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## Conflict Processes and Transitions in Parent and Peer Relationships: Implications for Autonomy and Regulation

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### Abstract

Relational components of three attributes often regarded as individual variables (conflict, autonomy, and self-regulation) were examined in two studies. In Study 1, mothers and their 10- through 12-, 13- through 15-, or 16- through 17-year-old offspring reported expected times of transition to 47 adultlike behaviors (behavioral autonomy) and rated the importance of delaying each transition. Discrepancies from mothers' expectancies were found to be greatest for 13- through 15-year-olds. In Study 2, characteristics and correlates of conflict across different types of relationships were assessed. Sixth-grade and eighth-grade Hispanic American adolescents reported significant differentiation among relationships with mothers, fathers, and friends in frequency of conflict, conflict resolution strategies and sequelae, and correlates of adolescents' psychosocial competence. Variations suggest that multiple relationships may be involved in the development of autonomy and self-regulation during childhood and adolescence.

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Conflict, *autonomy*, and *self-regulation* long have been central to theory and research on adolescent development. For the most part, however, these terms have been embedded in individualistic views of ontogenetic change (Cooper, 1994). Autonomy has been regarded as a process of striving to gain freedom from parents and other influences (for a review, see Hill & Holmbeck, 1986); self-regulation, as a function of intrapsychic conflicts or internalization of external contingencies (for a review, see Kuczynski, 1995); and conflict, as a manifestation of intrapsychic turbulence and autonomy striving that were necessary components of separation from parents (e.g., Blos, 1979; Freud, 1969).

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Current views, however, affirm that conflict, autonomy, and self-regulation must be understood in interpersonal as well as individual terms. An increasing body of evidence documents that the extent and forms of conflict, autonomy, and self-regulation are moderated by expectations regarding appropriate behavior toward family members and nonfamily members (e.g., Collins, Gleason, & Sesma, in press; Cooper, 1994; Rosenthal, Demetriou, & Efklides, 1989; Smetana, 1995). Those behaviors, furthermore, vary considerably among familial relationships (e.g., adolescents with mothers, fathers, siblings) and among peer relationships of differing types (e.g., with acquaintances, friends, romantic partners) (Collins & Laursen, 1992; Collins & Sroufe, in press; Cooper, 1994; Laursen & Collins, 1994).

Although attributes of relationships with parents and with peers have not been considered systematically in research on autonomy and self-regulation, current theoretical views implicitly recognize the interrelations of interpersonal and psychosocial development. Crittenden (1990) has defined autonomy as “capacities for taking responsibility for one’s own behavior, making decisions regarding one’s own life, and maintaining supportive relationships” (p. 162). Similarly, Hill and Holmbeck (1986) have proposed that autonomy refers not to freedom *from* others (e.g., parents) but freedom *to* carry out actions on the adolescent’s own behalf while maintaining appropriate connections to significant others. With respect to self-regulation, Maccoby (1984) has argued that the gradual transition from parental regulation to autonomy and self-regulation entails *coregulatory strategies*, including shared decision making and parental monitoring of autonomous action.

Conflicts and related processes are key indicators of the developmental significance of relationships for adolescent development (Collins, 1996; Collins & Laursen, 1992). The impact of conflicts is determined by the attributes of conflict episodes and the qualities of the relationships in which conflicts occur (e.g., Grotevant & Cooper, 1985, 1986; Montemayor, 1983). Qualities of conflict resolution between family members and between friends have been linked to interpersonal competence (e.g., role-taking skills, moral judgments) and to components of psychosocial maturity such as identity formation and ego development (e.g., Grotevant & Cooper, 1985, 1986; Hauser et al., 1984; Nelson & Aboud, 1985; Selman & Schultz, 1989; Walker & Taylor, 1991). Links between conflicts and psychosocial development are likely to be apparent, especially in early adolescence, because of marked transitions in social roles and aspirations.

