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*Maria Nicoleta TURLIUC, Marius MARICI*

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# What do Romanian Parents and Adolescents Have Conflicts About?

Maria Nicoleta TURLIUC<sup>1</sup>, Marius MARICI<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Parent-adolescent (P-A) conflict presents *ethno-cultural particularities* with regard to its thematic content. *The purpose* of the present research was to establish the main thematic categories of the P-A conflict within the Romanian culture and understand how various dimensions of conflict relate to the P-A relationship. *Concerning methodology*, based on the in-depth, semi-structured interviews, 122 adolescents ( $M_{\text{age}} = 15,4$ ) provided information about conflicting issues with their parents, as well as data about the intensity, frequency, justifications, or stimuli of conflict. *The results* indicated twelve thematic conflicting categories. “Parental control of adolescents”, “personal activities” or “school and education” categories recorded the most frequent conflicts, a situation which is explainable in Romanian context. What is more, adolescents’ specific *preoccupations* and *age* were related to conflict, whereas the conflict actors’ different attributions with regard to accidents or to parents’ behavior proved to elicit conflict, as well. In addition, adolescents reported frequent conflicts as a result of the parents’ use of psychological control related strategies. *Overall*, this research underlines the necessity of cultural-featured research in deconstructing the P-A conflict.

*Keywords*: parent-adolescent conflict; themes of conflict; Romanian culture; conflict frequency and intensity; gender; socio-cognitive domains.

## Introduction

*Conflict is inevitable in interpersonal relationships* and scientists agree that a moderate level of conflict is generally considered to be beneficial for adolescents. Parents, though, perceive their children’ transition from childhood to adolescence

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Department of Medical Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Iași, ROMANIA. E-mail: turliuc@uaic.ro

<sup>2</sup> Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Iași, ROMANIA. E-mail: maricimarius@yahoo.com

as a stressful period (Olson, et al., 1983), in the context in which, on average, adolescents' negative affect (Buchanan, Eccles and Becker, 1992), P-A conflict or adolescents' autonomy solicitation increase (Lerner et al., 1996), while the quality of P-A relationship declines (McGue, Elkins, Walden and Iacono, 2005). In the first place, the conflict was defined in various ways: Montemayor (1982) referred to the P-A conflict as a negative interaction between one parent and a child implying a varying degree of disagreement. The Issues Checklist (Robin and Foster, 1989) defined it as a discussion between the conflict actors, while Sorkhabi (2010) viewed it as a fight or disagreement.

Furthermore, Stanley Hall, the one who achieved the first doctorate in psychology in the USA, claimed that adolescence is a period of "storm and stress" (Hall, 1904), which leads to conflict between parents and adolescents, this being a universal and biological tendency. Moreover, in his view adolescents rather suffer from mood disruption and get involved in risky behavior, but P-A conflict is not normative. They often have school troubles and low self-esteem (Arnett, 1999). As Arnett concludes, there is no pure biological determination of "storm and stress" in adolescence, although there is evidence that adolescence is a special period involving a higher level of conflict with parents, more frequent variations of mood disruptions and an intensification of risk behavior as compared to the other developmental stages (Arnett, 1999). In addition, Ellis-Schwabe and Thornburg (1986) found that children between 10 and 14 had most conflicts about "home responsibilities" and "spending money" and at least conflicts about "watching TV", in a period when virtual reality was not such an available leisure option as today. Another research (Tesser, Forehand, Brody and Long, 1989) which used "Issue Checklist" measure, found that children aged between 11 and 14 discussed the least with parents about "drug use", "drinking or smoking" and the most about "chores", "homework", "time to go to bed" or "cleaning".

Smetana (1989) found that P-A conflict focused mainly on ten thematic categories such as: parental control, school issues, money, curfew, appearance a. s. o. She concluded that these conflicts are about daily, mundane issue pertaining to everyday interactions, they are generally not serious, but they are normative in the P-A relationship. Conflict helps adolescents to gain more autonomy (Adams and Laursen, 2001). It is not a wonder that Laursen found evidence that adolescents ( $M_{age} = 16,7$ ) spent in their daily interactions about 62%<sup>3</sup> of their time with friends, in comparison with the time spent with their family (28%) or with the other adults (11%). Actually, adolescents transfer some of their parents' functions to the same-age friends. What is more, just a fraction of conflicts are very intense and they are often in the moral domain.

In Chinese culture, Yeh (1995, 1997) performed some research in order to find out the origins of parent-child conflict. The study found 6 sources of conflict.

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<sup>3</sup> Numbers are rounded

They are: (1) parental requests conflict child's needs, (2) children do not have the ability to meet parents' requests (3) filial duty conflicts the other responsibilities the child has (4) parents' unreasonable behavior (5) immoral parental requests and (6) conflict between parents. About 60% of the total conflicts belong to the first category. These results actually reflect the findings in the western culture (Barber, 1994) which show that P-A conflict is mainly about everyday, mundane issues. In fact, cultural differences in parenting and especially in the conflict domain were attributed to individualistic/collectivistic features of a culture. These two forces shape thoughts, emotions, morality, goals, or attributions of individuals (Triandis, 2001). This means that we could presumably hypothesize that in a different culture, such as the Romanian one, the picture of P-A conflict might be depicted in different nuances.

