

Université de Montréal

Parenting practices and psychological distress in adolescents

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Parental practices and psychological distress in adolescents

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RÉSUMÉ

Les recherches indiquent que les parents jouent un rôle de première importance dans le développement psychologique de leur adolescent. Cette étude examine la présence de liens entre les pratiques parentales et la détresse psychologique chez l'adolescent. Les pratiques parentales sont définies en termes de mesures disciplinaires, de proximité affective et de conflits. Les mesures disciplinaires sont divisées en trois composantes soit, les limites permises, la supervision et les conséquences faisant suite à un comportement non acceptable. Des hypothèses fondées sur des variables telles que la démographie et la détresse psychologique parentale sont incluses dans le modèle. Les données ont été recueillies à partir des résultats de questionnaires administrés à un groupe de 334 étudiants francophones de 5^{ième} secondaire. Les données ont été analysées à l'aide d'un modèle d'équation structurale, et ce, tant pour le groupe en entier que pour les filles et les garçons séparément. Les conflits parentaux sont relevés comme étant le prédicteur le plus significatif de la détresse psychologique tant chez les filles que chez les garçons. On remarque que l'absence de proximité avec le père est le second indicateur menant à la détresse psychologique chez les filles. Les variables démographiques ainsi que la structure familiale influencent le type de pratiques disciplinaires. Toutefois, dans le présent modèle, aucun type de pratiques disciplinaires n'a pu être lié comme menant à la détresse psychologique. Les résultats de cette recherche suggèrent que les liens affectifs entre l'adolescent et ses parents ont une plus grande importance que les pratiques disciplinaires,

dans la prédictibilité de la détresse psychologique chez l'adolescent. Cette étude propose quelques pistes pouvant guider les interventions familiales dans les cas de détresse psychologique chez l'adolescent.

Mots clés: rapprochement aux parents, conflits avec les parents, limites permises, supervision, punitions, modèle d'équation structurale

ABSTRACT

Research indicates that parents play an important role in the psychological development of adolescents. This study investigates significant pathways between parental practices and measures of psychological distress in adolescents using structural equation modeling (SEM). Parental practices are defined in terms of discipline, closeness and conflict. Disciplinary practices are divided into three components: limits, supervision and consequences for misbehavior. Hypotheses based on demographic, parental and psychological distress variables are incorporated into a structural model. Data were gathered from 334 French-speaking Grade 11 students through a battery of group-administered questionnaires. Data were analyzed using SEM for the whole sample as well as for girls and boys separately. Parental conflict was the most consistent significant pathway to psychological distress for both genders. For girls, a lack of closeness to the father was a second direct pathway to psychological distress. Demographic and parental relationship variables influenced the form of parental disciplinary practices; however, none of the disciplinary practices were found to lead to psychological distress in the model. These findings suggest that relationships between adolescents and their parents are more important in predicting psychological distress than are parental disciplinary practices. Implications of this study relate to family interventions in the case of adolescent psychological distress.

Key words: closeness to parents, conflict with parents, limits, supervision, punishment, structural equation modeling

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT OF THE PRESENT RESEARCH

1.1 Introduction

Many authors have stressed the importance of parental relationships throughout the life cycle as the building blocks of future success in terms of relationships, psychological well-being, and career orientation (e.g. Adams & Gullotta, 1989; Noller & Callan, 1991; Steinberg & Darling, 1994). This study explores particular aspects of the parent-adolescent relationship. The general purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between behavioral and emotional factors of parental practices and psychological distress among adolescents.

The research design used in this study enabled a simultaneous exploration of the emotional impact of closeness and conflict in the parent-child relationship as well as that of parental discipline practices on psychological distress within the framework of a structural model. This research had two main goals: first, to develop a theoretically sound directional model to help explain the impact of parenting practices on psychological distress; second, to test the theoretical model against empirical data gathered from adolescents. The ultimate purpose of this research was to expand the understanding of the contribution of parental factors in adolescent psychological distress such that it would be useful in the development

of prevention and intervention techniques for families coping with psychologically distressed adolescents.

The first chapter begins with a survey of the literature on parent-adolescent relationships, the impact of different parenting styles on children, the importance of closeness within the family, and findings regarding adolescent psychological distress, particularly in relation to gender and parental divorce. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the hypotheses that guided the construction of a theoretical model.

The second chapter addresses the research methodology. Specifically, the subjects, the assessment instruments, and the procedures for data collection and analysis are presented and discussed.

Through text, tables, and diagrams, the third chapter presents the results of the correlational analyses and the analyses of the structural model. Structural models were tested for the whole sample, as well as for males and females separately.

The fourth and final chapter is an interpretation and discussion of the results. Implications and recommendations for families in distress are presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the present study and future directions for research in this field.

1.2 Theoretical context

Adolescence, from the Latin *adolescere* meaning to grow into maturity, is a period viewed as a time of preparation for adulthood (Crockett & Crouter, 1995). This stage of the life cycle is differentiated from childhood by the youth's physical maturation, emotional and cognitive development of a more sophisticated understanding of social roles and relationships, and acquisition and refinement of the skills needed for successfully performing adult work and family roles.