This article addresses the proposal that variations in the nature and extent of interpersonal conflicts in relationships with mothers, fathers, and friends are related to the development of autonomy and self-regulation during adolescence. The first section reviews research findings regarding significant changes in the phenomena of conflicts with parents and friends during the transition to adolescence. The second section addresses whether aspects of interpersonal conflicts are linked to development of autonomy, what additional information is needed about possible links, and how the links vary across relationships with mothers, fathers, and friends. The final section considers what must be included in research to encompass multiple relational contexts for psychosocial development.

## CONFLICTS AND RELATIONSHIPS DURING THE TRANSITION TO ADOLESCENCE

Conflict is defined as behavior by one member of a dyad that is incongruent with the goals, expectations, or desires of the other member, resulting in *mutual opposition* (Shantz, 1987). These oppositions may create difficulties both in interactional and emotional aspects of relationships (Kelley et al., 1983). Most research has focused on incidence of conflicts, neglecting the related processes that often determine their impact. These related processes include the topic of the conflict, the circumstances of initiation, the behaviors associated with

resolution, and the outcomes of the episode for both individuals and relationships (Laursen & Collins, 1994; Shantz, 1987).

As in other life periods, conflicts during adolescence are integral to relationships. Conflicts rarely are related inversely to the closeness of relationships or to the extent of positive emotions associated with them. Conflicts, however, do reflect differences among the dyads in which they occur (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). Dyads marked by interdependence, a defining characteristic of relationship closeness (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989; Kelley et al., 1983), generally show higher rates of conflict than do less interdependent pairs (Argyle & Furnham, 1983; see review by Hartup & Laursen, 1993).

This section first addresses distinctive patterns of conflict in relationships with family members and with peers during adolescence. Next, the degree to which conflicts are normative in close relationships during adolescence is considered briefly.

### Relational Contexts of Conflict

Conflicts are more common in relationships with family members than with peers (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Laursen, 1995). This difference in incidence commonly is attributed to distinctive characteristics of relationships with family members and with peers. For example, parent/child conflicts most often center around authority, autonomy, and responsibilities (Carlton-Ford & Collins, 1988; Smetana, 1989), whereas conflicts with friends and boyfriends or girlfriends often pertain to issues of interpersonal behavior and relational difficulties (Hobart, 1991; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). The centrality of autonomy to individual development during this period makes parent/child issues especially salient. Changes in the balance of decision-making responsibility between parents and adolescents may disrupt normal patterns in the defining dimensions of family relationships, power, and intimacy (Emery, 1992), thus engendering more opposition and emotional disruption.

Variations in conflict also reflect differing structural characteristics of familial and extrafamilial relationships. Relationships with family members may be described as *closed-field* or involuntary, in that they are partly defined and constrained by kinship or legal definitions and associated norms and environmental pressures (Berscheid, 1985). Closed-field relationships entail lengthy interaction histories and extensively routinized interactional scripts; consequently, conflicts may stimulate adaptation to altered capabilities and predilections of adolescents and to changes in relative power and autonomy within families. Outside of the family, adolescents participate in *open-field* or voluntary interactions, forming and dissolving relationships without the biological or legal constraints that apply to familial dyads. Under these conditions, conflicts affect whether and with whom new relationships are formed and whether these relationships will be maintained.

Laursen and Collins (1994) recently have proposed a social relational model, based on principles of interdependence and social exchange, to supplement older conceptualizations of the nature and developmental significance of conflicts during the transition to adolescence. This suggestion reflects diverse findings that relationship characteristics are powerful determinants of conflict behavior during adolescence. Conflicts vary with differing familial and peer relationships (e.g., mothers, fathers, siblings, acquaintances, friends, boyfriend/girlfriend). For example, reports of daily conflicts, regardless of age, most often involve mothers, followed in descending order by siblings, friends, romantic partners, fathers, and other peers and adults (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Laursen, 1995; Montemayor & Hanson, 1985). Familial conflicts arouse more intense expressions of emotion than those occurring in extrafamilial relationships; negative affect is not characteristic of disputes with friends or boyfriends/girlfriends (Laursen, 1993b; Raffaelli, 1990). Within these general trends, however,

beginning in midadolescence, conflicts with same-sex friends decrease, whereas those with romantic friends increase (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Miller, 1993).