*What is more*, other studies show that P-A conflict is normative and moderate levels of conflict elicit a positive influence on autonomy negotiation and independence in comparison with families where no conflict or too much conflict exists (Adams and Laursen, 2001). Autonomy represents a universal need of human beings regardless of language or culture. Conflict encourages a renegotiation of adolescents' personal jurisdiction limits and boundaries, which determines parents to provide some degree of autonomy in one of more domains of autonomy support such as: physical closeness, thinking, decision making or other domains (Soenens and Beyers, 2012). P-A conflict is the most frequent in early adolescence and drops until late adolescence (Laursen, Coy and Collins, 1998). Starting with early adolescence, P-A interactions are redefined and they suffer major transformations from a unilateral to a more mutual relationship (Doorn, Branje and Meeus, 2011). Actually, a small number of these conflicts are the result of some serious tense P-A exchanges. Some reported that 5% to 15% of the total P-A conflicts are serious, (Collins and Laursen, 2004), while others 15% to 20% (Montemayor, 1983). What is more, adolescents' relationship with their parents maintains relatively warm during this period (Schaefer, 1965).

*Besides this*, from the perspective of socio-cognitive domain theory, conflict arises because of different perspectives of parents' and children' upon the issues which pertain to the personal domain of adolescents. Literature defines *the moral domain* with reference to actions which have the potential to negatively affect the welfare or rights of the others, the *conventional domain* refers to the issues which are arbitrary and which were established through social interaction and agreement, the *prudential issues* have the potential of harming or negatively influencing the personal comfort or health, the *friendship domain* includes issues referring to relationships, while *the personal domain* focus on issues which are within the jurisdiction of personal choice and do not affect negatively the welfare or health of the others (Smetana, 2011). On the one hand, the research found that P-A conflict is the most frequent in the personal domain and it is rarely about more serious issues. Smetana (1989, p. 1052) writes: "*conflict rarely occurs over topics*

*such as religion, politics, sex, and drugs ... but rather occurs over issues of rule breaking and noncompliance to parental requests.”* On the other hand, only a clinical minority of adolescents have conflicts in the moral domain, especially those with conduct disorders or oppositional behavior disorders (Smetana, 2005). The most intense conflicts are in the moral domain (Smetana, 2011).

*On top of that*, the concept of “protagonist” and “antagonist” of conflict mirrors the literary writings in which the later opposes in some way the forces of the former. The isolation of the very first stimulus that triggered conflict seems a harder task owing to the fact that the tendencies for the actors involved in conflict is to defend themselves or to react negatively towards each other. Parents tend to under-appreciate while children are inclined to exaggerate in their self-reports (Patterson et al., 1992). Yet, adolescents’ reports are closer to reality, and thus preferred.

*Finally*, concerning gender, generally, mother-adolescent conflicts are more frequent than father-adolescent conflicts (Marici and Turliuc, 2011) and mother-girl conflicts are more frequent than any other combinations (Laurson, 1995). Generally, mothers are the main caregivers of their children meaning that they spend significantly more time with their children (Comparable time use statistics, 2005). This means more closeness and thus more conflict. Girls are more sensitive to conflicts and they are socialized to explore and try to solve conflicts, while boys are socialized to deny or avoid conflicts (Turliuc, 2004). Other studies found no gender differences regarding conflict (Dekovic, 1999).

### ***Particularities of Romanian Culture and Family Life***

Romania is predominantly a Christian Orthodox country (about 86%) and formally a collectivistic society, where values such as obedience, relationships, or authority are more valued than their opposites. In the last two decades, these values have been often questioned under the more individualistic invasion of the western culture. After the 1989 revolution, Romanians showed much openness for the expression of liberty, consumerism, interest for property and the new. Yet, most of these changes did not transform mentalities overnight, and yesterday’s teenagers become today’s parents, some of whom are still captive of the old patterns of thinking and of inefficient practices. In the process of change from the traditional way of living to the more modern ones, the Romanian families are being confronted with the instability of norms and values. Today, families increasingly need external support in order to adapt to this changes, parents claiming either an inability to manage the relationship with their own children, or an attachment to traditional values and an idealization of traditional family (Cojocaru & Cojocaru, 2011). In comparison with their husbands, Romanian traditional mothers promote closeness, cohesion, social courtesy, and parental authority. They exert greater supervision (instrumental control) and relational control

(constrains of emotional attachment) in relation with their children, especially with their daughters; sons being often exposed to fewer maternal controls and encouraged to take risks. In other word, traditionally mothers bring up their children and fathers are generally responsible for the family economic welfare, although the paradigm is also being permanently questioned. The less traditional mothers and fathers expect autonomy and self-actualizations, verbal and physical assertiveness and independence, and their expectations are not so much related to the gender of the child (Turliuc, 2004). Even so, mothers spend about twice more time with their adolescent children, while fathers get involved mainly in recreational activities (Comparable time use statistics, 2005). Most adolescents spend daily six or seven hours at school while the time for the next-day homework takes other several hours. It is well-known that the Romanian school curriculum is over-dimensioned and it has been often subject to major modifications made by the Ministry of Education. High school requirements lead to higher expectations and control on the part of the parents.

