moderating role of conflict resolution can be found in research on interparental conflicts and child adjustment. Unresolved interparental conflicts elicit a more negative response from children than resolved interparental conflicts (Cummings, Ballard, & El-Sheikh (1991); Cummings, Ballard, El-Sheikh, & Lake, 1991; Cummings, Simpson, & Wilson, 1993). Moreover, the relations of interparental conflicts with child adjustment depend on the type of conflict resolution parents use. Whereas parents' use of aggression and conflict avoidance in resolving conflicts was related to more negative outcomes in children (Camara & Resnick, 1989; Dadds, Atkinson, Turner, Blums, & Lendich, 1999; Kempton, Thomas, & Forehand, 1989), parents' use of negotiation and compromise was related to less detrimental effects of conflicts on child adjustment.

These findings suggest that conflict resolution might moderate the relation between parent–adolescent conflict frequency and adolescent adjustment. Moreover, the findings regarding interparental conflict resolution suggest that it is not only important to include conflict resolution, but also to distinguish different conflict resolution styles. Although there are no reported data on the moderating role of different conflict resolution styles, conflict resolution has been associated with adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. Conflict engagement of adolescents, characterized by attack and display of anger, seems to be positively related to both externalizing problems (Edwards, Barkley, Laneri, Fletcher, & Metevia, 2001; Jaffee & D'Zurilla, 2003; Rubenstein & Feldman, 1993; Sanders, Dadds, Johnston, & Cash, 1992) and internalizing problems (Rubenstein & Feldman, 1993). Withdrawal or avoidance has also been associated with more externalizing problems (Jaffee & D'Zurilla, 2003) and internalizing problems (Rubenstein & Feldman, 1993). In contrast, positive problem solving (Tucker et al., 2003) and compromise (Rubenstein & Feldman, 1993) were found to be related to fewer externalizing and internalizing problems.

Different conflict resolution strategies are not used in isolation, but instead form patterns that typically go together. The effect of a particular conflict resolution style might depend on the extent to which other styles are also used. For example, using high levels of positive problem solving might be related to a weaker relation between conflict frequency and problem behavior only when at the same time little negative conflict resolution is used. In the current study, we therefore adopted a person-centered or typological approach to identify different groups or types of adolescents who have similar configurations of conflict resolution styles in relationships with their parents. We focused on the total constellation of conflict resolution styles that characterizes each adolescent and the way these conflict resolution styles work together to produce particular outcomes. Using a typological approach enables one to look at moderator variables for different types of adolescents characterized by different conflict resolution patterns. We examined whether the link between parent–adolescent conflict frequency and adolescent psychosocial adjustment depends on adolescents' type of conflict resolution. More specifically, we asked whether different types or subgroups of adolescents with distinctive conflict resolution patterns show different relations between parent–adolescent conflict frequency and adolescent psychosocial adjustment.

Because there is not a typology of adolescent conflict resolution style patterns, we did not predict the expected types or formulate concrete hypotheses about their moderating role. We addressed the following research questions: 1. Which types of adolescents with distinctive conflict resolution styles can be distinguished and do these types differ in conflicts and adjustment problems? 2. Does the link between parent–adolescent conflicts and adolescent behavioral and internalizing or externalizing adjustment problems depend on adolescents' type of conflict resolution style? 3. Are there sex and age differences in these associations?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants came from the first wave of the CONAMORE (CONflict And Management Of Relationships, Meeus, Akse, Branje et al., 2004) longitudinal study. In this study, 1313 adolescents (676 girls and 637 boys) participated, including 923 early adolescents (mean age 12.42 years) and 390 middle adolescents (mean age 16.68 years). Eighty-six percent of the adolescents were

of Dutch origin; the other 14% came from ethnic minorities. Adolescents came from 12 schools in Utrecht and surroundings. Different educational tracks were represented, with approximately 1/3 of the adolescents in trade-schools, 1/3 of the adolescents in pre-professional training, and 1/3 of the adolescents in pre-university schooling (because classes are frequently combinations of different school tracks, exact numbers cannot be provided). This study was reviewed and approved by the review board of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO).