Other conflict processes also differ between parent/child and peer relationships (Laursen, 1993a). Resolutions of conflicts with parents are divided equally between standoffs and power assertions; negotiation is extremely rare (Montemayor & Hanson, 1985). By contrast, friends generally try harder to maintain amity (Hobart, 1991). Findings from a recent meta-analysis (Laursen, 1993a) showed that conflicts between friends involved more mitigation and less coercion than conflicts with family members or with other peers. Relative to other relationships, friends reported less anger during and after conflicts, as well as more postconflict social interaction and improved relations (Laursen, 1993b). Friends and romantic partners also were more likely than family members to report positive feelings after a conflict (Laursen, 1993b; Raffaelli, 1990). With parents, continued interaction and disengagement were equally likely as outcomes of conflicts (Laursen, 1993b), whereas interaction usually continued following disputes between friends and boyfriends/girlfriends.

These variations may reflect the distinction between open-field and closed-field relationships. In open-field relationships (e.g., with peers), other potential partners are available, and partners are especially likely to avoid conflicts and to manage those that do arise in such a way as to minimize negative outcomes. Competition may be threatening enough to reduce conflicts and/or to moderate resolutions, as well as to discourage hanging on to negative feelings (see Laursen, Hartup, & Koplas, 1996, for a more extended discussion). These inhibitions may be less apparent in closed-field relationships, in which adolescents are less free to choose a different partner with whom to interact. Conflicts differ from those in open-field relationships because future exchanges are ensured; hence conflicts are both more likely to occur and less likely to be resolved directly.

### Conflict and Maturation

This differentiation of conflicts across dyads challenges the stereotype that adolescence is a time of greater interpersonal conflict than are other periods. When conflicts are defined behaviorally as disagreements or interpersonal oppositions, evidence of age-related increases in conflicts is inconsistent at best. Conflict rates and behaviors vary more as a function of type of relationships than of maturation (see Laursen & Collins, 1994, for a review).

The emphasis on normative change, moreover, has overshadowed significant questions regarding individual differences in the nature and significance of conflicts. Levels of certain pubertal hormones have been correlated with individual differences in intensity of conflicts (Inoff-Germain et al., 1988). In addition, conflicts tended to be more frequent in families with adolescents who experienced puberty *off-time* (e.g., Hill, 1988; Hill & Holmbeck, 1987; Savin-Williams & Small, 1986; Steinberg, 1987, 1988). For pubertal *on-time* adolescents, the normative pattern may be somewhat different, once confounding between timing and status has been eliminated. Pronounced gender differences have been reported in the specific relations between physical maturation and parent/adolescent conflicts (Collins & Laursen, 1992).

In peer relationships, individual differences may be a function of social acceptance and social network characteristics (Parker & Asher, 1987, 1993). Furthermore, although high levels of stressors are normative during the transition to adolescence, impaired peer relations, including high levels of or poor management of conflicts, may be related to individual differences in the number of stressors experienced. Adolescents encountering more stressors may be more susceptible to interpersonal difficulties (Eccles et al., 1993; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Temperamental characteristics also may moderate both the occurrence and impact of conflicts (Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 1995). No data indicate that pubertal or chronological age

variables are important determinants of these variations, except as early-adolescent transitions contribute to an aggregation of stressors experienced by some adolescents.

Thus distinguishing between the occurrence of conflicts, the interpersonal conditions under which they occur, and the nature of the sequelae may help to clarify the functions of conflict during the transition to adolescence.

## INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS, AUTONOMY, AND SELF-REGULATION

Previous studies have documented age-related changes during adolescence in the characteristics of conflicts in parent and peer relationships and in transitions to autonomy as a function of significant relationships (e.g., Collins, 1990, 1995; Collins & Luebker, 1994; Laursen, in press). Initial findings from two lines of research have addressed the functional significance of conflicts with parents and peers for psychosocial competence during adolescence.