### **Aims of the Research**

P-A conflict is characterized by ethno-cultural particularities, which means that culture plays a significant role in determining the content of the P-A conflict, which might elicit significant variations among different cultures. The purpose of the present research was to address the following questions: (1) “What are the main *thematic categories* of P-A conflict in the Romanian culture?”, and (2) “How other dimensions of conflict such as *intensity, frequency, gender, conflict stimuli or socio-cognitive domains* relate to P-A relationship?”

### **Sample**

The participants ( $M_{age} = 15,4$ ) were 122 adolescents from four high schools from Suceava, a city in the Northwestern of Romania of about 91 000 citizens. We tried to obtain a non-clinical, homogeneous sample of Romanian participants, whose parents were married, and had lived together in the same dwelling, for at least 2 months prior to the time of the interview. At the same time, as a condition for the inclusion in the sample, adolescent participants, as well as their parents had to suffer no severe mental, physical disability or chronic disease and adolescents had to have both their parents.

The participants were 66 girls and 56 boys. 50% of mothers graduated from high school and 33% graduated from a college, while in case of fathers 51% graduated high school and 36% had a college diploma. Most participants were the only child (45%) and 33% had one more sibling. 56% of adolescents were the first

child, and 28% were the second child. 77% of children belong to Orthodox families.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The research on P-A conflict was conducted in the fall of 2012, and it was based on face to face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews combined with the questionnaire method. According to the *research ethics* and country laws parental written acceptance was obtained for the participation in the research of their minor children. The participation was optional and only a small minority (8%) refused to take part in the present study. In addition, school principals facilitated our access to participants, offered us a room for the interviews, set up a schedule and appointed people to assist us in our work.

The selection of schools was based mainly on principles' openness to our research. Two principles rejected our request to initiate a research on the basis of lack of time on the part of the students. The research started by verbally providing students with information and details about the researcher, purpose of the study, confidentiality of information and explanations about the theme of research. The introduction informed participants that the purpose of the researcher was to gather information about every single conflict from the last four weeks, which they can remember. Besides, adolescents had to indicate with whom the conflict was (with the mother, the father or with both), to rate the most three intense conflicts, and to indicate the socio-cognitive domains by answering a question referring to their justifications for conflicts ("*Why do you think it is good/bad to do/not to do that?*") (Smetana, 1989).

Prior to the interview we asked participants to write in brief all the conflicts they can remember in the last month, to indicate the day/date and with whom it was, the mother, the father or with both. After completion, the participants had the actual interview and they provided details about the P-A conflict, using the notes which they previously made. They were encouraged to add even more conflicts if they remembered. Demographics were assessed using a standardized questionnaire after the interview. The adolescents' answers were audio-recorded or noted by the researcher during the interview.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

For the present research we used a combination of inductive and deductive qualitative thematic analysis together with the quantitative method. We investigated the data using QSR NVivo data management program. Nvivo is a computer software designed for qualitative research which allows users to organize, classify,

sort, examine relationships, search for information, or quantitatively investigate and analyze non-numerical data from various fields of knowledge. This tool supports more formats such as audio, video, picture, web, database formats and helps researchers comprehend and systematize information (Nvivo 10, n.d.). We entered transcripts and notes in Nvivo as *project documents*, manual codes were treated as *nodes* and segments of data were selected and labeled as *codes*.

### ***Qualitative Analysis***

The research was based on thematic analysis (Strauss, 1987) which is a scientific process of encoding qualitative information. We combined inductive (Boyatzis, 1998) and deductive (Crabtree and Miller, 1999) methods, relying on the revised and improved procedure written by Feredazy and Muir-Cochrane (2006).

*Code Manual Development.* “A code manual” refers to all codes which are to be used in a research. “A template” was defined as a list of codes used for a section from research or for a broader theoretical construct. “A code” is the minimal unit used for analysis in a qualitative research and it is defined as a “*pattern found in the information that at a minimum describes and organizes the possible observations or at a maximum interprets aspects of a phenomenon.*” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). At this point, we used *a priori codes*. Codes were identified by their (1) label, (2) definition of what the theme refers to, (3) a description of how to know that the theme occurs (“flagging”) (4) criteria for exclusion of themes, and (5) examples in order to eliminate potential confusions when searching for the themes (Boyatzis, 1998, pp. 10-11). *A priori codes* were established before the data analysis procedure started. We had such codes (including labels, definitions, descriptions, and examples) for the socio-cognitive domains, which were theorized and tested in international literature and which were established based on the respondents’ justifications (Smetana and Asquith, 1994, p. 1152). They were: the “*moral domain*”, the “*conventional domain*”, the “*prudential domain*”, the “*friendship domain*” and the “*personal domain*”. Then, we turned the ten thematic categories resulted in Smetana’s research (1989) into *a priori codes* for the purpose of comparison of the conflict thematic categories from the American culture with those in the Romanian one. Finally, we used *a priori codes* to determine who the conflict stimuli belonged to and for this we had the following codes: “Parent-protagonist”, “Adolescent-protagonist”, “Parent-antagonist”, “Adolescent-antagonist”. When the very first action/fact reported belonged to one actor of conflict, he/she was considered the protagonist of conflict, while the other actor was labeled as the antagonist, and the vice-versa.

