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ADOLESCENT-PARENT CONFLICT AS PERCEIVED BY THE ADOLESCENT:
A STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDEPENDENCE

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education at Massey University.

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ABSTRACT

The development of independence is one of the major developmental tasks of adolescence. The development of two aspects of independence—economic independence and emotional independence—were considered in this study. It was postulated that when the individual is emotionally dependent on his parents, and acceptant of being so, the degree of conflict with parents is low and that during the period of striving for emotional independence the degree of conflict with parents rises to a maximum, then falls as emotional independence is established.

After a consideration of factors stated in the literature to be related to adolescent-parent conflict the following hypothesis was developed and tested:

for those adolescents living with their parents who are by law permitted to engage in full time employment there is an inverse relation between the degree of economic independence and the degree of conflict with parents, regardless of age, sex, socio-economic status and whether or not the adolescent is a student.

A scale to measure degree of conflict was developed and used to assess degree of conflict with mother, with father, and with both parents together.

From 133 responses to the questionnaire designed to test this hypothesis a sample of 85 Europeans, ranging in age from 15 to 19 years who came from families where both the natural parents were present was obtained.

The hypothesis was not verified. Conflict with mother was found to decrease with age. No other factors were found to be related to degree of conflict.

An analysis of the areas of conflict indicated, on average, a greater number of areas of conflict with mother than with father and a greater number of areas of conflict with father than with both parents together. Examination of the highest ranking areas indicated that adolescents argue more with their mothers about specific home-centered topics and more with their fathers and both parents together about abstract and external topics. This difference in the nature of adolescent-parent conflict was explained in terms of the structure of the New Zealand family and the role each parent plays in the family.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Administrations ............................................. iii

List of Tables ............................................... v

List of Figures ............................................ vi

Chapter One: Introduction and Literature Review ...... 1

Introduction .................................................. 1

Adolescence .................................................. 1

The Developmental Tasks of Adolescence .............. 5

Theories of Adolescence .................................. 6

Emotional Independence and Conflict with Parents .... 12

Economic Independence .................................... 17

Research on Emotional and Economic Dependence/Independence . 18

Chapter Two: The Study - Hypothesis and Procedure .... 23

The Hypothesis ............................................. 23

Operational Definitions .................................... 24

Degree of Economic Independence ....................... 24

Degree of Conflict with Parents ......................... 26

Procedure .................................................... 28

Scoring ....................................................... 30

The Sample .................................................. 32

Calculations ................................................ 36

Chapter Three: The Study - Results ..................... 39

Degree of Economic Independence and
Degree of Conflict Scores ................................ 39

Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients ............... 40

t-tests .................................................... 43

Areas of Conflict .......................................... 45

Chapter Four: Discussion and Conclusion ............... 56

Discussion .................................................. 56

Conclusion .................................................. 66

Appendix ..................................................... 69

References ................................................... 74
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tables</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Composition of the Sample according to Student/Non-Student Status and Sex.</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Range, Mean, Standard Deviation and Median of the Raw Scores obtained for Degree of Economic Independence, Degree of Conflict with Mother, Degree of Conflict with Father and Degree of Conflict with Both Parents Together.</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Correlations of Degree of Conflict with Each Parent Separately and with Both Parents Together with Degree of Economic Independence, Age and Socioeconomic Status and for Degree of Economic Independence, Age and Socioeconomic Status with each other.</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Correlations of Conflict Variables with Degree of Economic Independence - Age partialled out.</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Comparison of Degree of Conflict scores - males vs females.</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Comparison of Degree of Conflict scores - students vs non-students.</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Distribution of the Number of Areas of Conflict between the Adolescent and his Parents, according to the age of the adolescent.</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The ten most common areas of conflict with mother - full sample.</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The twelve most common areas of conflict with father - full sample.</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The ten most common areas of conflict with both parents together - full sample.</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The three most common areas of conflict with mother for the full sample (N=85) and their occurrence in each age group, per cent and rank.</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The three most common areas of conflict with father for the full sample (N=85) and their occurrence in each age group, per cent and rank.</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The three most common areas of conflict with both parents together for the full sample (N=85) and their occurrence in each age group, per cent and rank.</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A representation of the postulated relation between degree of emotional independence and degree of adolescent-parent conflict.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Distribution of Age of Sample.</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Distribution of Socioeconomic Status of Sample.</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>