
Conflict Resolution in Parent-Adolescent Relationships and Adolescent Delinquency

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This study examines the relation between conflict resolution styles in parent-adolescent relationships and adolescent delinquency. Questionnaires about conflict resolution styles were completed by 284 early adolescents (mean age 13.3) and their parents. Adolescents also completed a questionnaire on delinquency. Hierarchical regression analyses show that combinations of adolescents' and parents' conflict resolution styles are significantly related to delinquency. In adolescent-father relationships, the demand-withdraw pattern was found to be related to delinquency, and in adolescent-mother relationships the interaction characterized by mutual hostility was found to be related to delinquency. The results stress the interdependence of adolescents and parents in conflict resolution and demonstrate the need for investigating combinations of adolescents' and parents' conflict resolution styles.

Keywords: *adolescence; parent-adolescent conflict; conflict resolution; delinquency; demand-withdraw*

Conflicts are very common in parent-adolescent relationships and are particularly frequent in early adolescence (Galambos & Almeida, 1992; Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Steinberg, 1990). Adolescents are striving for autonomy during this age period, but parents and adolescents have different expectations about the timing of adolescents' autonomy, which inevitably results in conflicts

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(Collins, Laursen, Mortensen, Luebker, & Ferreira, 1997). Whether conflicts are functional or dysfunctional depends to a certain extent on how these conflicts are handled. Whereas relationships marked by constructive conflict resolution may be related to adolescent adjustment (Collins & Laursen, 1992), those marked by destructive conflict resolution might be associated with adolescent problem behavior. In the current study, we will examine not only the conflict resolution styles of adolescents but also the conflict resolution styles of their parents, and we will relate these styles to adolescent delinquency.

The potential importance of the relation between conflict resolution styles of adolescents and their parents and adolescent delinquency has been identified by the social problem-solving model (Chang, D'Zurilla, & Sanna, 2004). According to this model, adolescents with greater problem-solving ability will respond more appropriately and adaptively to conflict situations in which externalizing behavior might be a response alternative. Also, parents with greater problem-solving ability will help them solve problems outside the home more effectively and will presumably deal more effectively with their children's externalizing behaviors (Jaffee & D'Zurilla, 2003). In addition, coercion theory poses that adolescents who learn from their parents to use coercive behavior in family interactions are more likely to be antisocial and to behave similarly in interactions with others outside the home (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994; Dishion, Patterson, & Kavanagh, 1992; Patterson, 1982). The link between conflict resolution styles and adolescent delinquency is further recognized in family interventions for treating and preventing adolescent problem behavior, which frequently focus on problem-solving training for adolescents and their parents (Robin & Foster, 1989). In line with this, research indicates that a combination of parental management and child problem-solving training resulted in greater reduction of antisocial behavior than either intervention alone (Kazdin, Siegel, & Bass, 1992).

In the social problem-solving model, three types of conflict resolution styles are distinguished: a constructive style, labeled rational problem solving, and two destructive styles, an impulsive-carelessness style, characterized by impulsiveness and recklessness, and an avoidance style, marked by passivity and withdrawal. These three styles are widely recognized in the parent-adolescent literature (Laursen, 1993a; Laursen & Collins, 1994; Rubenstein & Feldman, 1993). Adolescents and parents with greater problem-solving ability are characterized by relatively high scores on the constructive problem-solving style or relatively low scores on the destructive styles (Chang et al., 2004). In the current study, we assess these three styles using Kurdek's (1994) Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (CRSI). The

styles positive problem solving (which involves compromise and negotiation), conflict engagement (which involves being verbally abusive, angry, defensive or attacking, and losing self-control), and withdrawal (which involves avoiding the problem, avoiding discussion, and becoming distant) used in the current study correspond with the rational problem-solving style, the impulsive-carelessness conflict resolution style, and the avoidance style, respectively, which were distinguished by the social problem-solving model.

Adolescent Conflict Resolution Styles

Thus far, a limited number of studies have examined the association between adolescent conflict resolution and adolescent delinquency. Three different studies found support for a possible relation between the conflict resolution style conflict engagement and delinquency: Rubenstein and Feldman (1993) showed that adolescent boys who frequently respond to parent-adolescent conflicts with attack were at risk for delinquent behavior. This relation was found independently of the number of conflicts. Higher levels of an impulsive or carelessness problem-solving style have also been found to be related to higher levels of delinquent behavior in adolescents (Jaffee & D’Zurilla, 2003). In addition, higher levels of aversive verbal content during conflict were related to conduct disorder in preadolescents (Sanders, Dadds, Johnston, & Cash, 1992). Mixed results have been found concerning an avoidant or withdrawing conflict resolution style. Whereas one study reported that higher levels of conflict avoidance of adolescents was related to higher levels of delinquency (Jaffee & D’Zurilla, 2003), another study failed to find this relation for adolescent boys (Rubenstein & Feldman, 1993). The latter study also failed to find a significant relation, after controlling for the number of conflicts, between higher levels of compromise, a constructive style, and lower levels of delinquency. In contrast, research on preadolescents with conduct disorders did find that these children showed lower levels of effective problem solving (Sanders et al., 1992). Thus, conflict engagement of adolescents, characterized by attack, display of anger, and impulsiveness, seems to be positively related to adolescent delinquency. No consistent results have been found regarding the relation between the use of withdrawal and positive problem solving by adolescents on one hand and delinquency on the other hand.