*Code Reliability Testing.* We used double-coding as a means of reliability testing (Miles and Huberman, 1994) meaning that two research assistants coded the same field data. As a result we calculated the inter-coder reliability which was 88 for the thematic categories in Romanian culture, 87 for the recoding of



Romanian themes of conflict according to Smetana's thematic categories of conflict (a priori codes), and 85 for the determination of antagonists/protagonists of conflict. Inter-coder reliability was calculated by the formulae:  $(\frac{\text{the number of total agreements between coders}}{\text{the total number of agreements}} + \frac{\text{The total number of disagreements}}{\text{The total number of disagreements}})$ .

*Data Summary and Identification of Initial Themes.* The stage involved reading, understanding, high-lightening pieces of information and summarizing the raw data, which, in fact, all these actually, being initially done when the researchers transcribed the audio-taped reports or when we checked the written notes made during reports. The stage involved two steps. *In the first place*, we organized the data according to the research questions from the semi-structured interview or according to the purpose of the research, in order to facilitate a better data management. *In the second place*, the research assistants continued the process of identification of initial themes, which started with the transcription, in a more focused and systematic manner. As a result of this phase we obtained inductive codes and preliminary item-related themes of P-A conflicts. In the process of coding, the two raters initially agreed to a number of 24 "thematic categories" (nodes), which they refined and reduced to a number of 14, and then to 12 categories. The two assistant researchers were teachers of Romanian, aged 31 and respectively 34, with more than 8 years of experience.

*Applying Template of Codes (and Additional Coding).* In this stage we used the templates of codes, described above, to disseminate the data in a deductive manner. At this point, we had no additional coding. The result was a preliminary coding of individual conflicts according to the codes in the templates.

*Connecting the Codes and Identifying the Thematic Categories.* The purpose of this stage was to cluster the resulting coding from the previous stage into higher-order thematic entities. Individual codes were correlated with each other and were organized by thematic content. At this point the research assistant had the task of agreeing on the *number* and *labels* of thematic categories. In case of inter-cultural comparison the whole thematic analysis was started over again and every single conflict item was recoded in order to fit the thematic categories from the research of Smetana (1989). From Smetana's research we selected the data reported by adolescents in early, middle and late adolescence, excluding the reports of preadolescents. The sole purpose of this maneuver was to equalize the age mean within the two samples of adolescents. Broadly, most thematic categories from our research found a partial equivalent in Smetana's thematic categories, though, some did not, such as: the "Parents' behavior" or the "Accidents" categories, in which most items were removed or recoded in the other thematic categories.

*Corroborating and Legitimizing Coded Thematic Categories.* The last step was meant to relate the data results to the interpretations and theoretical and

empirical findings in literature about conflict. The assistants attentively scrutinized the initial codes and the final thematic categories in order to make sure that the re-ordering process was correct. The whole procedure was a multi-step procedure and it implied an iterative process of reading, coding and recoding the data.

### *Quantitative analysis*

We used the quantitative method in several instances for example: to determine the sample characteristics based the standardized questionnaire, to count with which the conflict was, to find how frequent the themes occurred, to rate the frequency of the most intense conflicts or to figure out who the stimuli of conflict belonged to. For this we used the matrices in Nvivo, which perform quantitative analysis according to various criteria.

## **Findings**

### *Themes of P-A Conflict*

Research assistants' coding of P-A conflicts indicated a number of 507 conflicts, with an average of 1,27 conflicts per week, which were assigned to 12 categories. They are:

Table 1: *The thematic categories of P-A conflict*

<i>No.</i>	<i>Thematic categories</i>	<i>No. of frequencies</i>	<i>%</i>
1.	Control of personal activities	119	23,47
2.	School and education	113	22,29
3.	Chores and cleaning	62	12,23
4.	Parents' behavior	50	9,86
5.	Adolescent's social behavior	35	6,90
6.	Curfew	26	5,13
7.	Money and buying	26	5,13
8.	Interpersonal control	24	4,73
9.	Adolescent's personality	17	3,35
10.	Health and hygiene	15	2,96
11.	Clothing and appearance	12	2,37
12.	Accidents	8	1,58
	Total	507	100%

In order to test whether there are significant differences between these categories of conflict we performed the *Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit test*. The results indicated that Chi-Square test is significant:  $\chi^2(10) = 328.327, p < .000$ . We conclude that there are significant differences between the rank of the categories of P-A conflict.

### ***Description of Categories***

*Control of personal activities.* Adolescents did not agree with parents concerning the following issues: when to go to church, playing games on the mobile or computer, the selection of TV programs and the time spent watching. For example: “my mom was in the kitchen and I wanted to finish my game on my mobile phone and my mom sent me to answer to the phone as nobody was there. We had a fight because I did not want to leave the game and my mother got upset.” [male, 16] The boy considered that his activity was a matter of personal interest and he had the right to decide whether or not, and when to go. Another girl relates: “the food was served and everybody was in the kitchen and I didn’t show up. I was buttoning my mobile and watching a movie. However, I wasn’t hungry. Dad said to leave my phone and come to dinner. I didn’t want to and we quarreled” [female, 17].