The following sections address three issues related to adolescents within a family context. First is an examination of the theories that have guided our understanding of the parent-child relationship during adolescence, the way in which these have evolved, and the theoretical framework that has been adopted in this current research. Second, the impact of family relationships on the development of the adolescent is discussed. The third section is an overview of previous research findings related to psychological adjustment and distress in adolescents.

1.2.1 Theories on the changing nature of the parent-child relationship at adolescence

Many psychodynamically-oriented theorists have written about the changing nature of the parent-child relationship that occurs during the period of adolescence. Over the decades, these theories have evolved from an extreme

view of the teenage years as a period of storm and stress to a newer perspective of adolescence as a time to experience individuation. More recent theories describe adolescence as a time for the development of those capacities that allow for the individual to have access to adult maturity, in the forms of autonomy, identity and sexuality, for example. This transition towards adult maturity is seen as closely linked to the individual's personal history of interpersonal relationships since childhood – relationships that would ideally be maintained throughout the transitional period (Steinberg, 1990). The evolution of these theories follows.

According to the original psychodynamic models, the main task during adolescence involves the development of personal identity and autonomy from parents. For example, Erikson (1968) wrote that the adolescent's main psychological issue is that of identity versus role confusion. If adolescents do not succeed in defining and perceiving themselves as unique individuals during this period, they may become confused about their identity and will be unsure of their direction in life.

Other psychodynamic theorists, such as Anna Freud (1958), have defined adolescence as a period of rebellion, hypothesized to be triggered by the physiological changes at puberty, resulting in conflictual relations involving feelings of detachment. Adolescents are viewed as regressing during this period, being driven by their libidos, and as becoming difficult and unpredictable people who may react in oppositional ways. According to this approach, oppositional

behaviors are seen as a natural and essential part of adolescent development, and frequent periods of conflict are seen as an unavoidable and healthy progression towards growth (Steinberg, 1990).

The analytically-oriented author Blos (1979), whose ideas have long prevailed in the area of adolescent theory and research, viewed adolescence from a more moderate perspective than Anna Freud and her colleagues. As opposed to previous theories of storm and stress associated with a detachment from the parents, Blos theorized that adolescent development was a process that involved separation and individuation. In fact, the separation-individuation process according to Blos could be accomplished through mainly cognitive rather than behavioral means, such as acting out, when adolescents would perceive themselves as psychologically distinct from their parents.

More recently, there has been a shift away from the analytical and neoanalytical perspectives of detachment, distance and individuation, and a progressive movement towards empiricism. Empirical research done with non-clinical populations has, in fact, questioned the existence of parent-adolescent relationships dominated by conflict and separation. A number of studies have examined whether parent-adolescent conflict is necessary and inevitable for growth (Collins & Russell, 1991; Galambos & Almeida, 1992; Rutter, et al. 1976; Steinberg, 1990; Offer & Schonert-Reichl, 1992.) These studies confirmed that there were significant changes in the parent-child relationship as the child entered

adolescence; however, they did not find any overwhelming presence of separation or conflict among well-adjusted subjects.

Larson and his colleagues (1996) used the term 'disengagement' to reflect the changing nature of the adolescent-parent relationship. In their four year cross-sequential study of over 200 children from grades 5 to 12, they found that adolescents spent progressively less time with their families. The researchers had participating students fill out a checklist when they were paged at random times during the day, and found that their sample of Grade 5 students spent 35% of their waking hours with family, whereas the Grade 12 students spent less than half this time with family (14%). Although the actual contact time was less, hence the term 'disengagement,' the time spent with family became more concentrated in certain areas such as one-on-one communication with parents, thereby maintaining a certain continuity to the relationship that may have existed prior to adolescence. The finding that the older adolescents spent less time with their families did not appear to be influenced by factors relating to family relationships, closeness with the parents, or to the subjects' own internal emotions. Despite the disengagement between parents and adolescents, close emotional bonds and communication remained part of the relationships (Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck & Duckett, 1996).

In contrast to the analytical approach, it has in fact been suggested that adolescents best develop their autonomy while still maintaining their emotional

bond to their parents (Cooper, Grotevant & Condon, 1984; Larson et al. 1996; Steinberg, 1990). According to this approach, adolescents are best able to explore their identity within a familial context where autonomy and independence are encouraged within an environment of parental support, interdependence and closeness (Noller & Callan, 1991). Adolescents seem best able to become well-adjusted individuals and to explore their identity when they and their parents cooperate in redefining their relationship as one of equality and mutuality (Cooper, Grotevant & Condon, 1984). As summarized by Noller and Callan (1991, p.18), "It is the balance between closeness in the family and the encouragement of individuality and autonomy that becomes the crucial factor" in the psychological adjustment of adolescents.

Although conflict leads to tension and stress within relationships, the conflict experienced by the families in the above-mentioned studies was reported to be minor by both the adolescents and their parents. The majority of adolescents reported having a positive relationship with their parents with few serious conflicts (Steinberg, 1990). Not only has conflict been seen as unnecessary towards developing autonomy, but also recent studies have suggested that serious conflict within a family was associated with negative outcomes such as delinquent behavior and depression (Allen, Hausser, O'Connor, Bell & Eickholt, 1996; Steinberg, 1990). In their study of hostile family conflict, Allen and colleagues (1996) found that the majority of adolescents they studied developed a sense of autonomy regardless of the presence of hostile conflict.

