

Exercise 3: Adolescents' Relationships with Parents

Sydney Cross

Old Dominion University

PSYC 322: Psychology of Adolescence

Professor Suzanne Morrow

March 6th, 2023

Introduction

While adolescents all have unique experiences during development, a common aspect among many individuals involves conflict with parents. This conflict has a reputation for always occurring over severe topics and only existing in states of high intensity. However, John W. Santrock provides evidence in *Adolescence* (2023) that conflict with parents is actually more often related to minor topics, exists in a state of moderate to lower intensity, and decreases as adolescents get older and develop. This report covers a study designed to view a comparison between younger and older adolescents' experiences with parental conflict based on personal responses. This study is based on the idea that conflict with parents is not as severe as it is thought to be and that it tends to decrease into late development of adolescence.

Methods

Two participants were recruited for this study through voluntary participation. The contents of this study were posted on Reddit with specific criteria—in this case, age—listed with an invitation to participate. Those who chose to participate were presented with a document consisting of a small section to fill in their demographics, along with a seven-question survey discussing the topic of conflict with parents. These questions were mostly open-ended and prompted participants to answer what they like and dislike most about their parents, how often they fight with their parents, what the fight about the most and least with their parents, how intense conflict with their parents tends to be, and whether or not they could “make it” without their parents. Results of this study were evaluated based on intensity of conflict, content of conflict, and whether or not conflict displayed a decrease with age.

The younger participant is a 15 year old male high school student who lives at home with his parents. The older participant is an 18 year old female college student who also lives at home with her parents.

The most notable limitation of this study is the extremely small sample size. With only two participants, it is difficult to determine if the results of the study are representative of the population. Additionally, while two genders were present in the sample, it is not possible to observe any gender-related trends with only one representative of each gender. The participants who chose to participate both currently live with their parents, leaving no data on whether or not adolescent conflict with parents is dependent on or affected by a present living situation. The representation is also affected by the fact that participants were selected through voluntary participation, as the lack of randomization could have left many factors unconsidered.

Results

The responses involving frequency of conflict seem to suggest that there is a decrease in conflict as adolescents get older. The younger participant answered that he used to fight with his parents a lot, but hardly ever does now. The older participant answered that she also rarely experiences conflict with her parents because she avoids it. While both participants reported a small amount of conflict with their parents, the younger participant's response supports the hypothesis that conflict with parents tends to decrease with age as he directly stated that he used to fight with his parents a great deal more when he was younger. It is possible that personality also has an influence on this aspect, as the older participant has implied that she tends to be avoidant when it comes to conflict with her parents and likely in general as well; however, the responses seem to objectively display a negative correlation between age and frequency of conflict with parents.

The contents of conflict described by each participant seemed to be very different from each other. The younger participant reported fighting most often with his parents about managing his schedule and fighting least often about duties around the house. The older participant reported fighting most often with her parents about her little brother and completely avoiding all conflict about other topics. It can be assumed that the older participant argues over more severe content with her parents, as she reported the main topic of content being related to opinions regarding the well-being of another family member which can often become personal and create high tension. In contrast, the younger participant seems to experience conflict relating to a less personal, more trivial topic of how to manage his schedule. The younger participant's responses support the hypothesis that parental conflict tends to form over smaller topics while the older participant's responses do not support this hypothesis.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the least intense and 10 being the most intense, the younger participant reported a moderate rating of 5 while the older participant reported a high rating of 8. Based on the hypothesis that parental conflict tends to be low to moderate in intensity, the younger participant's response supports this trend while the older participant's response does not. This finding could imply that as younger adolescents learn how to handle little things on their own as they get older, conflict becomes more intense because it becomes more about serious topics as adolescents mature and develop their own opinions and beliefs.

