

Longitudinal Transmission of Conflict Management Styles Across Inter-Parental and Adolescent Relationships

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Introduction

Learning how to manage conflicts appropriately is an important developmental task for adolescents, and is related to their psychosocial functioning. Inter-parental and adolescent-parent relationships are considered important sources from which adolescents learn how to manage conflicts in other relationships, such as those with friends and romantic partners. However, the processes according to which transmission of conflict management take place are yet understudied.

Conflict Management Styles

Style

Positive Problem Solving:

Conflict Engagement:

Withdrawal:

Examples

Compromises;
Negotiation.

Getting angry;
Attacking.

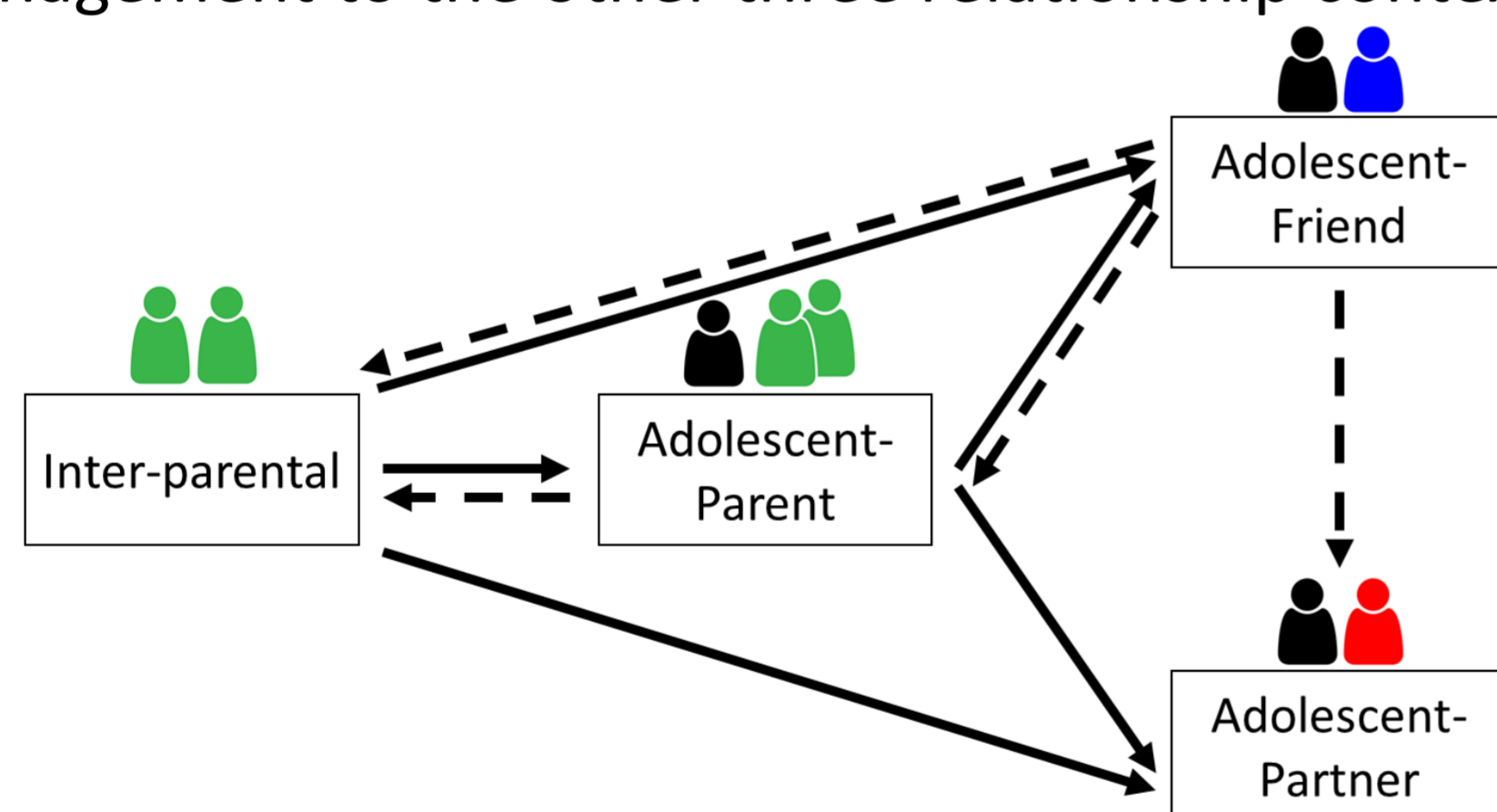
Avoiding talking;
Becoming distant.