2.2. Procedure

Before the study, both students and their parents received written information and, if the student elected to participate, were required to provide written informed consent; less than 1% decided not to participate. Written informed consent was also obtained at all the participating schools. Interviewers visited schools and asked participating adolescents to fill out a battery of questionnaires after school hours. During school visits the interviewer started with an explanation of the project and instruction about filling out the questionnaire. Anonymity of respondents and secrecy of their given answers was guaranteed explicitly. The interviewer asked the adolescents to fill out the questionnaires independently, and without consultation with others. The presence of the interviewer encouraged complete responding and prevented collaboration among the adolescents as they completed the questionnaire. Respondents received € 10 (US \$ 13) after completing the questionnaires.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Frequency of conflicts

The number and frequency of conflicts with the father and mother was measured with the Interpersonal Conflict Questionnaire (Laursen, 1993). The list consists of 35 items covering conflict topics that were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *never* through *sometimes* to *often*. Adolescents rated for each item how often they had conflicts with the father and with the mother about the topic during the last week. Items included issues like: “privacy, wanting to be alone”; “watching too much TV, or using the computer or phone too much”; “not doing what you are asked to do”; “how late you have to be home”; and “appearances, clothing”. Cronbach's alpha was .94 for conflicts with father and .93 for conflicts with mother.

2.3.2. Conflict resolution

Conflict resolution with the father and the mother was measured with a Dutch adaptation of Kurdek's Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (CRSI, Kurdek, 1994), which measures four conflict resolution styles: positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance. Positive problem solving involves trying to understand the others' position and using constructive reasoning tactics to work out compromises. Conflict engagement involves being verbally abusive, angry, defensive or attacking, or losing self-control. Withdrawal involves avoiding the problem, avoiding talking, and becoming distant. Compliance involves accepting the resolution of the other without asserting one's own position. In addition, we added a fifth strategy identified by Meeus (Meeus, Akse, Branje et al., 2004), exit, which involves ending all contact without resolving the conflict.

Adolescents rated for each of 25 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *never* to *always* how often they revealed particular conflict resolution strategies when having an argument or conflict with their father and with their mother. Sample items were: Conflict engagement: “Letting myself go, and saying things I do not really mean”; Exit: “Saying that I don't want to have anything to do with him or her”; Positive problem solving: “Trying to find solutions that are acceptable for both of us”; Withdrawal: “Not listening to him/her anymore”; and Compliance: “Not defending my opinion”. The CRSI has a good internal consistency and 1-year stability and moderate convergent, concurrent, and predictive validity (Kurdek). Cronbach's alphas in the current study ranged from .72 to .90 for conflict resolution with the father and from .65 to .86 for conflict resolution with the mother.

2.3.3. Internalizing problems

Depression was measured with the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI, Kovacs, 1985, 1992), a symptom-based measure consisting of 27 items rated on a 3-point Likert scale ranging from *not true* to *very true*. Sample items are: “I worry all the time about all kind of things”, “I feel tired all the time”, and “I don't have any friends”. The CDI has adequate to good internal consistency and test-retest reliability (Finch, Saylor, Edwards, & McIntosh, 1987) and adequate factor validity (Craighead, Smucker, Craighead, & Ilardi, 1998). Cronbach's alpha for this measure in the current sample was .92.

Anxiety was measured with the SCARED (Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders; Birmaher et al., 1997), a reliable and valid DSM-IV-related self-report questionnaire (Birmaher et al., 1999; Hale, Raaijmakers, Muris, & Meeus, 2005). The SCARED includes subscales for panic disorder (e.g., “When I am scared I have difficulties with breathing”), separation anxiety (e.g., “I worry that something bad will happen to my parents”), social anxiety (e.g., “I feel nervous around people I don't know well”), school anxiety (e.g., “I worry about going to school”), and generalized anxiety (e.g., “I worry if I am going to be fine”). Items were rated on a 3-point scale: 0 (almost never), 1 (sometimes), 2 (often), and were averaged to compute a total anxiety score. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .93.