Parental Conflict Resolution Styles

Besides the conflict resolution styles adolescents use in conflicts with their parents, the conflict resolution styles their parents use in these conflicts might also be important for adolescents’ adjustment. In families with

delinquent adolescents, mothers were found to use lower levels of constructive conflict resolution than in families with nondelinquent adolescents, whereas this was not the case for fathers' level of constructive conflict resolution (Borduin, Henggeler, Hanson, & Pruitt, 1985). Moreover, lower levels of constructive conflict resolution by mothers during early adolescence were found to predict severe delinquent behavior in early adulthood (Klein, Forehand, Armistead, & Long, 1997). However, this relation was not found for minor delinquent behavior. Parents' use of hostile behaviors toward early adolescents has been found to be associated with higher levels of conduct problems both concurrently (Conger et al., 1992, 1993) and longitudinally (Ge, Best, Conger, & Simons, 1996). Yet Jaffee and D'Zurilla (2003) failed to find significant relations between the use of three different conflict resolution styles by both mothers and fathers (i.e., an impulsive or carelessness problem-solving style, an avoidance style, and a constructive conflict resolution style) and adolescent delinquency. As these results are not consistent, and there are many indications that fathers and mothers play differential roles in their adolescents' lives (for a review, see Collins & Russell, 1991), we will investigate how conflict resolution styles of parents are related to adolescent delinquency in the adolescent-father and adolescent-mother relationships separately. Thus, we will examine not only the relation between conflict resolution styles of adolescents with fathers and mothers and adolescent delinquency, but also the relation between conflict resolution styles of fathers and mothers and adolescent delinquency. We especially expect that the use of the conflict resolution style conflict engagement by parents, which is marked by hostility and display of anger, might be related to higher levels of delinquency. We will explore whether withdrawal and positive problem solving of parents will be related to delinquency.

Combinations of Adolescents' and Parents' Conflict Resolution Styles

Not only the conflict resolution styles that adolescents and parents independently use but also the *combinations* of these styles might be related to delinquency, as both parent and child behavior are assumed to be important in eliciting and maintaining the child's antisocial behavior (Kazdin, 1987; Patterson, 1982). According to coercion theory, adolescent delinquency is highly influenced by experiences in the family in which parents and adolescents reciprocally influence each other (Patterson, 1982). This is in line with theories that emphasize bidirectionality in parent-adolescent relationships, which indicate that parents and adolescents mutually influence each others'

behaviors (e.g., Hinde, 1997; Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997; Minuchin, 1985; Stafford & Bayer, 1993). The actor-partner interdependence model (Kashy & Kenny, 1990; Kenny & Cook, 1999) also emphasizes that the behaviors of both partners in a dyadic relationship contribute to individual or relationship adjustment. Moreover, it is stressed that these behaviors are interdependent; that is, the way one dyad member behaves in conflicts with the other dyad member depends, to some extent, on the behavior of the other dyad member. This interdependence and bidirectionality suggest that specific combinations of conflict resolution styles used by adolescents and parents will have consequences for the parent-adolescent relationship and adolescent psychosocial adjustment. For example, if an adolescent generally complies with mother's request, it will make a difference whether mother generally yells and screams or whether she generally uses reasonable arguments. Thus, it is crucial not only to include the conflict resolution styles of adolescents and their parents, but also to examine the combinations of these styles.

Delinquent children and adolescents are often found to be part of a family system marked by reciprocal hostility (Dadds, Sanders, Morrison, & Rebetz, 1992; Patterson, 1982, 1995). In this interaction pattern, parents and children engage in angry, coercive interactions. There is an indication that this pattern would be more apparent in adolescents' interactions with mothers than with fathers. Whereas mothers from distressed families responded to their adolescents' negative behavior with significantly more negative and less positive problem-solving behavior than mothers from nondistressed families, no significant differences were found in how fathers from distressed and nondistressed families responded to adolescents' negative behavior (Krinsley & Bry, 1991). Also, adolescents from distressed families were found to respond to mothers' negative behavior with significantly less positive problem solving and more negative behavior than adolescents from nondistressed families. No significant differences were found among adolescents from distressed or nondistressed families when responding to fathers' negative behavior (Krinsley & Bry, 1991). In addition, a study on delinquent children and their mothers showed that delinquent children tend to reciprocate the levels of aversive verbal behavior and angry affect displayed by their mothers (Sanders et al., 1992). We will investigate whether the combination of higher levels of conflict engagement by both adolescents and parents is related to delinquency. Based on the aforementioned studies, we specifically expect that the combination of conflict engagement of adolescents and conflict engagement of mothers is related to delinquency.

The combination of conflict resolution styles by two dyadic partners studied most frequently is the so-called demand-withdraw pattern

(Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Kurdek, 1995). In research on marital relationships, this demand-withdraw pattern, characterized by the combination of wives' conflict engagement and husbands' withdrawal, predicted a decrease in marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives (Kurdek, 1995). Recently, this pattern has been investigated in parent-adolescent dyads. The two demand-withdraw combinations, that is, demand by adolescents and withdrawal by parents and withdrawal by adolescents and demand by parents, were found to be related to problem behavior. Whereas the combination of parent demand and adolescent withdrawal was associated with high alcohol and drug use by adolescents, the combination of adolescent demand and parent withdrawal was mostly associated with low self-esteem of adolescents (Caughlin & Malis, 2004b). As several studies have shown that the demand-withdraw pattern is an ineffective way of resolving conflicts that has been related to negative adjustment (Caughlin & Malis, 2004a, 2004b; Kurdek, 1995), we will investigate whether this combination of styles in adolescent-parent relationships will also be related to delinquency. More specifically, we will investigate whether the interaction of higher levels of conflict engagement (or demand) by adolescents and higher levels of withdrawal by parents is related to adolescent delinquency and whether the interaction of higher levels of conflict engagement (or demand) by parents and higher levels of withdrawal by adolescents is related to adolescent delinquency. We expect that the combination of higher levels of conflict engagement by parents and higher levels of withdrawal by adolescents is related to delinquency, as it was found to be related to alcohol and drug use (Caughlin & Malis, 2004b).