Discussion

The participants in this study provide evidence that parental conflict decreases as adolescents get older, which is also stated in the text. Research concludes that while conflict with parents tends to increase during early adolescence, it decreases through late adolescence (Santrock, 2023). In the case of the younger participant, he explicitly states that he experienced

this trend and that there is a noticeable difference in the amount of conflict before the age of 15 and the amount of conflict currently. The older participant did not touch on past conflict, but she did support the idea of low conflict during late adolescence because she reported that she rarely experiences conflict with her parents at 18 years old. Conflict can increase during early adolescence for a number of reasons, such as hormonal fluctuations during puberty and violated expectations (Santrock, 2023). However, these aspects become more stable with age and maturation, leading to less frequent conflicts as both parents and adolescents develop skills to handle these changes.

The results of this study provide evidence to both support and disconfirm the text. According to Santrock, rather than focusing on major topics like drugs, the most common source of parental conflict is actually little things like keeping a room clean or arriving home by curfew (2023). The younger participant confirmed this portion of the text, as he reported conflicts relating to his busy schedule. The older participant, however, described conflicts over her little brother's well-being which likely relates to the high level of intensity she rated these conflicts to have. The conflicting results likely indicate that, even though there are common themes of conflict between families, there is much variability in what each individual household experiences conflict over because of personal and unique living situations and personality types.

In regards to intensity, the results conflicted with the text as well. While some adolescents report high-intensity conflict with their parents, the vast majority actually report conflict with low to moderate intensity (Santrock, 2023). The younger participant reported a moderate level of intensity, while the older participant reported a high level of intensity. The likely cause of these dramatically different ratings is the content in which conflict arises over. As previously stated,

the younger adolescent reported experiencing conflict over small, everyday things, while the older participant reported experiencing conflict over a more serious and personal matter.

Overall, the younger participant's responses supported the text on the aspects of frequency, content, and intensity of conflict. However, the older participant's responses only supported the text on the aspect of frequency relating to age. This discrepancy is likely due to the small sample size, but it does provide useful information on how individual situations greatly affect the nature of conflict and whether or not these conflicts follow the trends observed through research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, adolescent conflict with parents tends to decrease in age, occur over everyday topics, and exist in settings of low to moderate intensity. The results of this study both confirmed and disconfirmed this hypothesis in different factors based on personal situations. This particular study could be used to explore the true impact of personal situations and how development is affected by these environmental factors. Conducting further research into this topic could assist in discovering more data on how an environment can affect someone's personality and how they respond in social situations, leading to more information on what roles both nature and nurture play during adolescence.

Younger Adolescent Responses

Age: 15 Gender: Male

Other pertinent information (education, living situation, etc.): High school student, lives with parents

1. What do you like most about your parents?

The unconditional love.

2. What do you like least about your parents?

The lack of understanding.

3. How often do you fight with your parents?

Rarely ever now, but used to a lot.

4. What do you fight about most with your parents?

My busy schedule and how to balance it.

5. What do you fight least about with your parents?

Never really fight about my duties around the house.

6. On a scale of 1 – 10, with 1 indicating very little intensity and 10 indicating a great deal of intensity, how intense do you think your conflicts are with your parents?

5

7. Could you “make it” without your parents? Why or why not?

I couldn't make it without my parents, they give me a home to live in and a financial outlet when my money is low.

Older Adolescent Responses

Age: 18 Gender: Female

Other pertinent information (education, living situation, etc.): College student, lives with parents

1. What do you like most about your parents?

They raised my brothers and I to be independent.

2. What do you like least about your parents?

They raised my brothers and I with unrealistic expectations (pastors family).

3. How often do you fight with your parents?

Rarely (I avoid it).

4. What do you fight about most with your parents?

My little brother and what is best for him.

5. What do you fight least about with your parents?

Everything. I avoid arguing with them as much as possible.

6. On a scale of 1 – 10, with 1 indicating very little intensity and 10 indicating a great deal of intensity, how intense do you think your conflicts are with your parents?

8

7. Could you “make it” without your parents? Why or why not?

Yes. They raised me to be independent and take care of myself.

References

Santrock, J. W. (2023). Adolescence. *brytewave.redself.com* McGraw Hill LLC. Retrieved

February 22, 2023, from

<https://platform.virdocs.com/r/s/0/doc/2101318/sp/265040736/mi/767841233?cfi=%2F4%2F4&menu=table-of-contents>.