### Autonomy Transitions and Parent-Adolescent Conflicts

One line of research concerns links between parent/adolescent conflicts and transitions in behavioral autonomy. Those studies address an expectancy violation-realignment model of individual development in relational contexts (Collins, 1995). In this view, the long-term interdependencies of parent/child relationships form the basis for expectations that affect adolescents' and parents' perceptions and interpretation of each other's behavior and, therefore, guide their actions and reactions toward one another. During the transition to adolescence, discrepancies between parents' and adolescents' expectations are especially likely to occur (a) because multiple rapid changes during adolescence make past behavior an unreliable basis for predicting actions and responses and (b) because those changes elicit new expectations that may not be appropriate yet. Those discrepant expectations generate conflicts, which in turn stimulate realignments toward more age-appropriate expectations.

Realignment processes should be particularly apparent in connection with issues of behavioral autonomy (Bios, 1979; Hill & Holmbeck, 1986; Steinberg, 1990). The most commonly reported violations of expectations between parents and adolescents involve authority, autonomy, and responsibilities (Carlton-Ford & Collins, 1988; Montemayor, 1983; Smetana, 1989), and autonomy issues are associated with psychosocial difficulties both for parents and adolescents (Silverberg & Steinberg, 1990; Steinberg, 1987, 1988). In recent studies (e.g., Collins & Luebker, 1994), expectations have been assessed in terms of two categories of transitions in behavioral autonomy: *transfers of responsibilities* from parents to children (e.g., jurisdiction over clothing choices, school decisions), and *transitions in activities* over which parents typically exercise jurisdiction at earlier ages, but not later ones (e.g., whether to spend time with friends rather than family, use of tobacco or alcohol). Parents' and adolescents' expectations about the timing and significance of these transitions provide specific referents for examining both conflicts in parent/child relationships and links to autonomy.

The initial step in this research was a timetable study in which parents and adolescents both indicated the appropriate ages for each of 47 distinct transitions in activities and responsibilities. Participants also were asked whether the transitions already had occurred. If the transition had occurred, participants were asked the age at which it occurred and whether it was considered timely. If the transition had not occurred, they were asked at what later age it would be appropriate. In addition, for each item adolescents indicated "how important it is that you be able to do (the activity) at your age"; and parents indicated "how important it is that your child *wait* to do this activity." Thus, the degree of interpersonal discrepancies in expectations about adolescent behavior could be estimated.

Participants were 79 mother/child pairs, grouped by age of the target adolescent: 10 through 12, 13 through 15, and 16 through 17 years old. Fathers' responses were available in too few cases to permit reliable analyses.

The first question addressed in data analyses was, To what degree are parents' and adolescents' expectations about issues of adolescent autonomy likely to be violated? Results showed that discrepancies within the parent/adolescent dyads occurred frequently. There was little concordance between parents' and adolescents' expectations regarding the appropriate time for specific transitions, implying that conflicts are likely between both people's expectations regarding autonomy and the behavior of the other.

The second question was, What are the conditions under which these violations are most likely? The age of the child was important, with discrepancies generally being more common—and violations thus more likely—in early adolescence. Thirteen- through fifteen-year-olds were more likely to have engaged in activities and responsibilities without their mothers' knowledge. Regardless of whether the 13- through 15-year-olds had made the transition to the more adultlike behaviors, adolescents in this age group disagreed more with their mothers about appropriate timing than did 16-through 17-year-olds. Furthermore, mothers of both younger groups were more likely to place considerable importance on waiting to make the transition to more adultlike behavior, whereas 13- through 15-year-olds were as likely as 16- through 17-year-olds to rate adultlike activities as important to do. The fewest discrepancies in expected timing occurred in the oldest group, and a greater number of those older adolescents already were engaging in a wide variety of activities and responsibilities.

Those results indicated that the process of changes toward autonomy is associated with oppositions between adolescents and parents. The findings were consistent with the hypothesis (Collins, 1995) that the views of parents and adolescents gradually converge as a result of successive iterations of realignments of expectations following violations. The inference of an age-related pattern in which conflicts are related functionally to greater autonomy must be replicated longitudinally to provide the information needed to bolster this causal interpretation from cross-sectional data.

### Self-Regulation and Conflicts With Parents and Friends

A second line of research stems from a social relational model (Laursen & Collins, 1994), in which conflicts largely reflect distinctive characteristics of differing types of relationships. The studies in this line of research have examined differentiation among conflicts in adolescents' relationships with mothers, fathers, and friends. A further question was whether conflicts in these differing relationships were related in similar ways to adolescents' social and academic competence.