2.3.4. Externalizing problems

Aggression was measured by the Direct and Indirect Aggression Scales (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Osterman, 1992). We used the 17 items from the subscales for direct aggression (e.g., “I kick or strike the other one” or “I call the other one names”) and indirect aggression (e.g., “I spread vicious rumors as revenge” or “I tell others not to associate with that person”), which have good reliability

Table 1
Differences between conflict resolution types in conflict resolution, conflict, and adjustment

Differences in	df (4, ...)	F	Partial η^2
Conflict resolution with mother			
Engagement	1183	115.13**	.29
Exit	1183	79.15**	.21
Positive problem solving	1183	453.84**	.61
Withdrawal	1183	176.03**	.38
Compliance	1183	26.87**	.08
Conflict resolution with father			
Engagement	1183	226.49**	.44
Exit	1183	211.18**	.42
Positive problem solving	1183	529.42**	.64
Withdrawal	1183	172.40**	.37
Compliance	1183	38.97**	.12
Conflicts with mother	853	30.03**	.09
Conflicts with father	853	48.58**	.14
Aggression	877	8.58**	.04
Delinquency	877	1.86	.01
Depression	877	8.19**	.03
Anxiety	877	4.65**	.02

** $p < .01$.

(Bjorkqvist et al., 1992). The subscale for withdrawal was not included. Adolescents indicated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *never* to *very often* to which extent they show certain behaviors when they are angry at someone in the classroom. A total aggression score was computed by averaging direct and indirect aggression scores. Cronbach's alpha for the total score was .89.

Delinquency was measured by 16 items from Baerveldt, van Rossem, and Vermande (2003). Adolescents were asked to rate on a 4-point scale ranging from *never* to *four times or more* how often they had shown certain forms of delinquent behavior (e.g., “stolen a bike”, “deliberately broken something on street”) during the last 12 months. This measure has good internal consistency and is sufficiently one-dimensional (Baerveldt et al., 2003). Cronbach's alpha in the current sample was .90.

3. Results

3.1. Different types of conflict resolution styles

We used a hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's (1963) method to examine whether it is possible to distinguish different constellations of conflict resolution. The cluster analysis was performed on the conflict resolution strategies with both the father

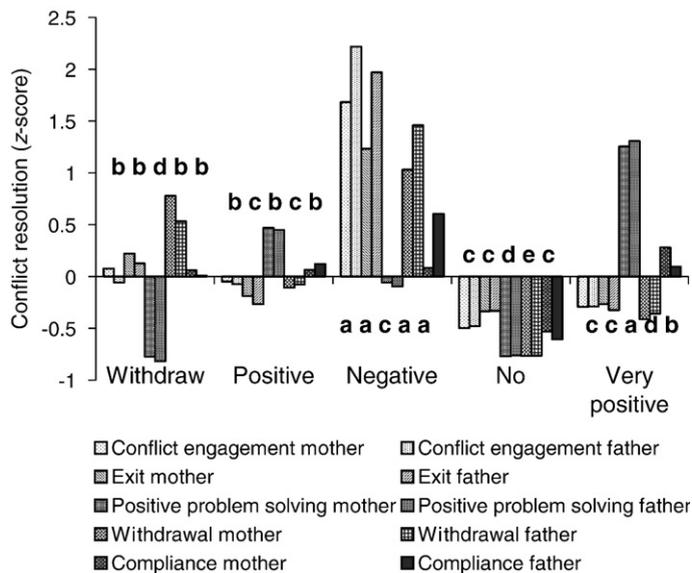


Fig. 1. Mean levels of conflict resolution strategies with father and mother for different types of adolescents with different conflict resolution patterns. *Note.* Different letters (i.e., a, b, c, etc) indicate significant differences in conflict resolution across types. Because similar differences were found for conflict resolution with fathers and mothers, one letter is used for each conflict resolution style for father and mother together.

and the mother. The number of clusters was determined by examining the number of adolescents in each cluster and the meaningful distinction between clusters using Multivariate Analyses of Variance (MANOVAS). A five-cluster solution was found to be most suitable. To examine whether these types significantly differed in conflict resolution strategies, MANOVAS were performed with the five cluster solution as predictor and the conflict resolution strategies with the father and the mother as the dependent variables, using an alpha level of .05. Partial Eta Squared was used to evaluate whether the cluster solution was acceptable and able to account for at least 10% of the variance in each of the clustered variables (ter Bogt, Raaijmakers, Vollebergh, van Wel, & Sikkema, 2003). The MANOVAS revealed that the five clusters differed in conflict resolution (Table 1, Fig. 1).