Aims

This study longitudinally investigated the transmission of conflict management styles from:

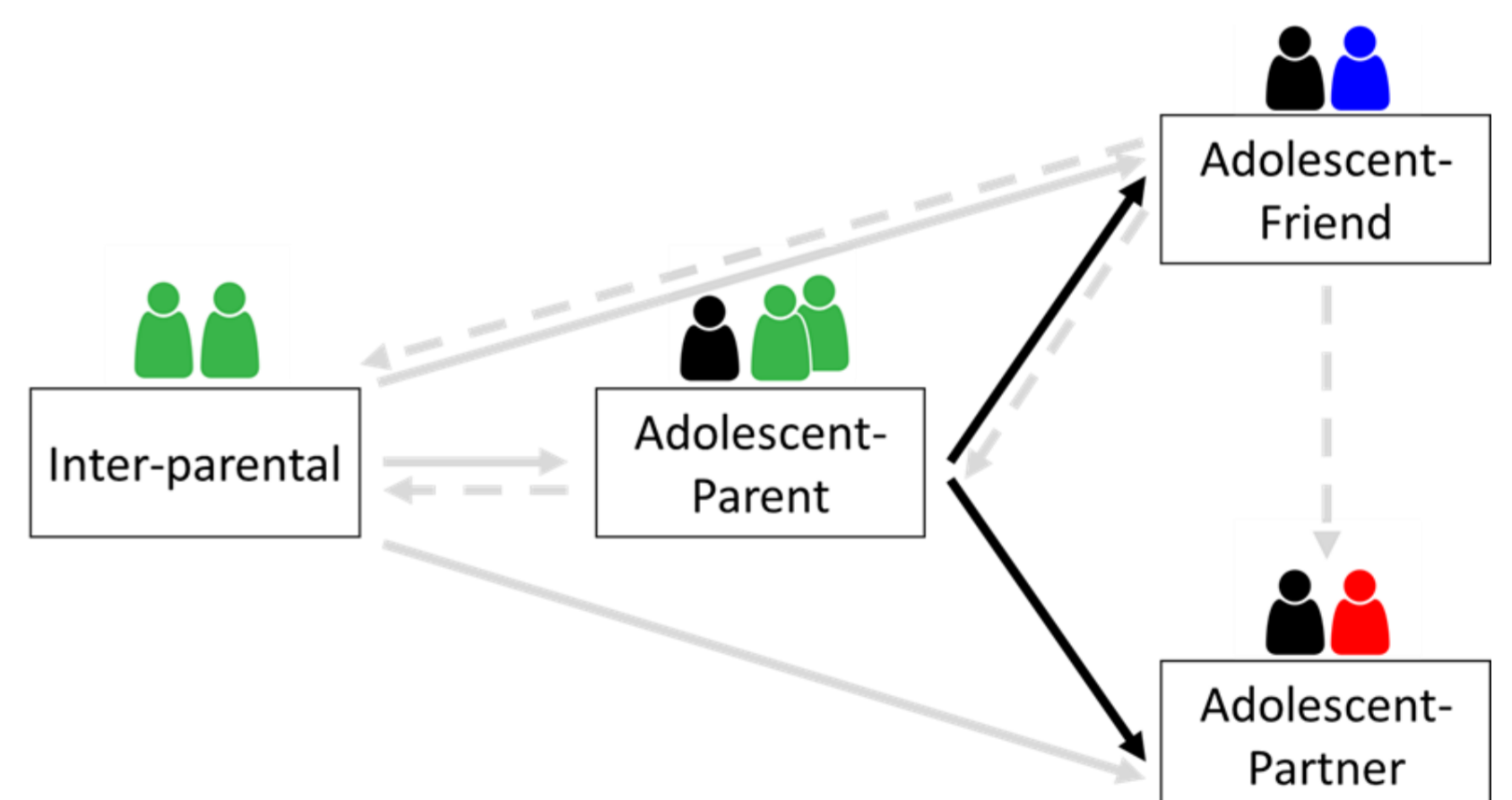
- 1) Inter-parental relationships to adolescent relationships with parents, friends, and romantic partners.
- 2) Adolescent-parent relationships to adolescent-friend and adolescent-partner relationships.
- 3) Inter-parental relationships to adolescent-friend and adolescent-partner relationships *via* adolescent-parent relationships (i.e., mediation).

We also took into account transmission from adolescent-parent conflict management to the inter-parental relationship, and from adolescent-friend conflict management to the other three relationship contexts.



Results

Path analyses with cross-lagged effects indicated transmission from adolescent-parent, but not inter-parental, conflict management styles to adolescent-friend and adolescent-partner relationships: Conflict engagement and positive problem solving utilized by adolescents in conflicts with parents were significantly, positively related to conflict engagement and positive problem solving, respectively in adolescent-friend relationships 1 year later and adolescent-partner relationships 2 years later. No significant longitudinal effects emerged with regard to withdrawal.



Methods

The current study used four waves of data from the ongoing longitudinal study Research on Adolescent Development and Relationships (RADAR), in which 799 adolescents ($M_{age\ t1} = 15.80$; 54% boys) and their parents completed the Conflict Resolution Style Inventory.

For all three conflict management styles, the results yielded no mediation of adolescent-parent relationships between inter-parental and adolescent-friend/partner relationships. Nor did we find significant effects from adolescent-friend conflict management to the other relationship contexts.

Discussion

The results of this study underscore the relevance of adolescents' experiences with parents for the development of interpersonal skills, such as conflict management skills. As adolescents' conflict management style is prospectively related to their psychosocial and relational functioning, it is important to monitor and address adolescent conflict management in relationships with parents, so that constructive conflict management styles are utilized by adolescents in relationships with parents and in later friendships and romantic relationships.