Those adolescents from conflictual families developed their autonomy by undermining or withdrawing from the relationship, whereas those from more harmonious families developed their autonomy while still maintaining the relationship.

The present research project has been developed with a focus on this latter perspective – that the period of adolescence is a time for developing a sense of autonomy, responsibility and individuality, within the context of a connection and closeness with the parent. This perspective implies that parents play an important role in encouraging their children towards adulthood through their parenting behaviors as well as through the relationship they have established with their adolescent, as elaborated in the following section.

1.2.2 The role of family relationships in adolescent development

Family relationships have a significant impact on the success with which adolescents negotiate major developmental tasks, the extent to which they become involved in problem behaviors, and their ability to establish meaningful, close relationships (Noller & Callan, 1991; Steinberg, 1990).

Within the family environment, Noller and Callan (1991) have identified five factors that research has shown to be particularly important in the adolescent's development. These factors may act in a protective way, helping the

adolescent grow into a mature, well-adjusted adult. If the factors are absent or present to an extreme, they may constitute risk factors leading towards maladjustment (Noller & Callan, 1991). Their factors are:

1. the encouragement of autonomy and independence
2. the degree of control exerted by the parents
3. the amount of conflict among family members
4. the closeness of family bonds
5. the love and support available to the adolescent

All of the above factors, determined by Noller and Callan (1991), have been used to guide the present research. This thesis has attempted to operationally define and measure parental practices through closeness, conflict, and disciplinary practices.

1.2.2.1 Closeness within the family

In this dissertation, the three main elements of parental practice involve (1) closeness between parent and child, (2) conflict in the parent-adolescent relationship, and (3) parental disciplinary practices. This first element is now explored in more detail.

It has been suggested that levels of closeness within the family do not remain stable throughout the development of a child. Generally, families are closest in the early stages of the life of their children, and the closeness

diminishes as the child ages, up to the time of adolescence (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen & Wilson, 1983). Noller and Callan (1986) studied measures of the perceptions of closeness between parents and their adolescent children (aged 13-17 years). The authors administered a family adaptability and cohesion scale to both parents and adolescents from 281 intact families and found that parents reported higher levels of cohesion than did their adolescents; however both groups agreed that cohesion was lower than it had been when the youths were younger. Exploring these findings further, the authors discovered that both the adolescents and their parents reported that they would like to have a closer and more supportive relationship with each other, although parents wished the relationship to be closer than did their children. At the same time, adolescents also expressed a wish for changes in the power structure and roles within the family (Noller & Callan, 1986).

In subsequent articles, the authors discussed the differences in perceptions between adolescents and their parents (Callan & Noller, 1986; Noller & Callan, 1988). The authors noted that parents might have tended to overestimate the socially desirable characteristics of their family so as to place themselves in a better light. In the same vein, adolescents might have tended to overestimate the negative characteristics of their relationships with their families, given their desire for autonomy from their families. This desire for autonomy might have led them to adopt what they saw as a more objective view of their family. Another

possibility is that it could have been a representation of their dissatisfaction with the family roles and power structure within the family (Callan & Noller, 1986).

In order to study the accuracy of the different perceptions in more detail, the authors videotaped interactions between two parents and their adolescent, and had all three participants rate the videotape on measures of anxiety, dominance, involvement and friendliness. This videotape was also given to another participating family and to a trained observer for their ratings on the same measures. The broad conclusions of the study were that (1) when rating one's own family, subjects had more positive ratings than the outsiders and (2) when rating one's self, the ratings tended to be more strongly correlated with the outside raters than when one rated another family member from within the same family. These results suggest that although adolescents generally rate their families less positively than parents, both groups generally rate their families more positively than would an outsider.

More recently, Helsen, Vollenberg and Meeus (2000) studied a national sample of 2918 Dutch youths between the ages of 12 and 24 years. They reported a decline in parental support and an increase in the support from friends as their subjects aged. Helsen and colleagues found a link between low parental support and emotional problems in their adolescent subjects. Although the importance of parental support on emotional problems declined with increasing age, it remained a significant factor at every age studied. The researchers also found gender

differences in that parental support was found to be more important for girls than for boys when predicting emotional problems.

Whereas the levels of closeness may diminish as the child enters into the period of adolescence, this does not entail a severing of these parent-child bonds (Noller, 1994; Steinberg, 1990; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). The relationship between parents and adolescents takes on a different character in that parents tend to exercise less unilateral authority, and tend to develop an interdependent relationship with their adolescent (Youniss & Smollar, 1985; Youniss, 1988).

Studies have suggested that it is important for parents to attempt to maintain a certain degree of closeness with their adolescents. In their research, Ryan and Lynch (1989) concluded that adolescents were able to develop emotional autonomy within a framework of parental support and acceptance, whereas adolescents who were more detached from their parents felt more insecure. The findings from Cooper's (1994) research concurred when she found that individuation in adolescence was closely linked with parental attachment. Cooper emphasized the importance of maintaining parental bonds. She suggested that adolescents build their identity in large part through the interactions they have with their parents, which would explain the necessity of maintaining these relationships (Noller & Callan, 1988).