The first cluster, labeled *Withdraw* ($n = 237$) was characterized by relatively high levels of withdrawal and very low levels of positive problem solving. The second cluster was labeled *Positive* ($n = 374$), and was characterized by medium to high levels of positive problem solving and medium levels of the other conflict resolution styles. The third cluster, *Negative* ($n = 87$), was characterized by very high levels of engagement, exit, withdrawal and, to a lesser extent, compliance. The fourth cluster was labeled *No resolution* ($n = 261$). This cluster consisted of adolescents who had very low scores on all conflict resolution strategies, suggesting that they do not resolve conflicts with parents. The last cluster ($n = 229$) was labeled *Very Positive*, because it was characterized by very high positive problem solving, moderate levels of compliance, and low levels of the other conflict resolution strategies.

Chi-square tests revealed that younger and older adolescents and boys and girls were differentially distributed across the clusters (age $\chi^2(4, N = 1202) = 33.18$, sex $\chi^2(4, N = 1202) = 18.40$, $ps < .001$). Compared to younger adolescents, older adolescents were more represented in the clusters *Positive* (34% versus 30%) and *Negative* (13% versus 5%), and less in the cluster *No resolution* (17% versus 24%). Compared to boys, girls were more represented in the clusters *Negative* (9% versus 5%) and *Withdraw* (22% versus 18%), and less in the cluster *No resolution* (18% versus 26%).

Next, we examined whether these subgroups of adolescents with distinctive conflict resolution styles differed in the frequency of conflicts with their father and mother and in their problem behavior. Again, MANOVAS were performed in which the five cluster solution was used as the predictor variable and frequency of conflicts with the father and the mother, anxiety, depression, aggression, and delinquency were the dependent variables (see Table 1, Fig. 2). Adolescents in the *Negative* cluster had the most conflicts with the father and with the mother, and adolescents in the *No resolution* cluster reported the least conflicts. Adolescents who used withdrawal as the primary conflict resolution strategy reported the second highest level of conflicts with the mother. Between the other types no significant differences were found in frequency of conflicts with the father and the mother. Adolescents in the *Negative* group were also characterized by significantly higher levels of aggression, anxiety, and depression than the other types. For delinquency no significant differences were found between the five types of adolescents with different conflict resolution strategies.

3.2. Relation of conflicts to problem behavior for adolescents with different types of conflict resolution style

To examine whether the relation of parent–adolescent conflicts to behavioral and emotional problems differed for the five types of adolescents with different patterns of conflict resolution styles, multigroup path analyses were conducted in which we estimated the relation between conflicts and problem behavior for each of the five groups (Fig. 3). Conflicts with parents was measured as a latent variable with frequency of conflicts with the father and the mother as indicators. For adjustment, latent

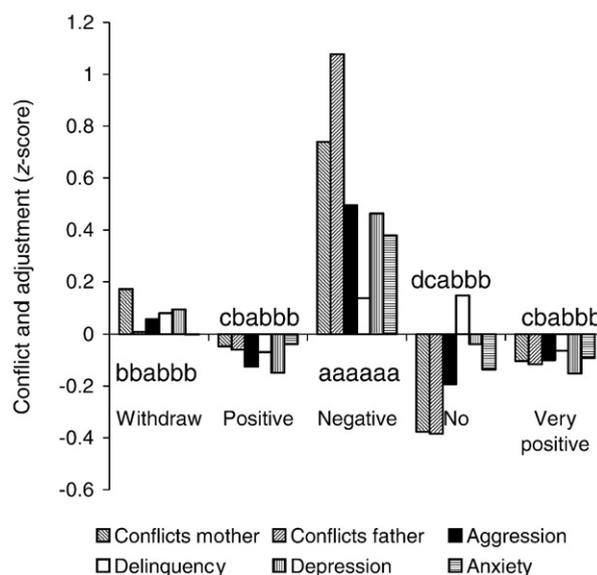


Fig. 2. Mean levels of conflict with father and mother and adjustment problems for different types of adolescents with different conflict resolution patterns. Note. Different letters (i.e., a, b, c, etc) indicate significant differences in conflict and adjustment across conflict resolution types.