**Study 1**—In an initial attempt to address this question, Laursen, Mortensen, Ferreira, Yankelevitch, and Alexander (1995) administered self-report measures to 120 Hispanic American sixth and eighth graders (49 males, 71 females) living in a primarily Cuban American community in greater Miami. Participants were invited to participate in a study “about yourself and the people you spend most of your time with each day.” Parents consented to participation in response to a letter distributed by the school, and adolescents assented at the time of data collection. Participants' ages ranged from 11 to 15 years. Schools provided grade point averages for each student, following signed consent forms from both parents and students.

Participants completed an Interpersonal Conflict Questionnaire (Laursen, 1993b, 1995), which described daily conflicts with mothers, fathers, and friends. From a list of potential conflict issues, adolescents identified all disagreements from the previous day. Assessment of conflict frequency was open-ended; individual responses ranged from 0 through 15. For each



disagreement identified, adolescents indicated affective intensity, which ranged through 1 = *friendly*; 3 = *neither*; 5 = *angry*. For those who reported conflicts, the average calculated across disagreements also ranged from 1 through 5 across the three types of relationships. In addition, they reported postconflict social interaction (whether participants stayed together and continued talking after the disagreement). The proportion of disagreements that resulted in discontinued social interaction for individual adolescents ranged from 0% through 100%.

Two measures of self-perceived competence also were completed. In the present framework, these measures are considered to be indicators of competence for self-regulation. The Self-Perception Profile (Harter, 1985) assessed self-esteem in six domains, of which three were of particular interest in this study: *scholastic competence*, *behavioral conduct*, and *global self-worth*. Item scores ranged from 1 = *low* through 4 = *high*. Individual scores were averages of subscale items (range = 1 through 4). A modified version of the Revised Class Play (Masten, Morison, & Pellegrini, 1985; Pizzaniglio, Bukowski, & Hoza, 1995) measured self-perceptions of social skills in three domains: *sociability*, *aggression*, and *isolation*. Item scores ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 3 = *sometimes* to 5 = *very much*. Individual scores were averages of subscale items (range = 1 through 5).

Data analyses (Mortensen, 1995) revealed differentiation across types of relationships in conflict-behavior scores (total conflict; continued social interaction; discontinued social interaction; affective intensity). Conflicts with mothers and with fathers were intercorrelated significantly across the four scores,  $r = .30$  to  $.63$ . Correlations between conflicts with friends and conflicts with each of the two parents, however, were negligible, with the exception of affective intensity,  $r = .58$  (for fathers and friends) and  $.48$  (for mothers and friends). These varying intercorrelations indicate that method similarity did not bias measures of conflicts across relationships.

Differentiation among relationships also was apparent in correlations between conflict behavior and measures related to adolescents' self-regulation, all  $ps < .05$ . Conflicts with friends and mothers, but not fathers, were linked to adolescent self-esteem. In contrast, conflicts with friends and fathers, but not mothers, were linked to adolescent peer relations. Global self-worth was associated with affective intensity in conflicts with friends,  $r = -.42$ , and mothers,  $r = -.30$ . With friends, discontinued social interaction was linked to scholastic and social competence,  $r = -.56$  and  $-.30$ , respectively, as well as global self-worth,  $r = -.21$  and  $-.25$ , respectively. Measures of self-regulation in peer relations revealed a somewhat different picture. Peer aggression was linked to total conflicts with fathers and friends,  $r = .33$  and  $.26$ , respectively, as well as to affective intensity in conflicts with fathers,  $r = -.27$ . Peer sociability was correlated with affective intensity in conflicts with friends,  $r = .31$ , but not with mothers and fathers.