To summarize, the following questions will be addressed in the current study for the adolescent-father and adolescent-mother relationship separately: (a) How are the conflict resolution styles adolescents use in conflicts with their parents related to adolescent delinquency? We hypothesize that higher levels of conflict engagement will be related to higher levels of delinquency. We will explore whether withdrawal and positive problem solving of adolescents will be related to delinquency. (b) How are the conflict resolution styles parents use in conflicts with adolescents related to adolescent delinquency? We hypothesize that higher levels of conflict engagement by parents will be related to higher levels of adolescent delinquency. We will explore whether withdrawal and positive problem solving of parents will be related to delinquency. (c) What combinations of conflict resolution styles of adolescents and parents are related to adolescent delinquency? We hypothesize that the combination of higher levels of conflict engagement by parents and higher levels of withdrawal by adolescents will be related to adolescent

delinquency. We will explore whether the combination of conflict engagement by adolescents and withdrawal by parents will be related to delinquency. Additionally, we hypothesize that the combination of higher levels of conflict engagement of adolescents and parents will be related to higher levels of delinquency. We specifically expect this pattern to be significantly related to delinquency in the adolescent-mother relationship.

As both the number of conflicts and conflict affect are found to be associated with adolescent problem behavior (Barber & Delfabbro, 2000; Borduin et al., 1985; Sanders et al., 1992; Shek, 1997; Tesser, Forehand, Brody, & Long, 1989), we decided to control for these factors in our analyses. In our analyses we will also control for sex of adolescents, as it is known that boys generally have higher levels of delinquency than girls (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Farrington, 2004). Although we have no theoretical or empirical reasons to expect differences between boys and girls, we will examine moderation effects of sex of adolescents between the aforementioned relations.

Method

Participants

Of the 284 adolescents who participated in the current study, 142 were boys (50.0%). The mean age of the adolescents was 13.3 years (range = 12-15 years, $SD = 0.5$); the mean age of the fathers and mothers was respectively 46.8 years (range = 35-65 years, $SD = 5.1$) and 44.3 years (range = 34-55 years, $SD = 4.1$). Adolescents named Dutch as their main ethnic identity and lived with both parents. Different levels of education were represented, with approximately 51% of the adolescents at schools preparing for university, 36% of the adolescents at schools preparing for higher professional education, and 14% of the adolescents at schools preparing for lower level jobs. Of the fathers, 1.8% did not finish high school, 21.1% graduated from high school, 41.9% graduated from middle or higher level vocational/technical training, and 35.3% had a university degree. Of the mothers, 0.4% did not finish high school, 35.5% graduated from high school, 44.4% graduated from middle or higher level vocational/technical training, and 19.7% had a university degree.

The current sample, called the family sample, was a subsample from an ongoing longitudinal study on relationships of adolescents with parents and friends called CONAMORE (CONflict And Management Of Relationships; Meeus et al., 2004). In the main study of CONAMORE, 938 early adolescents (mean age 12.4 years, $SD = 0.6$, range = 10-15 years) and 393 middle

adolescents (mean age 16.7 years, $SD = 0.8$, range 16-20 years) from 12 high schools located in the province of Utrecht, the Netherlands, annually filled out a battery of questionnaires at school. At the first measurement, the Dutch early adolescents received a letter including an invitation to participate with both parents during annual home visits as well. Of the families invited, 491 families initially agreed to participate. Due to our restriction of including only two-parent Dutch families, 90 one-parent families who agreed to participate were not able to take part in this additional research project. For financial reasons, 323 families were randomly selected from the 401 two-parent families to participate from Wave 2 onward. We refer to this sample as the family sample. In our analyses we used only families with complete data on the second measurement wave, resulting in a final sample consisting of 284 adolescents and both of their parents.

Analyses were performed to test whether there were differences between the adolescents who participated in the family sample ($n = 284$) and those who did not ($n = 360$). When selecting the comparison group, we controlled for the fact that only adolescents from intact Dutch families were invited to take part in the family sample. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) showed no differences between participants in the family sample and nonparticipants on adolescents' conflict resolution styles with fathers and mothers at Wave 2, $F(6, 636) = 1.95, p > .05$, and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed no differences between participants and nonparticipants on adolescent delinquency at Wave 2, $F(1, 640) = 2.93, p > .05$. In addition, analyses were performed to test whether there were differences between the original family sample ($N = 323$) and the final sample ($n = 284$). A MANOVA showed no differences between adolescents in the original sample and in the final sample on adolescents' conflict resolution styles with fathers and mothers at Wave 2, $F(6, 305) = 1.01, p > .05$, and on mothers' and fathers' conflict resolution styles with adolescents at Wave 2, $F(6, 301) = .71, p > .05$. Also, an ANOVA showed no differences between adolescents in the original sample and in the final sample on adolescent delinquency at Wave 2, $F(1, 308) = 1.22, p > .05$.