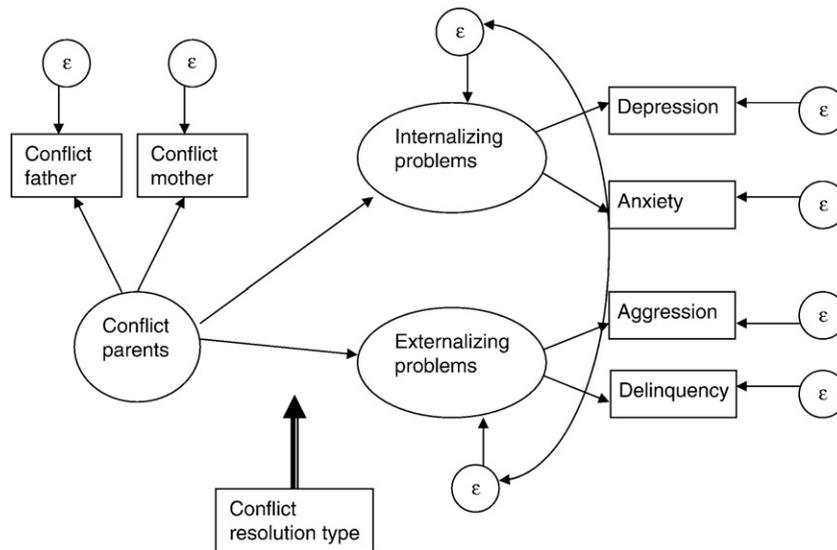


Fig. 3. Model estimated to assess the relation between conflict with parents and problem behavior. Note. This model was estimated in a multigroup analysis for each of the five conflict resolution types.

variables for internalizing problems and externalizing problems were used, with anxiety and depression as indicators of internalizing problems, and aggression and delinquency as indicators of externalizing problems. For each latent variable, the factor loading of one of the indicators was fixed to 1 and the factor loading of the other indicator was constrained to be equal across the five groups. Configural invariance and invariance of factor loadings is a necessary condition for testing differences in paths across groups (Kline, 1998). Correlations between internalizing and externalizing problems were allowed, but were constrained to be equal across groups. Although invariant factor variance and covariance are not required to compare paths across groups, we chose to constrain these to be able to compare unstandardized as well as standardized coefficients.

Model fit was evaluated by the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) and the non-normed fit index (NNFI), with values above .90 indicating acceptable fit and values above .95 indicating good fit, and the root mean square of error of approximation (RMSEA), with values up to .06 representing a close fit of the model (Browne & Cudeck, 1989, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

First, a model was estimated in which all factor variances and covariances, error variances, and paths were constrained to be invariant across the five groups. This model did not provide a very good fit to the data (Table 2). Next, we estimated a model in which regression coefficients were allowed to differ across groups. A chi-square difference test was then applied to examine whether the difference between the constrained model and the less constrained model was significant. The results indicated that the less constrained model did not significantly fit the data better than the fully constrained model. The third model allowed different error variances across the five groups. Testing for invariant error variance assesses whether the model has comparable predictive power across groups (Kline, 1998), however, testing for equal factor variance and covariance is not dependent on invariant error variance. Allowing for different error variances significantly increased model fit. Next, path coefficients were again allowed to differ across groups, but this did not improve model fit. In the final model, we allowed only some paths to differ, which improved model fit and resulted in an acceptable fit.