When assessing closeness between parents and adolescents, other variables, such as family structure, are important to consider. McKeown and his colleagues (1997) addressed this issue in their study on cohesion, family structure, and depressive symptoms with over 3000 American young adolescents. They followed their sample of boys and girls who were African American or Caucasian over a period of two years. In sum, the researchers found that the level of depressive symptoms was greatest in those adolescents who perceived lower levels of emotional bonding or family cohesion, regardless of their family structure. This study supports the importance of creating and maintaining close relationships between adolescents and parents, regardless of the marital status of the parents.

Other studies have also shown the presence of parent-adolescent bonds to lead to better interpersonal abilities (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986) and psychological well-being (Rice, 1990). There is much evidence to suggest that the level of closeness between parents and adolescents, along with the type of discipline offered in the home affects various aspects of the youth's psychological adjustment and well-being in many spheres of his or her life. When the family is perceived as cohesive and members are able to express their feelings openly, members of the family report higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of anxiety and depression (Burt, Cohen & Bjorck, 1988).

In their chapter on family support, psychological distress and behavior problems, Barrera and Li (1996) examined seven studies on parent-adolescent relationships. The authors highlighted the importance of parental support and the detrimental effects of parental negligence. Based on these studies, they concluded that parental structures are vital in developing a well-adjusted individual. Weak family support is related to internalizing symptoms such as depression, global measures of psychological distress, and low self-esteem, as well as to externalizing symptoms such as conduct problems, tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug usage.

Overall, research consistently suggests that positive parental support and closeness have beneficial effects on many psychological aspects of child and adolescent development, regardless of family structure and ethnic and socioeconomic background (Barrera & Li, 1996; Barber, 1992; Liddle, Rowe, Diamond, Sessa, Schmidt & Ettinger, 2000; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; McKeown et al., 1997; Rohner, 1986).

1.2.2.2 Conflict within the family

As discussed previously in this chapter, psychodynamic theories of adolescence have assumed that conflict is a natural part of the parent-child relationship as the child enters puberty. This notion has been called into question by a number of empirical research findings. With a sample of 80 families over a period of two years, Galambos and Almeida (1992) studied whether parent-child

conflict increases as children enter adolescence. The children began the study in Grade 6 (mean age=11.6 years) and were examined on four occasions until Grade 8. The researchers found that rates of conflict varied depending on the specific domain studied. For the five domains studied by the authors, they found that conflict regarding finances increased, conflict related to substance use remained relatively constant, and conflict regarding household chores, appearance and politeness decreased. The authors found no major differences between conflict rates depending on the sex of the child or of the parent. The authors concluded that overall levels of conflict do not necessarily increase as the child enters adolescence, rather the domains in which the conflict is centered changes.

In contrast to Galambos and Almeida's findings, Gehring and colleagues previously (1990) studied conflict during adolescence and found overall increased rates of parent-adolescent conflict as the adolescent aged, especially in relation to autonomy. Subjects in this cross-sectional study of over 300 adolescents came from one of three age groups: early (mean age=11.5 years), middle (mean age=16.3 years) and late adolescence (mean age=18.7 years). Similarly to Galambos and Almeida (1992), the authors of this study found that the domains of conflict varied depending on age. In contrast, however, they found that rates of conflict increased with increasing age of the adolescent. It is noted that Gehring et al.'s (1990) study spanned a wider age range, and therefore the results of the two studies may be complementary. Taken together, it may be concluded that overall levels of conflict do not necessarily increase as the child enters

adolescence, but rather that as the child progresses through the period of adolescence, changes exist in the nature of the conflict and in the quantity, particularly in the later years.

As discussed above, minor conflicts between parents and their adolescent children have often been seen as inevitable as both parties attempt to redefine their relationship, and especially as the adolescent seeks more autonomy. Recent research has also investigated the impact of more serious parent-adolescent conflict. These studies have suggested that conflict is neither inevitable nor desirable (Smetana, 2000). In the case of serious conflict, the parent-adolescent relationship may find itself in jeopardy and the adolescent may experience internalizing and externalizing problem behavior, as discussed in the text that follows.

In their recent study of 284 low-income adolescents aged 10-16 years, Formoso and her colleagues (2000) investigated the relationship between family conflict and internalizing and externalizing behaviors, using self-report questionnaires. The researchers discovered that family conflict was positively related to depression and conduct problems in boys and girls. These findings concur with previous studies on the topic of parent-adolescent conflict, which pointed to its relation to depression, anxiety and low self-esteem, as well as to conduct problems, aggression and antisocial behavior (e.g. Barrera, Chassin & Rogosh, 1993; Jenkins & Smith, 1991).

The relationship between conflict and psychological well-being is a topic of interest not only in North America. Shek (1998) investigated parent-adolescent conflict in China with a sample of 378 youth aged 12 to 16 years. In his longitudinal study, parents and their children both completed a battery of questionnaires once and then a year later. Based on his results, Shek found that the relationship between parent-adolescent conflict and the adolescent's psychological well-being was bi-directional. That is to say that the study supported the concept of reciprocity - that the quality of the relationship and the individual psychological factors had an effect one on the other.

In addition, the study investigated differences between gender of both adolescents and parents. The author found little difference between the boys and girls; however, he did find that father-adolescent conflict had a greater impact than mother-adolescent conflict on the psychological well-being of the adolescents (Shek, 1998). The author highlighted the specificity of the cultural influence and stated that in Chinese culture parental conflict is strongly discouraged in contrast to the more open relationships experienced in the North American culture.