*School and education:* Adolescents had conflicts about not preparing for school: “I had a fight with my mother about my learning style. She doesn’t allow me to waste my time playing outside or staying on the computer. She says that I do not learn well if I do something else first.” [female, 14]. Another girl aged 15 had a conflict about low grades at school or Olympics: “my mother asked to see my school report, and I pretended not to hear, so I didn’t get it” or “I failed to make the grade so my mother scorned me. Well, it’s not a big deal what happened, but it’s up to me what I do with my grades. I am a grown-up.” In this case, the mother who was much more responsible about her daughter’s education, had unmet expectations. Thus, she used her parental authority to communicate in a punishing voice that she was disappointed. The girl counter argued and reminded her mother that she was a mature person. Other themes include: skipping classes, not preparing for exams, not doing homework for the next day, refusing to learn or to do extra-work, playing instead of doing homework, making mistakes in homework, refusal to take part in national competitions. From this percentage 1,8% reported that they had conflicts with parents owing to the graduation examination in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade (baccalaureate) or owing to national examinations (“capacitate”) in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

*Chores and cleaning:* Conflicts arose because adolescents did not do chores or did not put their room in order, as expected by parents: “I came from school and I was tired so I threw my clothes over the room. I had a quarrel with my mom because it was my room and I decide what I do and when I do.” [male, 14] A recurrent motif in children’s reports was the urgency of performing the task demanded by parents. Usually, children fail, delay too much, forget, or simply refuse to help parents. Other themes of conflict include: putting clothes on hangers, messy rooms, thrown clothes, refusal to vacuum, not dumping the garbage, delaying to feed domestic birds, refusal to clean immediately, refusal to do the dishes.

*Parents' behavior:* Parents use a series of methods in order to manipulate children's thoughts and emotions, and by this they try to psychologically control their children (Barber and Harmon, 2002, p. 15). The parents initiate requests using counterproductive methods of conversation which lead to conflict. Thus, psychological aggression (4,86%) becomes the main theme of conflict: *"I am fed up with my parents' madness. They are always getting on my nerves because I don't do things right, and they know all this from my brothers."* [male, 15] or *"I was driving home with my mom in the passenger's seat when I remained stuck in the traffic jam and she started to shout and accuse me although I really had no other option. I don't like the way she speaks."* [male, 18] In another situation parents conflicted with adolescents because of their insisting requests (1%): *"...my dad found in the kitchen a beetle and he wanted to give it to me to keep it in my hand. I didn't want to but he kept forcing me and I got angry because of that."* [female, 17] or *"she asked me a lot of times if I smoked. I answered her tens of times that I don't but she kept asking me. She makes me mad with that."* [male, 18]. Finally, parents invaded their children's personal life (4%) in different ways: the parents listened to adolescents' phone conversations, they checked their daughter's purse or searched through children's personal belongings. The parents entered their room without knocking, remained too much in their room, opened their correspondence, the parents accessed their children's e-mail or checked their phone messages, searched their pockets or logged on their Facebook account. Usually, children felt very upset when such things happen, and they used superlatives (like *"incredible"* or *"shocking"*), they expressed amazement (*"I couldn't believe my eyes."*) or they exclaimed (*"How could he dare to do it?"*) in order to describe what they perceived to be a serious wrongdoing.

*Adolescent's social behavior:* The social behavior of adolescents refers to issues such as: teasing a drunkard, quarrel with siblings, neglecting younger siblings as a result of a transfer of parental responsibility from parents to adolescents, improperly talking to parents, improper tone with parents, contradicting parents, fight with siblings or school mates. For example: *"there on the street was a drunkard and I teased him, I was with some friends. I told him all kind of bad things and he got mad. My father found out, I don't know how, and we had a fight."* [male, 16] or *"my sister told my father about it and my dad said that I beat her and he punished me. The truth is that it was my fault."* [male, 17] In several situations, children acknowledged that they were wrong about their deeds but they related that their friends pushed them to do so, more as a proof of their bravery. They also felt momentary pleasure doing it, and they didn't think much of possible serious consequences. Actually they felt that it was more of fun than some sort of antisocial behavior.

*Curfew:* The parents and children had disagreements because of: leaving to school at a late hour, staying outside with friends too much, sleeping overnight at a friend's house and not coming home, disagreeing with parents' curfew. *"I woke*

*up a bit later and I was late for school. I ate and I couldn't decide what clothing to wear. When my mother saw me she said that I am always late and that's why I have school problems.*" [female, 14] Those who return late are rebuked and they receive the promised punishment or they are threatened that that was the last time when they were not punished. In most cases the adolescents knew well that it was their fault, they became less talkative to their parents and some answered back only if their parents insisted with argumentation or threatening.

*Money and buying:* Adolescents reported issues such as: "*I often quarrel because of money for food at school. They often tease me that I spend much money on junk food. It is my money and it's none of their business what I do with it.*" [female, 15] or "*One day my dad let me walk to the bus station and I was on high hills. He didn't give me enough money to call a taxi. He didn't want to, he said that I can deal with it by myself and I was really in a hurry because I was late.*" [female, 17] Other themes of conflict include: children asked for a larger amount of money, they wasted money on clothing, received too little money from parents, parents refused to give money for a concert, taxi or for dining out, parents refused to buy their children different things such as a dress, a dog, shoes or parents refused to give their children money immediately.