These preliminary data were consistent with the expectation that conflicts and their psychosocial correlates vary with the type of relationship in which conflicts occur. In parent/adolescent relationships, conflicts over autonomy transitions appeared to be embedded in transitions in the self-regulation of children's behavior and the development of functional autonomy. Parent/adolescent conflicts manifested patterns of expression and resolution that were predictable from the closed structure of family relationships and that were related meaningfully, but in contrasting ways, to adolescents' perceptions of self-worth and social competence with peers. By contrast, conflicts with friends occurred less frequently than did conflicts with parents. When they occurred in the absence of modes of resolution that favored postconflict interaction, peer conflicts were linked to negative self-perceptions of social competence with peers. Although parent/adolescent disagreements have been reported to be less frequent in Hispanic American than in European American families (e.g., Barber, 1994),

these findings indicated that variations in conflicts both within and outside of families also may be important in adolescent development.

**Study 2**—Conflicts with friends were examined further to address the question of whether individual differences in conflict behavior with friends are associated with variations in adolescent social and academic competence. Conflict management behaviors distinguish friendships from other types of relationships (Laursen et al., 1996). In the absence of the power differentials and kinship bonds that shape relationships with family members and authority figures, principles of social exchange emerge as a primary force governing the behavior of adolescent friends. Friendships are voluntary affiliations established for the provision of mutually beneficial rewards (Berscheid, 1986). Peers compete with one another to participate in favorable relationships. Therefore, friends adhere to communal exchange norms: In general, the need of both participants must be met through social interactions in which rewards exceed costs (Kelley et al., 1983; Mills & Clark, 1982). To maintain previously established patterns of rewarding exchange, friends tend to manage conflicts so as to avoid long-term relationship disruption, even if the solution requires short-term personal sacrifice.

Conflict management also may provide a window on individual differences in competencies associated with effective self-regulation. Disagreements with friends hold both promise and peril (Shantz, 1993). The ability to manage conflicts successfully frequently is assumed to promote relationship intimacy and foster social skills, whereas excessively coercive conflict behavior is expected to disrupt relationships and isolate individuals (Hartup, 1992; Perry, Perry, & Kennedy, 1992).

The first of two questions addressed in this study was, Are adolescents who differ in the frequency of conflicts with friends also different on measures of self-regulation? Adolescents were divided into two groups on the basis of each of the conflict variables separately. For conflict frequency, the two groups were those who reported one or more disagreements with friends ( $n = 36$ ) and those who reported no disagreements with friends ( $n = 84$ ). Adolescents who reported conflicts with friends had significantly higher levels of aggression and isolation on the self-report version of the Revised Class Play than did adolescents who reported no conflicts with friends. The low-conflict adolescents also were higher on self-perceived global self-worth, behavioral conduct, and scholastic competence than those who reported conflicts with friends. Conflict frequency was not related to grade point average.

The second question was, Do these reduced levels of social competence vary with individual differences in conflict management? Of adolescents who reported disagreements with friends, subgroups were formed on the basis of affect during conflicts and postconflict social interaction. For affective intensity during conflicts, adolescents who reported disagreements with friends were divided into those whose average conflict score reflected friendly affect ( $n = 14$ ) and those whose average score indicated affect that was not friendly (i.e., neutral or angry affect) ( $n = 22$ ). For postconflict social interaction, the groups were adolescents with one or more conflicts that resulted in discontinued social interaction ( $n = 15$ ) and those with no conflicts resulting in discontinued social interaction ( $n = 21$ ).

The results revealed a hierarchy in which adolescents who reported no conflicts with friends manifested more adaptive psychosocial characteristics than those adolescents who reported managed conflicts, who in turn evinced more adaptive outcomes than those adolescents who reported unsuccessfully managed conflicts. Those who reported that conflicts were angry and resulted in discontinued social interaction had (a) lower school grades, (b) lower self-esteem, and (c) lower social skills than those adolescents whose conflicts were more affectively positive and who managed to continue interaction following the conflict.



These findings accord with previous reports of links between contentiousness with peers and individual competence (see Perry et al., 1992, for a review) and with indications that the significance of conflicts is moderated by conflict-management processes, particularly within close relationships (see Hartup, 1992, for a review). Furthermore, the findings offered a glimpse into the possible mechanisms whereby conflicts between friends may have an impact on adolescent adaptation. Although not inherently negative, disagreements hold the potential for unpleasant arousal, unequal outcomes, and disrupted relations. Indeed, children and adolescents have cited conflicts as one of the greatest threats to friendship (Selman, 1980). Engaging in conflicts with friends is risky behavior. Disagreements may improve communication and restore equity between friends, but there is always a risk of hindering communication and disrupting equitable exchanges. Some adolescents more frequently experience the risk of ending friendships and manage these less successfully than do other adolescents. The challenge is to understand the conditions that favor a balance between the benefits and risks of opposition in friendship.