There appears to be little doubt in the literature that parental conflict and psychological distress are related. Small differences have been found between boys and girls on this topic, but the relationship between the two measures exists in both sexes. The relative importance of conflict within a family remains to be

determined when examined in relation to other factors such as closeness and parental discipline. These factors are empirically examined in this dissertation.

1.2.2.3 Parental control and discipline

The third aspect of parental practice to be discussed is parental discipline. As presented in the methodology section (Chapter 2) in more detail, the present research investigated parental discipline in terms of parents' punitive behavior, their supervision of their child, and their establishment of limits. Discussed in this section are studies that have investigated the impact of various parental styles on behavioral and psychological outcomes of children.

Research on parental disciplinary practices has generally indicated that parenting behavior and child outcomes have a U-shaped relationship. That is to say that very weak disciplinary practices, such as permissiveness and lack of structure, are related to negative psychological effects; and that very strong parental disciplinary practices, such as corporal punishment and stringent limits, are more likely to be related to behavioral difficulties in children. Parents with moderate disciplinary practices seem to have children with the best behavioral and psychological outcomes (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). In this section, definitions of these practices in terms of observable behavior are described, in addition to specific difficulties associated with certain parenting behaviors.

Current research into parenting practices often focuses on the three parental styles of permissive, authoritarian and authoritative approaches, researched initially by Baumrind (1967). Authoritarian or coercive parenting is defined as being at the strict end of the spectrum, whereas permissive parenting lies at the other end. In the middle is authoritative or inductive parenting which is characterized by a balance between the two extremes (Baumrind, 1967, 1991; Adams & Gullotta, 1989; Noller & Callan, 1991). A number of recent studies confirm the general findings that adolescents with parents who adopt an authoritative and inductive approach, who are neither too permissive nor restrictive, tend to rate more positively on many measures including those of psychological adjustment and distress (Canetti, Bachar, Galili-Weisstub, Kaplan De-Nour, et al., 1997; Colder, Lochman & Wells, 1997; Glasgow, Dornbusch, Troyer, Steinberg, et al., 1997; Janssens & Dekovic, 1997; Peiser & Heaven, 1996; Peterson, Smirles & Wentworth, 1997). Each of these three parenting styles and their effects on children are discussed in more detail in the text that follows.

First, parents who tend to adopt a coercive style are defined as authoritarian and punitive in their relationships with their children. There is little room in the relationship for compromise or discussion. Research has shown that adolescents with coercive parents tend to adopt external moral standards, have lower self-esteem and self-confidence, have difficulty using their own judgment

which can lead to behavioral concerns (Feldman & Rosenthal, 1994; Noller & Callan, 1991; Steinberg & Darling, 1994).

Along the same lines, Amoroso and Ware (1986) previously suggested that the degree of punishment and perceived parental control (i.e. perceived by the adolescent) seems to affect self-esteem and may generate hostility in the adolescent when parents are too controlling or punitive. The authors found that close supervision and other manifestations of strict parental control tended to provoke negative attitudes in youth. In sum, parents who are punitive in their parenting style tend to have children with negative behavioral and psychological outcomes.

Second, parents who are permissive in their discipline styles tend to allow their children or adolescents to engage in any behaviors with little restriction. Permissive parents rarely punish their children, are tolerant of a variety of behaviors and attitudes, and may not supervise their children's activities as closely as non-permissive parents. Children of permissive parents have been found to be more dependent and demanding, and have been observed to have more temper tantrums than children with non-permissive parents (Baumrind, 1991). Research has suggested that adolescents of permissive parents tend to experience more psychological distress, have a less positive perception of themselves, and tend to feel less competent about their abilities in general. Adolescents of permissive parents also tend to exhibit more behavior problems

(Steinberg & Darling, 1994). A lack of parental supervision may lead to a decreased performance in school (Dornbush & Wood, 1989), an increase in delinquent behavior (Leblanc & Tremblay, 1988; Dornbush & Ritter, 1991) and illicit drug usage (Loeber & Dishion, 1983).

Researchers agree that parents who are inductive and authoritative tend to have children who are better adjusted than do those parents who adopt either restrictive or permissive parenting styles. Parents who are authoritative are defined as offering both a high amount of control along with a high level of warmth. This is in contrast to coercive or authoritarian parents who have a high control and low warmth or to permissive parents who provide little control but much warmth (Baumrind, 1967). Adolescents of authoritative parents have been found to have higher self-esteem, a more positive self-image, and better school achievement. These adolescents also tend to possess a more internalized moral code, which means that they are more capable of making their own decisions, rather than being overly influenced by peers. (Noller & Callan, 1991; Steinberg, 1990).

In relation to differences in parenting behaviors across cultures, Jambunathan, Burts and Pierce (2000) found that North American parents tended to adopt more liberal views of child rearing than their counterparts in other countries, such as those in Asia and Africa. Additionally, Taylor and colleagues (1990) suggested that parents who immigrate to a new country tend to adopt a

stricter approach to parenting. Immigrants generally seek to fit into their host culture and do not want their children to stand out from the others by getting into trouble. These parents therefore may adopt a more authoritarian approach to encourage their children to conduct themselves in a proper manner (Taylor, Chatters, Tucker & Lewis, 1990).