Procedure

Before the study, both adolescents and their parents received written information and, if the adolescent wished to participate, were required to provide written informed consent. Interviewers visited the schools and asked participating adolescents to gather in classrooms to fill out a questionnaire. Interviewers also visited the families at home. During these home

visits, adolescents filled out an additional questionnaire and both parents also filled out a questionnaire. The adolescents and their parents were instructed to fill out the questionnaires independently from each other. Confidentiality was guaranteed. Families received €27 for participation (approximately US\$34), and adolescents received an additional amount of €10 for participating at school (approximately US\$13).

Measures

Conflicts. Number of conflicts with fathers and mothers was measured using the Interpersonal Conflict Questionnaire (Laursen, 1993b, 1995). Adolescents had to rate on a 5-point Likert scale how often, ranging from *never* to *often*, they have had an argument or fight with father and mother for 35 issues over the past 7 days. The issues covered topics such as “manners,” “watching too much TV or using the computer or phone too much,” “privacy,” “not doing what you are asked to do,” “appearances and clothing,” “homework,” and “being honest.” The last item included the option “other,” which adolescents could use to fill out an additional conflict topic not covered by the list. The 35 items were averaged to compute mean scores for conflict with fathers and mothers. Cronbach’s alphas on these scores were .94 for conflicts with both fathers and mothers, indicating good reliability (Henson, 2001).

Conflict affect. Conflict affect was also measured using Laursen’s Interpersonal Conflict Questionnaire (1993b, 1995). Adolescents had to rate on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *friendly* to *angry*, how they generally felt during conflicts with fathers and mothers and also how they felt after these conflicts. Additionally, they had to rate how these conflicts influenced the relationship with fathers and mothers on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *making the relationship better* to *making the relationship worse*. The three items were averaged to compute mean scores for conflict affect with fathers and mothers.

Conflict resolution styles. Conflict resolution styles were measured by Kurdek’s (1994) CRSI. This questionnaire, originally designed for couples, was modified so that it referred to parents and adolescents. Three conflict resolution styles were used in this study: conflict engagement, withdrawal, and positive problem solving. Adolescents rated the extent to which they used these three conflict resolution styles during conflicts with fathers and mothers. Also, fathers and mothers rated the extent to which they used the same three conflict resolution styles during conflicts with their adolescents. Each

conflict resolution style was measured by five items, and the items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *never* to *always*. Conflict engagement involved being verbally abusive, getting very angry, or losing self-control and was measured by items such as “getting furious and losing my temper” and “letting myself go and saying things I do not really mean.” Withdrawal implied avoiding the problem, avoiding talking, and becoming distant. Items used to measure withdrawal were, for example, “not listening anymore,” “refusing to talk any longer,” and “withdrawing from the situation.” Positive problem solving involved making compromises and discussing the conflict effectively. Sample items of positive problem solving were “negotiating and trying to find a solution that is mutually acceptable” and “sitting down and discussing the differences of opinion.” Cronbach’s alphas of the subscales conflict engagement, withdrawal, and positive problem solving ranged from .79 to .90 for adolescents’ conflicts with fathers, from .75 to .84 for adolescents’ conflicts with mothers, from .69 to .77 for fathers’ conflicts with adolescents, and from .68 to .79 for mothers’ conflicts with adolescents, indicating sufficient internal consistency of these scales (Henson, 2001).

Delinquency. Delinquency was measured by a 16-item questionnaire adapted from Baerveldt, Van Rossem, and Vermande (2003) and designed to measure minor offences. Adolescents were asked to indicate on a 4-point scale ranging from *never* to *four times or more* how often they had shown certain forms of delinquent behaviors during the last 12 months. Sample items were “stolen a bike,” “deliberately broken something at the street,” “started a fire,” and “used drugs.” Cronbach’s alpha of the scores on this scale was .80, indicating adequate internal consistency of this scale (Henson, 2001).

Strategy of Analyses

To investigate the link between adolescents’ and their parents’ uses of conflict resolution styles and adolescent delinquency, we performed hierarchical multiple regressions for conflict resolution with fathers and mothers separately. In these regression analyses, demographic variables such as adolescents’ sex, the educational level of adolescents, and the educational level of either fathers or mothers were entered at the first step. We controlled for the amount of conflicts and conflict affect with either fathers or mothers at Step 2. To investigate how adolescents’ conflict resolution styles with fathers or mothers were related to delinquency, we entered conflict engagement, withdrawal, and positive problem solving of adolescents with fathers or mothers at the third step. To examine whether parents’ conflict

resolution styles were related to adolescent delinquency, we entered conflict engagement, withdrawal, and positive problem solving of fathers or mothers at the fourth step. Finally, to investigate whether specific combinations of conflict resolution styles were related to adolescent delinquency, the two demand-withdraw interactions as well as the interaction of adolescent and parent conflict engagement were entered at Step 5.

Before creating interaction terms, the conflict resolution styles of adolescents and parents were centered by subtracting the overall mean from each participant's score to avoid multicollinearity between the main effects and the interaction terms (Jaccard, Turrisi, & Wan, 1990). Significant interactions were followed up by computing the slope of adolescent delinquency on the conflict resolution score of one dyad member for different levels of conflict resolution of the other dyad member. That is, we computed the slope when the other member's conflict resolution style score was low (more than 1 standard deviation below the mean), average (between 1 standard deviation above and below the mean), and high (more than 1 standard deviation above the mean).

Results

The means and standard deviations of the variables used in the regressions are shown in Table 1. The scores of the sample on these variables are rather low, which is in line with the fact that participants were drawn from a nonclinical population.