## **TOWARD A FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCH ON AUTONOMY AND SELF-REGULATION IN MULTIRELATIONAL CONTEXT**

The accumulating evidence from these and other studies provides a basis for a more comprehensive formulation of the role of conflict as an element of normative change in relationships and, in turn, in individual development during adolescence. Such a reformulation must involve attention to three broad elements: attention to variations between parent and peer relationships as contexts for mastering autonomy and self-regulation; attention to multiple competencies associated with successful autonomy and self-regulation; and attention to the developmental course of autonomy, self-regulation, and relationships and the interrelations among them.

### **Dyadic Variations in Preparation for Autonomy and Self-Regulation**

Relationships with parents and with friends provide contrasting contexts for mastering the multiple skills involved in autonomy and self-regulation. Structurally, the closed-field represented by family relationships provides interdependence and presents barriers to autonomy, whereas the converse is true of open-field relationships with peers.

Although both types of contexts vary in the elasticity and permeability of these implicit structures, differences between them provide a basis for hypothesizing contributions of each to autonomy and to self-regulation. Indicators of peer relationships may be especially informative regarding aspects of autonomy and self-regulation that are relevant to maintaining voluntary social affiliations. These may vary with a number of conditions that are both endogenous to and exogenous to relationships with peers. For example, in-group/out-group perceptions associated with minority status may make conformity with in-group peers more likely than would autonomy, especially in cases in which autonomous behavior implies rejection of in-group norms and/or adoption of out-group norms (e.g., Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990). In studies that have compared parent and peer influences on academic achievement (e.g., Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992), for example, level of peer support for achievement was a moderator of the impact of parenting practices on adolescents' academic performance and school behavior.

Relationships with parents and peers, however, are interrelated more highly than commonly is recognized. Fuligni and Eccles (1993) recently reported that an increasing degree of extreme orientation to peers over time is a positive function of perceptions of parental strictness and a negative function of opportunities for decision making that affect the self. Other researchers (e.g., DeBaryshe, Patterson, & Capaldi, 1993; Dishion, Patterson, & Griesler, 1994; Vuchinich,

Bank, & Patterson, 1992) have documented that variations in differing types of relationships interact in relation to significant individual outcomes. Similar approaches are needed in the study of the development of autonomy and self-regulation.

In the studies reported here, a distinction is made not only between friends and parents as potential influences on autonomy and self-regulation, but also between mothers and fathers. Previous research has documented both similarities and differences in mother/child and father/child relationships during adolescence, but the functional significance of those differences has remained more a matter of speculation than of evidence (for reviews, see Collins & Russell, 1991; Shulman & Collins, 1994). Nevertheless, the initial findings were consistent with common conclusions from comparisons between mother/child and father/child relationships. For example, the finding that measures of competence in peer relationships are related to conflict behaviors with fathers and friends, but not with mothers, accords with frequent findings that peerlike recreational activities are relatively more dominant in father/child relationships (e.g., Larson, 1994). Similarly, the significant relation between self-esteem and conflict behaviors with mothers and friends, but not fathers, was consistent with observations that both mother/child relationships and friendships are marked by intimacy and support (e.g., Furman & Buhrmester, 1992).

Joint consideration of mother/child and father/child relationships as contexts for the development of autonomy and self-regulation also should be a goal in further research. Although few gender differences among adolescents have been documented (Collins, 1995; Collins & Russell, 1991), research also should consider whether these relationships carry differing implications for males and for females. Such research might provide a basis for specific attention to the interrelated influences of dyadic relationships in family systems (Hinde, 1989).