Although parental practices vary across cultures and social groups, Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn and Dornbusch (1991) found that the effects of these practices were relatively consistent across different ethnic and socioeconomic groups. That is to say that the effects of parenting behavior are consistent regardless of the family background.

Just as adolescents are growing and developing in many spheres, several aspects of parental authority have been found to evolve during this period (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). One aspect is that parental authority tends to be restricted to certain areas of the adolescent's life, rather than being applied universally to their whole life as it may have been in childhood. A second aspect is that adolescents perceive that they can participate in cooperative decision making with their parents. In their research, Youniss and Smollar (1985) found parents of adolescents to be less restrictive over time, allowing increasingly more freedom to their adolescents as they aged. Despite overall measures of increased freedom, parents continued to maintain higher levels of authority when it came to specific issues, such as school performance. Regardless of the issue, parents

tended to be more willing to listen to their adolescents and to take their opinions into account now that their children were older. These findings highlight the evolution in the parent-child relationship that occurs during the period of adolescence. The findings also lend support to the notion of parent-adolescent relationships as a distinct field of study – different from parental relationships at other stages of human development.

It has been found that the nature of parental discipline tends to vary according to family structure and sex of the child. With respect to structure, literature in the past suggested that in the first few years following a parental separation or divorce, children experienced less parental control and consistency in the home. The family tended to stabilize as its members adjusted to the new structure and new family dynamics (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1978). Along the same line, in their research a decade later, Dornbusch and colleagues (1987) found that single parents were generally more permissive in the behaviors in which they allowed their children to engage. Astone and McLanahan (1991) also suggested that single parents were less likely to monitor their teenaged children's behavior than were married parents.

With respect to gender, Hill and Lynch (1983) have suggested that parents exert more protective behaviors, such as more chaperoning, increased parental vigilance, and less permissiveness towards their daughters than towards their sons. One possible explanation for this difference is that adolescent girls have an

earlier physical maturity that could lead parents to supervise them more closely. On the other hand, the difference could be due to learned parenting behaviors that traditionally encouraged different qualities in daughters and sons (Berk, 2000). The differences in parenting behaviors towards the sexes are less marked than several decades ago (Rheingold & Cook, 1975); however, recent research indicates that there are still elements of this so-called “double standard” today (Ruble and Martin, 1998).

In conclusion, theorists agree that families should provide their members with moderate levels of cohesion, closeness and connectedness, as well as moderate levels of flexibility with respect to roles and rules. Conflict is not necessarily inevitable, and serious conflict between parents and their adolescents is correlated with negative behavioral and psychological outcomes. Adolescents with warm, firm and democratic parents tend to be better adjusted and more competent than those with controlling or permissive parents. Adolescents tend to react negatively to parents who try to control too much. On the other hand, supervision seems to be important to their well being and minimizes their chances of becoming involved in problem behavior (Noller and Callan, 1991; Steinberg & Darling, 1994). As well, parenting behaviors tend to vary according to the age and sex of the adolescent, as well as according to the family structure in the home.

1.2.3 Psychological distress among adolescents

This section discusses four main issues related to psychological adjustment and psychological distress in adolescents. First, literature linking parental relationships with psychological well-being in adolescents is presented. The second issue addressed is the relationship between gender and depression. Third, the influence of socioeconomic status on family relations and psychological factors is discussed. Finally, the impact of parental divorce on psychological adjustment is addressed.

As has been elaborated earlier in this chapter, adolescence is a period of change both physically, socially and psychologically. This change may place adolescents at greater risk for both problem behavior and emotional distress (Hendry, Shucksmith, Love & Glendinning, 1993). This thesis is limited in scope to the aspect of emotional or psychological distress, and will not overtly address problem behavior. In this section, the broader issue of psychological distress in adolescents is presented, followed by the specific issues related to psychological distress in relation to parental relationships, gender, family structure and socio-economic status.

Psychological distress may be defined as a broad category of interiorizing symptoms like depression and anxiety. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual – Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) contains a number of disorders that fall into the broad categories of depression or anxiety.

The diagnoses of two such disorders are presented here in order to provide an example of the types of symptomatology associated with psychological distress. The DSM-IV defines Major Depressive Disorder along three main symptom groups: mood, cognitive and physical. Individuals experiencing Major Depression are likely to have an abnormally depressed mood, a loss of interest and pleasure, and irritability. Cognitive symptoms may involve abnormal feelings of self-reproach and guilt, poor concentration and/or indecisiveness, and morbid thoughts of death and/or suicide. Physical symptoms include a disturbance in appetite and/or in sleep, feelings of fatigue and a loss of energy, and a sense of either agitation or lethargy. The DSM-IV defines Generalized Anxiety Disorder as excessive and uncontrollable anxiety and worry about a number of events or activities. Associated symptoms may include restlessness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension, and sleep disturbance. In both of these disorders, the symptoms cause significant amounts of distress or impairment in the individual's ability to function socially, or in their school and work. In general, symptoms of depressed affect and feelings of anxiety, irritability and/or cognitive disturbances are present in the majority of depression and anxiety disorders.