Table 3 shows the resulting path coefficients of the final model with partially different paths. The results show that conflicts with parents are significantly related to externalizing and internalizing problems. Critical ratio comparisons of coefficients for the types of adolescents with different conflict resolution styles showed that for the Negative resolution group, conflicts with parents were significantly more strongly related to internalizing problems than for the four groups of adolescents with other conflict resolution styles. Thus, adolescents who resolve their conflicts with parents by a combination of conflict engagement, withdrawal, and exit, report more internalizing problems when they experience more conflicts with parents than adolescents who use other conflict resolution strategies. For adolescents of the conflict resolution type characterized by withdrawal and low positive problem

Table 2

Fit indices of different models in multigroup path analyses on the association between conflict and problem behavior

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	GFI	NNFI	RMSEA	$\Delta\chi^2/\Delta df$
1. All similar	395.33**	86	.86	.76	.07	
2. 1 with different paths	388.63**	78	.86	.73	.07	1 vs. 2: 6.7/8
3. 1 with different errors	147.57**	62	.95	.91	.04	1 vs. 3: 247.8/24**
4. 3 with different paths	138.67**	54	.95	.90	.04	3 vs. 4: 8.9/8
5. 3 with partially different paths	141.69**	60	.95	.91	.04	3 vs. 5: 5.9/2

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 3
Regression coefficients of conflict to problem behavior for different types of conflict resolution

	Total	Boys	Girls	Early adolescents	Middle adolescents
Conflicts with parents → internalizing problems					
Withdraw	.07** ^a (.15)	.06** ^a (.14)	.11** ^a (.26)	.08** ^a (.21)	-.02 ^a (-.02)
Positive	.07** ^a (.15)	.06** ^a (.14)	.11** ^a (.26)	.08** ^a (.21)	-.02 ^a (-.02)
Negative	.22** ^b (.44)	.20** ^b (.43)	.45** ^b (.75)	.31** ^b (.67)	-.02 ^a (-.02)
No resolution	.07** ^a (.15)	.06** ^a (.14)	.11** ^a (.26)	.08** ^a (.21)	-.02 ^a (-.02)
Very Positive	.07** ^a (.15)	.06** ^a (.14)	.11** ^a (.26)	.08** ^a (.21)	-.02 ^a (-.02)
Conflicts with parents → externalizing problems					
Withdraw	.34** ^b (.52)	.35** ^b (.46)	.31** ^b (.91)	.48** ^b (.74)	.21** ^a (.23)
Positive	.23** ^a (.38)	.20** ^a (.28)	.11** ^a (.63)	.27** ^a (.53)	.21** ^a (.23)
Negative	.23** ^a (.38)	.35** ^b (.46)	.11** ^a (.63)	.27** ^a (.53)	.21** ^a (.23)
No resolution	.23** ^a (.38)	.20** ^a (.28)	.11** ^a (.63)	.27** ^a (.53)	.21** ^a (.23)
Very Positive	.23** ^a (.38)	.20** ^a (.28)	.11** ^a (.63)	.27** ^a (.53)	.21** ^a (.23)

Standardized regression coefficients are displayed between parentheses. Different superscripts indicate significant differences in problem behavior across conflict resolution types.

** $p < .01$.

solving, conflicts with parents were more strongly related to externalizing problems than for each of the other four groups, indicating that adolescents who resolve their conflicts with parents by withdrawing report more externalizing problems when they experience more conflicts with parents than adolescents who use other conflict resolution strategies. The other groups did not differ significantly in paths from conflicts to problem behavior.

We repeated these analyses for boys and girls separately. The stronger relation between conflicts and internalizing problems for the Negative resolution group and the stronger relation between conflicts and externalizing problems for the Withdrawal resolution group were found for both boys and girls (Table 3). In addition, for boys, the Negative resolution group also revealed a stronger relation between conflicts and externalizing behavior. For girls, the relation between conflicts and externalizing problems was less strong than for boys, except for girls with a negative style of conflict resolution. The fit of the final models was $\chi^2(62) = 111.10$, GFI = .92, RMSEA = .04 for boys and $\chi^2(60) = 102.79$, GFI = .93, RMSEA = .04 for girls.