Correlations

Pearson correlations, presented in Table 2, were computed to examine cross-sectional bivariate associations between the conflict measures and adolescent delinquency. We also computed Pearson correlations between conflict resolution in the adolescent-father and adolescent-mother relationships. Conflict engagement of adolescents with fathers and mothers was highly related ($r = .81, p < .01$), indicating that when adolescents use more conflict engagement with fathers they also use more conflict engagement with mothers. The same was true for withdrawal ($r = .79, p < .01$) and for positive problem solving of adolescents ($r = .76, p < .01$). Conflict engagement of fathers and mothers with adolescents was also significantly correlated, but this correlation was lower ($r = .21, p < .01$). The same was true for withdrawal ($r = .28, p < .01$) and for positive problem solving of fathers and mothers ($r = .13, p < .05$). Thus, it seems that adolescents are using the

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of the Conflict
Measures and Adolescent Delinquency

Measures	Fathers (<i>N</i> = 284) \bar{X} (<i>SD</i>)	Mothers (<i>N</i> = 284) \bar{X} (<i>SD</i>)
Conflicts with parents	1.64 (.51)	1.74 (.52)
Conflict affect in conflicts with parents	2.79 (.85)	2.67 (.75)
Conflict engagement of adolescents with parents	1.32 (.50)	1.43 (.54)
Withdrawal of adolescents with parents	1.80 (.77)	1.94 (.70)
Positive problem solving of adolescents with parents	3.04 (.98)	3.17 (.88)
Conflict engagement of parents with adolescents	1.72 (.48)	1.75 (.49)
Withdrawal of parents with adolescents	1.66 (.56)	1.59 (.54)
Positive problem solving of parents with adolescents	3.66 (.58)	4.01 (.54)
Adolescent self-reported delinquency	1.10 (.21)	

conflict resolution styles similarly with both parents, but fathers and mothers are using the styles differently with their adolescents.

Regressions

The results of the hierarchical regression analyses are displayed in Table 3. At Step 5, the final model is shown. Sex of adolescents was significantly related to delinquency, indicating that adolescent boys in our sample had higher levels of delinquency than adolescent girls. Conflicts were positively related to delinquency, meaning that adolescents in our sample who experienced more conflicts with both fathers and mothers had higher levels of delinquency than adolescents who experienced fewer conflicts. Conflict affect with fathers and mothers was not significantly related to delinquency.

Adolescents' conflict resolution styles and delinquency. Hypothesis 1 was partly supported in the adolescent-father and adolescent-mother relationships: Conflict engagement of adolescents was significant in adolescent-father relationships in Step 3 as well as in Step 4 ($p < .05$; see Table 3). However, after adding the interactions, the main effect of adolescent conflict engagement became nonsignificant. In the adolescent-mother relationship, higher levels of conflict engagement by adolescents were significantly related to delinquency, but only in combination with higher levels of conflict engagement by mothers as well. Withdrawal and positive problem solving were not found to be significantly related to delinquency in the adolescent-father and adolescent-mother relationships.

Table 2
Pearson Correlation Between Number of Conflicts, Conflict Affect,
Conflict Resolution Styles, and Delinquency

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Conflicts with fathers/mothers	—	.29**	.44**	.45**	-.10	.13*	.24**	-.03	.34**
2. Conflict affect in conflicts with fathers/mothers	.29**	—	.33**	.39**	-.25**	.11	.20**	-.06	.11
3. Conflict engagement of adolescents	.44**	.30**	—	.46**	-.04	.19**	.25**	-.04	.22**
4. Withdrawal of adolescents	.50**	.40**	.46**	—	-.17**	.12*	.27**	-.05	.16**
5. Positive problem solving of adolescents	-.05	-.29**	-.12*	-.22**	—	.00	.04	.03	-.02
6. Conflict engagement of fathers/mothers	.05	.15*	.15**	-.02	-.02	—	.42**	-.05	.15*
7. Withdrawal of fathers/mothers	.07	.12*	.25**	.15*	-.11	.40**	—	-.09	.15**
8. Positive problem solving of fathers/mothers	.03	.00	-.03	-.06	.11	-.13*	-.14*	—	.02
9. Adolescent delinquency	.34**	.17**	.26**	.17**	-.01	.06	.09	-.07	—

Note: Correlations below the diagonal involve adolescent-father relationships, and correlations above the diagonal involve adolescent-mother relationships.

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

Table 3
Relation Between Adolescents' and Their Parents'
Conflict Resolution Styles and Delinquency