Scientific literature has consistently suggested that there is an increase in negative emotions between late childhood and late adolescence. A number of explanations have been offered, ranging from biochemical to cognitive to psychosocial causes (Barrera & Li, 1996; Brooks-Gunn & Reiter, 1990; Liddle,

Rowe, Diamond, Sessa, Schmidt & Ettinger, 2000; Millstein & Litt, 1990). The increase in these symptoms in girls has particularly been studied, given the higher rates of depression in adolescent and adult females (Scaramella, Conger & Simons, 1999).

Liddle and his colleagues (2000) elaborated on the effects of adolescent cognitive development on emotional expression. The authors hypothesized that newly developed cognitive abilities would affect adolescents' interpretations of events as well as their personal expressions of emotion. Adolescents would be better equipped to consider many variables concurrently, and would also be better able to consider their own emotions with respect to their environment. This increased understanding of the inner and outer worlds could lead to an increased sensitivity and reactivity towards family and peer relationships (Liddle, Rowe, Diamond, Sessa, Schmidt & Ettinger, 2000).

Psychosocial causes for psychological distress alluded to previously in this chapter relate particularly to parental relationships and family structure. Each of these specific issues is discussed in more detail in the following section. Other psychosocial causes for depression that have been studied are socio-economic status (Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1997) and relationships with the peer group (Allen, Moore, Kuperminc & Bell, 1998; Gauze, Bukowski, Aquan-Assee & Sippola, 1996). Other authors have emphasized the importance of family

relationships over those of peers (e.g. Liddle, et al. 2000). This thesis is limited in scope to family and economic variables related to psychological distress.

1.2.3.1 Psychological distress and parental relationships

As discussed in the previous section, there are several aspects related to parental practices that are important in the adolescent's development as a well-adjusted individual. First, when parents cooperate with their adolescents in redefining their relationship as one of equality and mutuality, the adolescents tend to be more well-adjusted and are more able to explore their identity (Cooper, Grotevant & Condon, 1984). Second, with respect to discipline, adolescents with authoritative parents tend to have high self-esteem, a positive self-image, a more internalized moral code, and are better able to make their own decisions (Noller & Callan, 1991; Steinberg, 1990). Third, with respect to closeness, it has been found that the presence of parent-adolescent bonds leads to better psychological well-being (Rice, 1990).

Another study relevant to this topic was done by Scaramella and her colleagues (1999), who studied the protective factors that parenting could play on both internalizing and externalizing problems. Their five-year longitudinal study investigated over 300 families on an annual basis using interviews, questionnaires, and systematic observation of family interaction tasks. All families included in the study were composed of two parents and an adolescent who was in Grade 7 at the beginning of the study. Internalizing symptoms within

the context of their study involved self-reported measures of depression and anxiety (Scaramella, Conger & Simons, 1999).

With respect to internalizing symptoms, the results of Scaramella et al.'s study (1999) supported the notion that parenting practices play a protective role against internalizing symptoms. That is to say that on average, parents who were consistent in their discipline, who monitored their children, and who spent quality time with them, in addition to being low in measures of hostility, had children who did not reach as high levels of internalizing symptoms as their counterparts.

As discussed previously in this chapter, Barrera and Li (1996) addressed the importance of family support on psychological distress. The authors found overwhelming data to suggest the importance of support and attachment on the development of a well-adjusted individual. In a number of studies they reviewed, they found that those adolescents with lower levels of family support had consistently higher levels of anxiety and depression.

1.2.3.2 Psychological distress and gender

The literature consistently indicates gender differences in diagnoses and symptoms of psychological distress. In studies of psychological distress in pre-pubescent children, some have indicated that there is no significant difference between the sexes, while others have found a greater number of symptoms in boys (Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 1994; Petersen, Silbereisen & Sorensen, 1996). As

they progress through the adolescent years, more girls tend to become more depressed; by the age of 17 years, girls have a significantly more depressive affect, and a poorer emotional well-being than boys. During adulthood, measures of depression in women continue to be two to three times higher than in men (Bebbington, 1996; Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 1994; Petersen & Ebata, 1987; Weissman, Bland, Joyce, Newman, Wells & Wittchen, 1993).

A Quebec study mirrored these gender differences in an investigation of 825 early adolescents between the ages of 12 and 14 years. Using interviews and questionnaires based on the DSM criteria, researchers found that adolescent girls reported approximately four times the rate of interiorizing problems. More specifically, girls were reported to be approximately six times more likely to be depressed, and had twice the amount of suicidal ideation (Santé Québec, 1993). These data accentuate the importance of research and intervention needed in the area of psychological distress, particularly for adolescent girls.

The longitudinal study done by Scaramella and colleagues (1999) presented in the previous section also revealed gender differences with respect to internalizing symptoms. The authors found that girls experienced a significant increase in internalizing symptoms from Grades 8 to 12, whereas the symptoms for boys remained constant throughout the time period. In investigating the relationship between gender differences and parenting practices, the authors found

that parents who played a supportive role at the beginning of high school had both boys and girls with fewer internalizing symptoms at the end of the study. This study understood the gender differences within a context of parenting behavior, and suggested that gender differences in internalizing symptoms may be due to the differing experiences of adolescent boys and girls, which in turn could affect the type of parenting behavior exhibited. Scaramella and her colleagues (1999) suggested that these factors be investigated in future studies.