In addition, we compared models for early adolescents and middle adolescents. For early adolescents, both the stronger relation between conflicts and internalizing problems for the Negative resolution group and the stronger relation between conflicts and externalizing problems for the Withdrawal resolution group were found. For middle adolescents, no differences were found across the five groups, and conflicts were not significantly related to internalizing problems. The fit of the final models was $\chi^2(60) = 156.04$, GFI = .91, RMSEA = .06 for early adolescents and $\chi^2(62) = 116.05$, GFI = .90, RMSEA = .05 for middle adolescents.

4. Discussion

The goal of the present study was to examine whether adolescents report different constellations of conflict resolution strategies with their fathers and their mothers, and whether these conflict resolution types moderate the relation between parent–adolescent conflicts and adolescent problem behavior. Using a person-centered approach, it was possible to distinguish five types of adolescents that meaningfully differed in their pattern of conflict resolution, their level of conflicts with parents and their problem behavior. Perhaps the most important finding of this study is that these different conflict resolution types moderate the link between conflicts and problem behavior: Conflicts with parents are differentially related to adolescent adjustment for adolescents characterized by distinctive types of conflict resolution.

Two types of conflict resolution were identified as particularly noteworthy when considering the relations between conflict and adolescent adjustment. The Negative resolution type, characterized by high levels of conflict engagement, exit, withdrawal, and, to a lesser extent, compliance, was least common among the study participants, but was related to more conflicts with fathers and with mothers and was related to significantly higher levels of aggression, depression, and anxiety than the other types. The relation between internalizing problems and conflicts was highest for this type. Although conflicts were generally more strongly related to externalizing problems than to internalizing problems, this was not the case for the Negative conflict resolution type. For this type, conflicts with parents were more strongly related to depression and anxiety than for the other adolescents. These relations may arise from a cycle of a search for autonomy and depression. Depressed adolescents have more difficulties establishing autonomy with parents (Allen, Hauser, Eickholt, Bell, & O'Conner, 1994), and describe their relationship with parents as enmeshed (Jewell & Stark, 2003). The history of conflict with authority and the hostile emotional tone in these parent–adolescent relationships may lead to internalizing problems for adolescents.

The other noteworthy type, Withdrawal, was characterized by high levels of withdrawing and low levels of positive problem solving, and reported moderate levels of conflicts with the mother. Apparently, this type does not adequately solve conflicts with parents, but instead stops talking and withdraws from the situation. The relation between externalizing problems (delinquency and aggression) and conflicts was highest for this type. For these adolescents, withdrawal may be a strategy to shun parental control and supervision of their antisocial behavior. Indeed, difficulties establishing autonomy and, in particular, relatedness with parents have been linked to externalizing behaviors (Allen et al., 1994). Families of adolescent substance abusers have been

characterized as disengaged (Friedman & Utada, 1992; Protinsky & Shilts, 1990; Volk, 1989), and adolescents with conduct disorder tend to describe their parents as using a permissive discipline style (Jewell & Stark, 2003). Also, adolescents in families who were higher on individuality than connectedness across adolescence revealed higher levels of aggression (Noack & Puschner, 1999).

Two types of adolescents were characterized by relatively effective conflicts resolution strategies, the Very Positive and Positive types. The Very Positive type showed high positive problem solving and low engagement, exit, and withdrawal. The Positive type revealed high positive problem solving, although significantly lower than the Very Positive type, and medium levels of the other conflict resolution strategies. These types revealed low to moderate levels of conflicts with fathers and mothers, and, in accordance with previous findings (e.g., Tucker et al., 2003), they did not reveal high levels of adjustment problems. The last type that could be distinguished was characterized by no conflict resolution at all. This type scored lowest on all conflict tactics and reported the lowest frequency of conflicts with parents. Apparently, for this type there are not many conflicts to resolve. The relation between conflict frequency and adjustment was similar across these three types.

Unexpectedly, analyses examining sex and age differences in these moderating effects showed that conflicts were not significantly related to internalizing problems and conflict resolution type did not moderate the relation between conflicts with parents and adolescents' adjustment for middle adolescents, although it did for younger adolescents. These findings may be related to the development towards greater autonomy, individuality and independence from their parents that characterizes middle adolescents (Cooper, Grotevant, & Condon, 1983; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986), which may make them more assertive and influential and less affected by parent–child conflicts regardless of the characteristic way they handle these conflicts. Sex difference analyses showed that conflicts were related to both internalizing and externalizing behavior for boys (but not girls) who used Negative conflict resolution.