Predictors	Delinquency			
	Fathers		Mothers	
	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2
Step 1		.04**		.04**
Sex of adolescents	-.19**		-.19**	
Educational level of adolescents	-.03		-.04	
Educational level of fathers/mothers	-.06		.00	
Step 2		.13**		.11**
Sex of adolescents	-.22**		-.19**	
Educational level of adolescents	.01		-.04	
Educational level of fathers/mothers	-.05		.02	
Conflicts with fathers/mothers	.32**		.32**	
Conflict affect in conflicts with fathers/mothers	.10		.04	
Step 3		.02		.01
Sex of adolescents	-.23**		-.21**	
Educational level of adolescents	.01		-.04	
Educational level of fathers/mothers	-.05		.01	
Conflicts with fathers/mothers	.26**		.28**	
Conflict affect in conflicts with fathers/mothers	.09		.03	
Conflict engagement of adolescents	.16*		.11	
Withdrawal of adolescents	-.01		.01	
Positive problem solving of adolescents	.03		.04	
Step 4		.01		.01
Sex of adolescents	-.23**		-.20**	
Educational level of adolescents	.01		-.03	
Educational level of fathers/mothers	-.04		.01	
Conflicts with fathers/mothers	.27**		.27**	
Conflict affect in conflicts with fathers/mothers	.09		.02	
Conflict engagement of adolescents	.15*		.10	
Withdrawal of adolescents	-.02		.00	
Positive problem solving of adolescents	.04		.03	
Conflict engagement of fathers/mothers	-.03		.05	
Withdrawal of fathers/mothers	.05		.03	
Positive problem solving of fathers/mothers	-.06		.03	
Step 5		.06**		.03*
Sex of adolescents	-.22**		-.21**	
Educational level of adolescents	.03		-.03	
Educational level of fathers/mothers	-.06		.01	
Conflicts with fathers/mothers	.25**		.26**	
Conflict affect in conflicts with fathers/mothers	.10		.01	

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

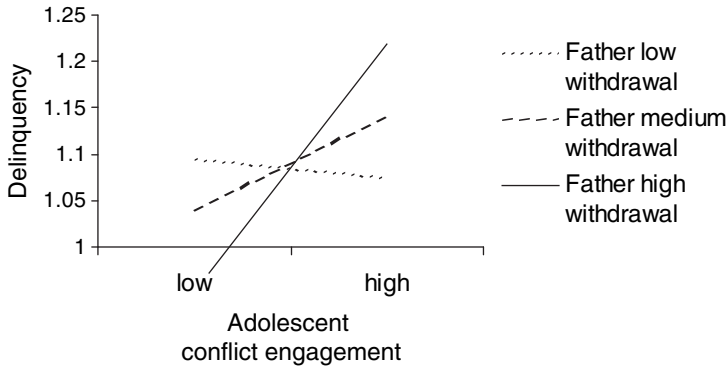
Predictors	Delinquency			
	Fathers		Mothers	
	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2
Conflict engagement of adolescents	.06		.10	
Withdrawal of adolescents	.00		.00	
Positive problem solving of adolescents	.06		.03	
Conflict engagement of fathers/mothers	-.04		.05	
Withdrawal of fathers/mothers	.02		.02	
Positive problem solving of fathers/mothers	-.06		.02	
A conflict engagement \times F/M withdrawal	.16*		-.09	
A withdrawal \times F/M conflict engagement	.04		-.02	
A conflict engagement \times F/M conflict engagement	.11		.21**	
R^2 total		.25**		.20**

Note: A = adolescent; F = father; M = mother.

Parental conflict resolution styles and delinquency. Hypothesis 2 was not confirmed in the adolescent-father relationship in that higher levels of conflict engagement by fathers were not found to be significantly related to delinquency. In the adolescent-mother relationship, higher levels of conflict engagement by mothers were significantly related to delinquency, but only in combination with higher levels of conflict engagement of adolescents as well, thus partly supporting Hypothesis 2. With regard to withdrawal, exploratory analyses revealed that higher levels of withdrawal by fathers were significantly related to delinquency, but only in combination with higher levels of conflict engagement by adolescents. Withdrawal of mothers was not significantly related to delinquency. Positive problem solving of fathers and mothers was not found to be significantly related to delinquency.

Combinations of adolescents' and parents' conflict resolution styles and delinquency. The most important finding was that combinations of conflict resolution styles were found to be related to delinquency. Although the expected parent demand-adolescent withdraw interaction was not found to be significant, exploratory analyses showed that the demand-withdraw pattern in which the adolescents used higher levels of conflict engagement and fathers used higher levels of withdrawal was found to be significantly related to delinquency. The demand-withdraw interaction, characterized by conflict engagement of adolescents and withdrawal of fathers, is represented in Figure 1. Following up this interaction revealed that higher levels

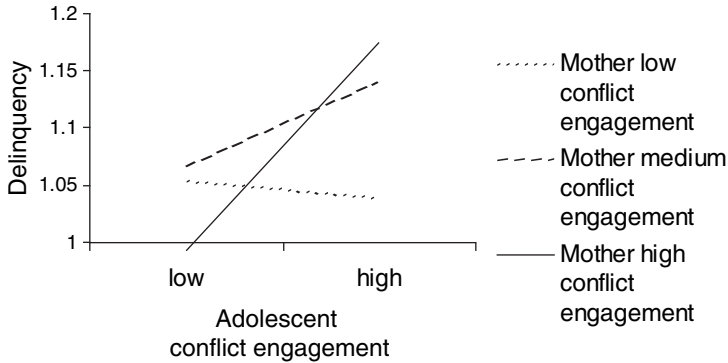
Figure 1
The Demand-Withdraw Interaction in
Adolescent-Father Relationships



of conflict engagement of adolescents were associated most strongly with higher levels of delinquency when fathers used higher levels of withdrawal ($\beta = .53, p < .01$). Higher levels of conflict engagement of adolescents were also significantly, although less strongly, related to higher levels of delinquency when fathers used medium levels of withdrawal ($\beta = .23, p < .01$). When fathers used low levels of withdrawal, higher levels of conflict engagement of adolescents were not significantly associated with higher levels of delinquency ($\beta = -.07, p > .05$). In other words, delinquency of adolescents was highest when adolescents scored highest on conflict engagement and fathers scored highest on withdrawal. Both demand-withdraw interactions, that is, conflict engagement by adolescents and withdrawal by mothers as well as withdrawal by adolescents and conflict engagement by mothers, were not significantly related to delinquency.