*Interpersonal control:* Adolescents reported that they had conflicts with parents about: meeting/choosing their girlfriend/boyfriend, parents' disagreement on child's meeting with a boyfriend/girlfriend, going to a friend's birthday, sleeping overnight at a friend's home, going out with friends, choosing to go with friends instead of going out with family, playing with friends outside, calling friends to come at home, inviting friends to come at home when parents are gone. For example: "*He didn't let me go to my friend. He said he should come to me. Until now I used to go to him but my dad didn't want to let me go. We had a fight and in the end I didn't go.*" [female, 17] "*He took my mobile in order not to talk to my girlfriend. I don't know why he doesn't like her, but it's none of his business what I do... He said I should not do what I do and if I don't obey I will stay the whole summer inside the house.*" [male, 18] Some parents are quite strong on their position when they forbid children to see with their opposite-sex friends. Some adolescents regretted sharing with their parents or being sincere towards them, and as a result this led to concealment.

*Adolescent's personality:* Adolescents reported issues such as: reading daily too much, being rude to parents, defending sister in front of parents, being a negative influence upon his sister, being a teaser with a drunkard on the street, not being attentive when talking, egocentrism by not letting his sister on computer. For example: "*I was speaking with my father and he accused me that I am not a good listener and I don't listen to him, but I told him I don't know what he is talking about. He accuses me I'm not interested in what he speaks and that I obey my mom, but in fact he also doesn't hear what I say. He doesn't like how I speak to him.*" [male, 16] or "*I use the computer when I want and my mom wants me to*

*let my sister on the computer too. She said that I am egocentric that I care only about me and that I should leave her some time on the computer too.”* [male, 14] The source of these conflict is parents’ negative comments with regard to adolescents’ personality traits.

*Health and hygiene:* The themes of conflict are: drinking alcohol, smoking or eating fast food. For example: *“She found my cigarettes in my purse and they rebuked me and I got angry because they also smoke and it’s my lungs and they had to explain to me because I can understand if they speak nicely.”* [female, 18] We recorded few such cases, as the Romanian laws forbid drinking alcohol or selling cigarettes to children under 18. Consequently, we speculate that some children might have avoided sharing with us such conflicts.

*Clothing and appearance:* Disagreement concerned child’s personal appearance, beard wearing, choosing a dress, too much time spent for dressing up, wearing inappropriate clothing for the weather, or walking without slippers at home. For example, *“I didn’t shave and my mother said I am too young to wear beard. My father wore beard when he was like me. He told me. But mom said that I look nice and I would better shave. I argued but finally I did what she said, although I didn’t want to.”* [male, 17]

*Accidents:* Conflict between parents and children arose because either parents or children were involved in some sorts of accidents. For example: *“...dad broke my mobile when he dropped it down.”* [female, 16] *“...by mistake my mom bleached my blouse when she washed it”* [female, 15] or *“I had an accident with my father’s car which made my parents become mad.”* [male, 18].

### ***Parents’ Gender and Conflict***

Adolescents indicated for about 95% of the total conflicts reported who the conflict was with. Based on the data we had, quantitative analysis using matrices in Nvivo showed that adolescents had more conflicts with mothers (51%) than with fathers (33%) while conflicts with both parents represented 16%. As a matter of fact, adolescents pronounced in their conversations the word “mother” or “mom” significantly more than the word “father” or “dad”.

### ***The Intensity and Frequency of P-A Conflict in Socio-Cognitive Domains***

As a result of rating the most intense three conflicts adolescents indicated the following (see *Table 2*):

Table 2. Percent regarding the intensity and the frequency of P-A conflicts in socio-cognitive domains according to adolescents' justifications.

	Moral	Conventional	Prudential	Friendship	Personal	Total
Intensity						
High	86	43	33	38	40	-
Medium	7	36	42	33	33	-
Low	7	21	25	29	27	-
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	-
Frequency of conflicts	3	21	18	4	54	100%

P-A conflict is the most intense in the moral domain followed by the conventional one. The computed scores show that the most intense conflicts are in the *socially regulated domain* (moral plus conventional), 64,5%, compared to the *personally regulated domain* (prudential, friendship and personal domains) represented by 37% of conflicts. The most frequent conflicts were in the personal domain followed by those in the conventional, prudential, friendship and finally in the moral domain (see Table 2).

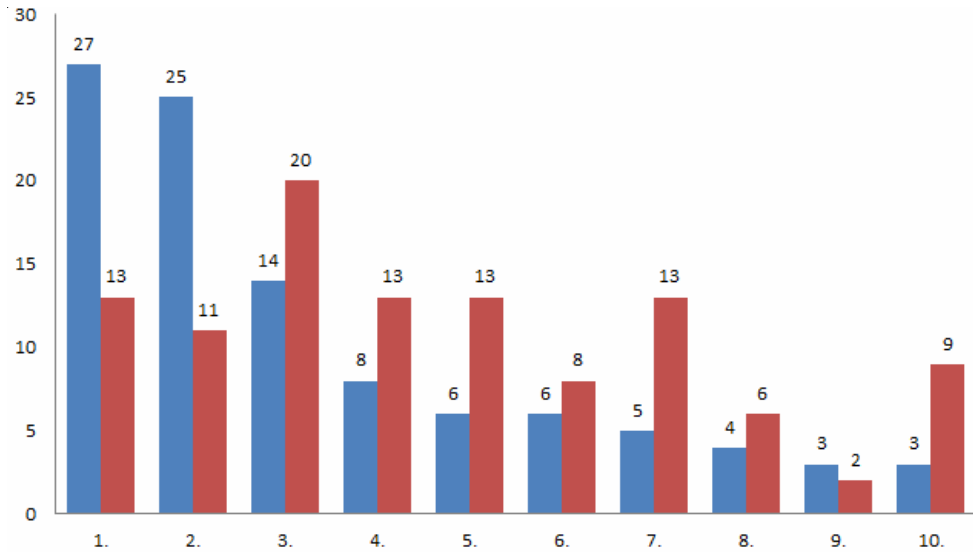
### ***Protagonists and Antagonists of Conflict***