### **Multiple Competencies in Autonomy and Self-Regulation**

Although autonomy and self-regulation traditionally have been treated as unitary constructs, more differentiated conceptualizations make it possible to formulate and test hypotheses about distinctive contributions of relationships to psychosocial development. In studies of autonomy, for example, conflicts with peers, as well as conflicts with parents, may be implicated in predicting behavioral autonomy and cognitive autonomy, whereas conflicts with parents may be related more strongly to emotional autonomy than are conflicts with peers. In the area of self-regulation, conflicts with peers may be more informative regarding initiation of behaviors than with behavioral inhibition, whereas conflicts with parents may be informative about both initiation and inhibition components of self-regulation (Hartup & Van Lieshout, 1995).

The initial findings reported here provide an example of the usefulness of addressing multiple components of psychosocial competence. The correlational analyses demonstrate that separate measures of affective (e.g., self-worth) and interpersonal (e.g., peer sociability) aspects of competence make it possible to identify distinctive patterns of correlations with mothers, fathers, and friends. More differentiated measures of individual competence, as well as differentiated understanding of relationship experiences, thus are essential to progress in this area.

### **Developmental Patterns**

Finally, attention must be given to normative developmental changes in both relationships and in the impetus toward autonomous, self-regulated behavior. Recent longitudinal findings (e.g., Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O'Connor, 1994) have shown that relationships play a role in the development of these competencies over time. The analysis of those data focused on parents' behaviors that would encourage adolescents to manifest both autonomy (e.g., parents'

encouraging adolescents to express disagreement with parents' views, to explain their own views, and to show confidence about their views) and relatedness (e.g., adolescents expressing validation of, and agreement with, another person's position; and adolescents' attending to another's statements). Allen et al. found that qualities of relationships with parents (especially fathers) were related positively and significantly to the amount of change in adolescents' ego development and self-esteem between the ages of 14 and 16 years.

In addition to the determinants of individual change, however, it is important to consider changes in relationships that make it possible for others to remain significant influences in children's lives, despite the maturational and social changes that occur during adolescence. Normative patterns have been documented for changes in interaction patterns both with parents and peers and in expectations for transitions in age-graded behaviors (for reviews, see Collins, 1990; Rogoff, Sellers, Pirrotta, Fox, & White, 1975; Steinberg, 1990). Linkages between individual psychosocial change and change in relationships, however, have been studied less than associations between parenting behavior and adolescent psychosocial characteristics.

Studies described in this article provide some evidence for a process linking individual change and changes in relationship. Discrepant expectations about the timing of autonomy transitions were found to result in more frequent conflicts between parents and children during early adolescence than in childhood or in later adolescence. In general, Collins (1990, 1995; Collins & Luebker, 1994) has found that autonomy appears to increase more rapidly, and self-regulation less rapidly, than parents wish. These violations of expectations are both normative and functional. Maintaining emotional bonds is a powerful motivation to realign expectations with the realities of developmental change. Collins has argued that continuous realignments stimulate the adaptation of relationships to individual developmental change.

Little is known, however, about circumstances that deflect these normative patterns or about the implications of nonnormative transitions. Rutter (1993) has argued that developmental transitions provide useful opportunities for observing the significance of factors such as close personal relationships on subsequent development. This strategy might be beneficial in research on autonomy and self-regulation. Both the period bridging childhood and adolescence and that bridging adolescence and adulthood offer highly salient instances of transitions in relationships and in individual functioning relevant to autonomy and self-regulation.

## CONCLUSION

Autonomy, self-regulation, and changing patterns of personal relationships so clearly are inherent in the normative transitions of early adolescence that variations in them often are overshadowed. Evidence is emerging, however, that the development of autonomy and self-regulation reflects the contrasting contexts experienced in multiple relationships during childhood and adolescence. Relationships with mothers and fathers may contribute distinctively to psychosocial development, and their contributions appear, in turn, to be different from the contributions of peers. The significance of other relationships known to be important sources of influence on adolescent development, such as those with romantic partners (Furman & Wehner, 1994) and adults outside of the family (Darling, Hamilton, & Niego, 1994), should be examined as well. A systematic, integrative approach to the linkages among them is an essential step toward assessing and understanding the processes of individual development in a dynamic, diverse sociocultural environment.

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