The interaction of adolescent and mother conflict engagement was found to be significantly related to delinquency, confirming Hypothesis 3 regarding mutual hostility in the adolescent-mother relationship. The mutual hostility interaction is represented in Figure 2. Following up this interaction revealed that higher levels of conflict engagement of adolescents were associated with more delinquency, especially when conflict engagement of mothers was high as well ($\beta = .48, p < .01$). Higher levels of conflict engagement of adolescents were also associated, although less strongly, with higher levels of

Figure 2
The Mutual Hostility Interaction in
Adolescent-Mother Relationships



delinquency when mothers used medium levels of conflict engagement ($\beta = .17, p < .01$). Finally, higher levels of conflict engagement of adolescents were not related to delinquency when mothers used low levels of conflict engagement ($\beta = -.05, p > .05$). In other words, delinquency of adolescents was highest when both adolescents and mothers scored highest on conflict engagement. The interaction of conflict engagement by both adolescents and fathers was found to be nonsignificant.

To explore the possible effects of the sex of the adolescent on these results, we performed additional regression analyses in which the two-way interaction terms of sex of adolescent with conflicts with fathers and mothers, conflict affect with fathers and mothers, the conflict resolution styles by adolescents, and the conflict resolution styles by parents as well as the three-way interaction terms of sex of adolescent and the interactions between adolescents' and parents' styles were entered as a sixth step. Only 1 significant effect out of the 22 possible effects was found. However, following up this interaction revealed that positive problem solving of fathers was significantly related neither to delinquency for boys ($\beta = -.16, p > .05$), nor for girls ($\beta = .07, p > .05$). Thus, sex of adolescents did not moderate the main effects and the interaction effects. For clarity of presentation, these coefficients are not included in Table 3.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate how conflict resolution styles of both adolescents and parents are related to adolescent delinquency. The results show that mainly combinations of the conflict resolution styles that adolescents and parents use in their conflicts are related to adolescent delinquency, which corresponds to theories emphasizing bidirectionality and interdependence in parent-adolescent relationships (e.g., Hinde, 1997; Kashy & Kenny, 1990; Kenny & Cook, 1999; Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997; Minuchin, 1985; Stafford & Bayer, 1993).

Supporting coercion theory (Dishion et al., 1992; Patterson, 1982, 1995), the combination of conflict engagement by both adolescents and mothers was found to be significantly related to delinquency. However, this combination was not found to be significantly related to delinquency in adolescent-father relationships. Although we did not examine coercive interaction patterns in which adolescents' and parents' conflict engagement reciprocally influence each other within specific interactions, the finding that adolescents report more delinquent behavior when both adolescents and mothers use more conflict engagement on average suggests that the combination of these conflict resolution styles might be important. Future research should examine whether mothers and adolescents reciprocally influence each other with these conflict resolution styles. The finding that mutual hostility was related to delinquency only in adolescent-mother relationships is in accordance with research on problem-solving interactions in families with delinquent children (Krinsley & Bry, 1991; Sanders et al., 1992). Again, future research is needed that assesses reciprocal patterns in these conflict resolution behaviors.

Adolescents revealed higher levels of delinquency when they reported higher levels of conflict engagement and when fathers reported higher levels of withdrawal. Higher levels of withdrawal might be viewed as disengagement, lack of involvement, and little or no attempt to work conflicts out. A study among 15- to 16-year-old adolescents found that lower feelings of being loved by the parent and lower parental concern were more strongly related to adolescent delinquent behavior in the adolescent-father relationship than in the adolescent-mother relationship (Johnson, 1987). Also, the connection between higher levels of withdrawal by fathers and delinquency might be explained by withdrawing fathers monitoring less than nonwithdrawing fathers. Low levels of monitoring and supervision have been found to be associated with adolescent delinquency (Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984). Therefore, this might explain why higher levels

of withdrawal by fathers were related to delinquency. However, this is an area for further investigation. In contrast to research on substance use (Caughlin & Malis, 2004b), with delinquency we did not find the combination of adolescent withdrawal and parent conflict engagement to be significantly related to delinquency.

The differential findings concerning withdrawal of fathers and conflict engagement of mothers in interaction with adolescents' conflict engagement might also be related to findings on gender differences in conflict behavior during marital conflicts, which showed that men tend to withdraw while women tend to demand (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). Moreover, marital satisfaction has been found to decrease when women used more conflict engagement and men withdrew more from marital conflicts (Kurdek, 1995). Our results show the detrimental correlates of the use of these gender-stereotypical conflict resolution styles by parents when facing demanding adolescents: Whereas demand of mothers might contribute to the escalation of conflict, withdrawal of fathers might imply lower paternal involvement, and both interactions are related to higher levels of adolescent delinquency.

A consistent finding in this study was the relation of adolescent conflict engagement in the relationship with both mothers and fathers and adolescent delinquency, even after controlling for number of conflicts and conflict affect. Adolescent conflict engagement was found to be significantly related to delinquency either as a main effect or in interaction with a style of the parent. This is an indication that adolescents who use this ineffective conflict resolution style tend to be more delinquent. A conflict resolution style by adolescents characterized by attack, display of anger, and impulsiveness has already been found to be positively related to adolescent delinquency (Jaffee & D'Zurilla, 2003; Rubenstein & Feldman, 1993; Sanders et al., 1992). Adolescents who respond angrily to parent-adolescent conflicts are obviously not able to cope adequately with conflicts. According to the social problem-solving model, these adolescents might also respond less appropriately and adaptively to problematic situations outside the home (Chang et al., 2004; Jaffee & D'Zurilla, 2003) and display delinquent behavior in these situations. We found no significant relations between the use of withdrawal and positive problem solving by adolescents and delinquency. These results may be partially explained by a study that found that delinquency was more related to higher levels of dysfunctional problem solving of adolescents than to lower levels of positive problem solving (Jaffee & D'Zurilla, 2003).