Based on the information available from adolescents' reports we noticed that not all conflicts started from a stimulus belonging to adolescents. Parents' actions also triggered P-A conflicts. Conflict cannot exist but in the active presence of two related people. The theme of conflict refers to "*What the conflict was about?*" (Laursen and Collins, 1994), whereas the question "*Who performed the very first action which triggered a conflict?*" focuses on the protagonist of the conflict. In addition, interpersonal conflict involves divergent interpretations of events and their expression. The collected data indicated that 7,51% from all conflicts were triggered by parents' actions. For example: "*By mistake, my father dropped my mobile phone and broke it. We had a fight because of that.*" [female, 16], "*When my girlfriend phones and my parents are around and hear me speaking; they are always making fun of me. They do this even if I know I don't like it.*" [male, 17]. In the context in which conflicts were reported by adolescents, 92,49% of all conflicts were triggered by an action/stimulus belonging to them.

### ***Comparison between the Present Research and the Research of Smetana***

The recoding of our conflict items according to Smetana's research categories (1989) led to the following results (see Table 3).

Table 3: Thematic categories of P-A conflict coded according to the categories of Smetana (1989)



Note: in blue (present research), in red (Smetana, 1989)

1. Control of personal activities<sup>4</sup> [REGULATING ACTIVITIES]<sup>5</sup>
2. School and education [HOMEWORK/ACHIEVEMENT]
3. Chores and cleaning [CHORES]
4. Adolescent's social behavior [INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS]
5. Curfew [BEDTIME/CURFEW]
6. Money and buying [FINANCES/MONEY]
7. Interpersonal control [INTERPERSONAL REGULATION]
8. Adolescent's personality [BEHAVIORAL STYLE]
9. Health and hygiene [HEALTH AND HYGIENE]
10. Clothing and appearance [APPEARANCE]

## Discussion

The *aim* of this study was to investigate the thematic content of P-A conflict in Romanian culture from the perspective of dimensions such as: intensity, frequency, gender, conflict stimuli or socio-cognitive domains.

*Firstly*, it was found that adolescents' conflict is related to the adolescents' *development niche* (Harkness and Super, 1992) and their *macro-system* (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). *On the one hand*, conflict can be about anything as long as there is an interest in that particular issue on the part of the actors of conflict. For

<sup>4</sup> Labels of the thematic categories in our research

<sup>5</sup> Labels of the thematic categories in the research of Smetana (1989)



example, adolescents in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade reported conflicts about the national school evaluation (baccalaureate) which generally takes place at this age dedicated to preparing for the exam. This theme is transitory and age-specific meaning that it is less likely to be reported by some other age-groups, as it actually happened. A study investigating conflict between adult children ( $M_{age} = 64$ ) and older parents ( $M_{age} = 39$ ) showed that the themes of conflict changed with age. Unlike regular P-A conflicts, these referred to conflict themes such as child-rearing practices and values, politics, religion, ideology, work, household maintenance, communication or interaction style, habits or lifestyle (Clarke, Preston, Raksin and Bengtson, 1999). *On the other hand*, further recoding of categories indicated that the following categories scored *less* on frequency in the present research as compared with the study of Smetana: “adolescents’ social behavior” [Interpersonal relations<sup>6</sup>] – 38% less, “curfew” [Bedtime and curfew] – 54% less, and “interpersonal control” [Regulation of interpersonal activities] – 61% less. “Clothing and appearance” [Appearance] category was about thrice more frequent in American than in Romanian culture. In addition, “chores and cleaning” [Chores] category scored 30% less while “adolescent’s personality” [Personality/behavioral style] category scored 33% less in our research, too. Cultural particularities account for the variations in the frequency of P-A conflict. For example, the interviews on Afro-American families indicated that the daily chores or putting the bedroom in order were the hottest themes of conflict (Smetana, 2011). One third of conflicts were on these themes, while in case of European-American families conflict frequency scored 18% (Smetana, Daddis and Chuang, 2003). Another research (Özmete and Bayoglu, 2009) on young adults ( $M_{age} = 21$ ) found that “putting the room in order” was one of the main themes of conflict, while in Smetana’s research (1989) this theme generated the most conflicts.

*Secondly*, conflict can also arise from *irrational reasons*. The “accidents” category refers to conflicts which took place owing to one actor’s mistake, for example the father dropped the child’s phone and broke it. The very essence of these particular issues is that accidents were not done on purpose or intention on the part of the actor involved in conflict. Yet, in some cases, they are perceived as intentional acts or unintentional, yet the author of the action is guilty of clumsiness. Parents and adolescents endorse different beliefs concerning the cause of accidents and they make entirely different attributions. When the father broke child’s phone, for example, he explained that it simply happened, it was chance, but the child who was the owner of the phone, attributed it to her father’s poor skills in handling it, so it was his fault. This phenomenon can be explained by attribution biases. The more negative the attributions in P-A dyads become, the more dyadic conflict there is (Grace, Kelley and McCain, 1993).