Hence, the relation between parent–adolescent conflicts and adjustment depends on adolescents' constellation of conflict resolution styles. Although conflicts are positively related to both internalizing and externalizing problems for all adolescents, this relation was found to be stronger for particular types of adolescents than for other types. These results confirm that conflicts with parents do not need to be equally detrimental under all circumstances. When resolved with a positive style with negotiation and compromises, conflicts are not always related to psychosocial adjustment problems.

Because the design of our study is correlational, the direction of effects in the relation between conflicts and adjustment needs further investigation, however. Conflicts with parents may lead to adolescent adjustment difficulties, but the reverse may also be true, with adolescent problem behavior (especially externalizing behavior) leading to more conflicts with parents. Parents tend to have more conflicts with adolescents with behavioral problems, and a negative conflict style might reflect the externalizing problems.

An important strength of this study is the person-centered approach, which enabled us to focus on the constellation of conflict resolution strategies instead of on isolated conflict resolution strategies. This study found evidence for five different types of conflict resolution, which shows that different strategies are not used in isolation, but instead form different patterns that typically go together. For example, adolescents using much conflict engagement typically use exit, withdrawal, and compliance as well to resolve their conflicts with parents. Correspondingly, positive problem solving and looking for compromises do not likely occur together with conflict engagement characterized by high arousal and emotionality. Taking into account combinations of conflict resolution strategies can elucidate patterns that are not revealed when each conflict resolution strategy is assessed separately. The results of this study indicate that the moderating role of conflict resolution on the relation between conflict frequency and externalizing problems and internalizing problems depends on the pattern of conflict resolution styles and not on specific conflict resolution styles. For example, our study showed that the moderating effect of withdrawal depends on the constellation of conflict resolution strategies in which withdrawal is used. When withdrawal is the only strategy used to resolve conflicts with parents, conflict frequency is more strongly related to externalizing problems. In contrast, when withdrawal is used together with engagement, compliance, and leaving the relationship, conflict frequency is more strongly related to internalizing problems. Of course, future research is needed to replicate these types.

A clear limitation of our study is the use of self-report to assess both conflicts and conflict resolution of adolescents with parents and adolescent adjustment. Common method variance, or the tendency of respondents to answer different questions in the same way, may have inflated the links between conflicts and adjustment. However, the main findings of our study are that the associations between parent–adolescent conflicts and adolescent adjustment are different for distinctive types of conflict resolution. It is unlikely that common method variance has a differential effect across different groups. Also, one might argue that conflict resolution style moderates the link between conflicts and problem behaviour due to its relation to conflicts, with negative conflict resolution styles being characterized by more conflicts. However, mean level differences between groups were not necessarily related to rank order relations within groups and it is *within* the negative conflict resolution type that more conflicts are related to more externalizing adjustment problems.

The reported findings have some important implications for practice. Clinicians working with parents and adolescents should pay attention to the different conflict resolution styles that adolescents use when dealing with conflicts with parents because these styles might affect how these conflicts are related to adolescent adjustment problems. Within a clinical context, conflict resolution styles may warrant opportunities for therapeutic intervention. For adolescents with internalizing problems it might be important to learn more positive ways of handling conflicts with parents, in particular trying to reduce the amount of negative conflict resolution. In contrast, for adolescents with externalizing problems it may be more important to get them involved in the conflicts rather than avoiding and withdrawing from them.

In conclusion, the results of the present study indicate that parent–child conflicts are not always equally detrimental for adolescent psychosocial adjustment and that conflict frequency is less strongly related to adjustment problems when adolescents

manage to acquire a positive conflict resolution style. When addressed in positive conflict resolution styles, parent–adolescent conflicts can provide adolescents with an opportunity to learn to negotiate, assert their own opinion but also take into account the other's opinion, and form compromises.

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