Our hypotheses regarding the main effects of parents were only partly confirmed. Although we expected higher levels of conflict engagement by

parents to be related to higher levels of adolescent delinquency, only *mothers'* use of conflict engagement was significantly related to adolescent delinquency, but only when adolescents also used higher levels of conflict engagement. Exploratory analyses revealed that higher levels of withdrawal by fathers were found to be related to delinquency only in combination with higher levels of conflict engagement by adolescents. Finally, with regard to the effect of positive problem solving by parents on delinquency, we found no significant effects. Thus, although a study by Borduin and colleagues (1985) found that mothers from families with delinquent adolescents used lower levels of constructive conflict resolution than mothers from families with nondelinquent adolescents and that this difference was not observable in the adolescent-father relationship, we did not find a significant association for either the adolescent-mother and adolescent-father relationship. However, the former results were based on the difference between families with clinical versus nonclinical adolescents, whereas our results were in concordance with earlier findings on the relation between conflict resolution styles and delinquent behavior in a nonclinical group (Jaffee & D'Zurilla, 2003) and with findings on minor delinquency (Klein et al., 1997). Thus, inconsistencies in findings by previous research on the relation between conflict resolution styles and delinquency might be accounted for by the fact that some studies were carried out using a clinical sample or an at-risk group, whereas other studies, including ours, were undertaken using a nonclinical sample.

A strength of the current study is the inclusion of parents' conflict resolution styles in conflicts with their adolescents, which enabled us to examine the combination of parents' and adolescents' conflict resolution in relation to delinquency. Furthermore, we examined conflict resolution in the adolescent-father and adolescent-mother relationship separately, as research indicates that sex of the parent may be a more important influence on family relationships than sex of the adolescent (Russell & Saebel, 1997). However, as delinquent behavior is usually higher in boys than in girls (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Farrington, 2004), we did control for sex of adolescent in our analyses. Another strength of the study is that we controlled for both the number of conflicts and conflict affect, which are found to be associated with adolescent problem behavior (Barber & Delfabbro, 2000; Borduin et al., 1985; Sanders et al., 1992; Shek, 1997; Tesser et al., 1989). This enabled us to assess the contribution of conflict resolution styles of adolescents and parents to adolescent delinquency independent of the number of conflicts and independent of conflict affect.

Despite the strengths of this study, it has a number of limitations. First, we used only self-reports to assess conflicts, conflict affect, conflict resolution

styles, and adolescent delinquency. However, we used the parents' own reports of their conflict resolution styles and related them to adolescents' reports of their delinquency levels. So common method variance cannot explain that parental conflict resolution styles qualified the relation of adolescents' conflict resolution styles with delinquency. Yet results might have been different when using, for instance, parents' reports of adolescent delinquent behavior. Second, we used questionnaires in which adolescents and parents rated their conflict resolution styles. This means that the combinations of scores on particular conflict resolution styles were not necessarily based on real conflict situations and did not necessarily involve sequences of conflict resolution behaviors. Although we did not test the coercion theory or observe demand-withdraw interactions directly, examining the combination of average conflict resolution patterns of parents and adolescents gives some indication that these interaction patterns might be important. Our study found comparable results using questionnaires, thereby extending previous research on conflicts between adolescents and parents using observational studies. A third limitation is the correlational design of the study. Conflict resolution might be a consequence of delinquency rather than a cause. Longitudinal studies are required to investigate whether conflict resolution styles cause adolescent delinquency or whether adolescent delinquency causes the use of certain conflict resolution styles. Finally, the explained variance was not very high. There are other variables besides the use of conflict resolution styles by adolescents and parents that might be related to adolescent delinquency. For example, as research indicates that adolescents with a certain personality type were found to be more vulnerable to parenting behaviors than others (Dubas, Gerris, Janssens, & Vermulst, 2002), personality might play a role in this process. Some adolescents might be more vulnerable to parents' conflict resolution styles than others; thus, the way parents handle conflicts with them might have a greater impact on their behavior. Also, when adolescents get older and spend more time outside the family, interactions with deviant peers might become increasingly significant (Dishion, Andrews, & Crosby, 1995). However, as antisocial behavior might be learned in different ways and in different settings depending on the developmental stage the adolescent is in (Patterson, 1995), the family might play a relatively large role in our sample of early adolescents.

To conclude, the current study shows that especially combinations of conflict resolution styles that adolescents and parents use in their conflicts are related to adolescent delinquency. Moreover, conflict resolution in adolescent-father and adolescent-mother relationships appears to have different relations with delinquency. In the adolescent-father relationship, the demand-withdraw

pattern characterized by higher levels of conflict engagement by adolescents and higher levels of withdrawal by fathers was significantly related to delinquency. In the adolescent-mother relationship, support was found for the mutual hostility hypothesis: The combination of higher levels of conflict engagement by both mothers and adolescents was found to be significantly related to delinquency. The results stress the interdependence of adolescents and parents in conflict resolution and demonstrate the need for investigating combinations of adolescents' and parents' conflict resolution styles.

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