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<sup>5</sup> The category labels in Smetana’s research (1989)

*Thirdly*, in the context of this research the most frequent conflicts fell in the category of “Parental control of personal activities” or “School and education”. A recoding of our thematic categories and a comparison with the thematic categories found in Smetana’s research (1989) indicates that these two categories are at least twice more frequent than their correspondents [id est, “Regulation of activities” and “Homework and academic achievement”] in American culture. As an ex-communist country where the regime used to be “omnipresent” and “omniscient” owing to its controlling system, most parents still manifest dysfunctional tendencies and behaviors reminiscent of those times, which they often project unto their children. Mănăstireanu writes with reference to Romania under Communism that people “*living in oppressive environments ... tend to be very protective of their loved ones and community members, but this legitimate desire to protect can easily lead to illegitimate control over the lives of others and, in the end, perpetual immaturity for those controlled. This actually replicates authoritarian reflexes, which presume that ordinary members of society cannot think for themselves and that this is why governing authorities have to make decisions for them.*” (Mănăstireanu, 2012, p. 54). Parents might show high levels of control towards their children owing to their deep level of mistrust in relation to the others learned under the Communist regime. *Furthermore*, a possible explanation for conflicts which fall into the “School and education” category is that in the last two school years The Ministry of Education decided to implement video cameras in order to prevent exam frauds. Consequently, the exam passing rates decreasing significantly to below 50%. This might have led parents to have higher expectations as compared with the previous years, when most teenagers passed the exam, and to intensify their efforts to discuss more with their children. Thus, they increased control pressure and associatively increased P-A conflict. In addition, the overdimensioned school curriculum and long school schedules might have put additional pressure on parents to control their children in order to make sure that their children will achieve a better school performance.

*Fourthly*, there is evidence (Sorkhabi, 2010) which shows that conflict can be triggered by *formal* (control, aggression...) as well as *content* (control of socio-cognitive domains) variables. Yet, with reference to the “parents’ behavior” category our research found strong evidence that, within the Romanian cultural context, formal-type variables such as “psychological aggression” or “insisting demands of parents upon adolescents” as well as content-type variables such as “intrusion into the personal jurisdiction of adolescent” lead to P-A conflict. In our research adolescents often reported cases of the following type: if parents demand in a high voice “*Go and put your room in order!*” some children perceive that parents talked to them badly. Although there is a theme of conflict implied by parents, their demanding style (formal variable) conveys a different message in the adolescents’ mind. The actual theme (putting the room in order) subsides and a new theme emerges from parents’ tone. Poor parental communication skills

account for this situation, but “*Learned techniques may result in an improvement of communication and in the prevention of conflicts*” (Cojocaru and Cojocaru, 2011, p. 217) if parents would attend parenting programs. Moreover, parents’ inappropriate behaviors towards adolescents, through which they violate their privacy, are perceived by adolescents as disrespectful, as intrusions into their personal intimacy, and a proof of disregard towards adolescents’ need for a personal domain. Parental control of the adolescent’s personal domain is associated with conflict.

*Finally*, the most intense conflicts were found in the moral *domain*, while the most frequent in the personal domain, results which confirm the findings in the international literature (see Smetana, 2011). However, the present qualitative research facilitated observations which indicated that a part of the conflict in the moral domain does not become manifest P-A conflict. This is because adolescents avoid confrontation and conversation with parents owing to the seriousness of the issues or owing to the fear of negative consequences, especially when parents’ style is authoritarian.

## Conclusion

*To sum up*, to our knowledge, this is *the first study* of this kind whose aim is to investigate the themes of P-A conflict in Romanian culture. Our research strengthened the idea that P-A conflict takes place about daily, mundane issues and it usually takes place in the family dwelling where children and parents meet most often. Conflict is inevitable and normal and it serves a certain function in the family system, and it is basically an expression of some unmet needs on the part of adolescents or parents. They feel entitled to demand more autonomy and a moderate conflict is considered by adolescents to be the royal way to claim it. *Moreover*, our conflict typology indicates that conflict is a dynamic phenomenon and the thematic content changes according to a series of variables such as *age*, *preoccupations* or *culture*.

One *limit* of our research is that the data was self-reported, which raises the question of data reliability. *In addition*, in determining the protagonist or antagonist of conflict, the data should be generalized with caution owing to the fact that we relied exclusively on adolescents’ indirect reports, and not on a direct question which could have indicated their *belief* about who was the first to do something to elicit conflict.

*All in all*, we investigated only families with married parents, who lived together with their children, but *future studies* could extend research to mono-parental families or divorced parents. Such studies could indicate variations in P-A conflict, as parenting resources are much more limited and P-A interaction has

specific particularities. Further research could also investigate *silent conflict* which refers to conflict which is “*neither verbal nor physical*” (Kielpikowski & Pryor, 2008, p. 217) and which is also part of the total variance of conflict between parents and children. Our research dealt only with manifest P-A conflict. At the same time, our study could significantly contribute to the developing of local parenting programs. The P-A relationship and communication need improving through an efficient and professional transfer of skills from experts to parents in order to make the intervention on the child permanent (Cojocaru, 2011).

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