Marcotte, Alain and Gosselin (1999) studied gender differences in adolescent depression in 306 French-speaking students from Trois-Rivières. Students who ranged in age from 14 to 17 years, with a mean age of 15.3, completed self-report measures. The authors focused particularly on the relationship between sex-roles and problem-solving skill differences and how these differed between boys and girls, as well as between those with and without depressive symptoms. In general, the authors found that girls had significantly more depressive symptoms than boys, as has been replicated in numerous studies. The reasons for these gender differences in depression rates was the object of the discussion of their study.

Marcotte and her colleagues found a significant relationship between reported problem-solving abilities and depressive symptoms in subjects. In which direction this relationship exists is as yet unclear. It is possible that feeling less capable of solving problems, sensing less control, or tending to avoid problems

could lead to a sense of hopelessness or depression. On the other hand, it is also possible that the presence of these depressive symptoms could lead to a difficulty in thought patterns and to a deficit in problem-solving skills (Marcotte, et al., 1999).

In their comprehensive review article, Nolen-Hoeksema and Girgus (1994) offered explanations for these gender differences in depressive symptoms. For both boys and girls, many of the factors leading to depression appear to be the same: lack of popularity, a loss of a relationship, body dissatisfaction and sexual abuse. The studies they reviewed revealed that girls had greater biological and social challenges associated with adolescence, and that their biological development and personality and behavioral styles placed them more at risk for the above-mentioned factors. In a similar vein, Compas and colleagues (1993) in their review found that stress, coping and biological developments interacted together in adolescence to produce the difference in depression rates between boys and girls (Compas, Orosan & Grant, 1993).

Leadbeater, Blatt and Quinlan (1995) suggested that the personality style of girls might also be a risk factor for depression. In their search of the literature, the authors found that girls might be more vulnerable to depression given their greater preoccupation with interpersonal concerns than boys. They also suggested that girls are more reactive to stressful life events involving others and themselves, such as environmental conditions, acute stressful life events, daily

estrogen accounted for 1% of the variance in depression, whereas life events were significantly stronger predictors of depression in women.

1.2.3.3 Psychological distress and socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status may have an indirect influence on the level of psychological distress both for adolescents and people of all ages. Living in a low socio-economic bracket is often a source of stress for individuals and families. Strained resources may lead to interpersonal conflict, or aggravate currently existing conflict. This conflict may act upon the quality of relationships as well as on measures of psychological distress (Eshleman & Wilson, 2001).

A study by Lempers and Clark-Lempers (1997) addressed the relationship between economic hardship and psychological distress. They studied mother-daughter and mother-son dyads to determine the relationship between low economic status, mother-adolescent relationships and psychological distress. Their study suggested a linear model. That is to say that financial strain led to stress within the mother-adolescent relationship, which in turn led to distress within the adolescent. The authors found the same conclusions for boys as for girls.

Overall, studies do not suggest a direct relationship between socioeconomic status and psychological distress. Rather, the stress caused by

financial strain appears to be the main factor affecting parental relationships and psychological distress.

1.2.3.4 Psychological distress and divorce

There is evidence that family structure plays a role in the psychological well-being of adolescents. In a survey of French-speaking adolescents living in Montreal, Saucier and Ambert (1983) found that youth with intact families had fewer emotional problems than did adolescents from divorced or widowed families. In the case of divorced parents, the authors hypothesized that the factors leading to the dissolution of the marriage were the same factors that contributed to the emotional problems experienced by the adolescents.

More recently, two studies addressed the psychological impact of divorced parents on their adolescents (Bynum & Durm, 1996; Palosaari, Aro & Laippala, 1996). In the study done by Bynum and Durm (1996), it was suggested that children whose parents had divorced had significantly lower levels of self-esteem.

In an extensive longitudinal study undertaken by Palosaari, Aro and Laippala (1996), 1656 Finnish adolescents were rated on levels of self-esteem and depression in Grade 9, and again six years later. The authors found that more subjects of divorced parents were depressed after six years than those whose parents had remained together. However, girls who had a close relationship with their divorced fathers had lower levels of depression – similar to those girls whose

parents were not divorced. Children whose parents had divorced tended to have greater contact with their mothers. The study concluded that maintaining close parental relationships with the non-custodial parent could be an important factor in buffering against depression, at least for girls.

In their meta-analysis of 92 studies on intact and divorced couples with children, Amato and Keith (1991) found that children from families in which the parents were divorced had poorer psychological adjustment. There are a number of hypothesized causes for the increase in depression and other measures of psychological maladjustment; however, based on their meta-analysis, the authors found the strongest predictor of difficulties lay with the family conflict perspective. That is to say that the children who tend to fare worst are those from families in which there is a greater amount of conflict both before and after the divorce. Other factors that may contribute to overall adjustment measures of children include the age of the child at the time of divorce, the gender of the child, and the socioeconomic status of the family (Ayoub, Deutsch & Maraganore, 1999). Amato (2001) recently followed up this meta-analysis to examine 67 new studies from the past decade. In general, he found similar results – that children with divorced parents tended to have poorer psychological adjustment, social relations and self-concept, as well as scoring lower on academic achievement measures and having more behavioral difficulties.

These studies support a hypothesis posed in this thesis that adolescents with divorced parents may experience more psychological distress than those living with their two parents.

1.3 A clarification of terms

The concept of *parental control* in the present research relates to Baumrind's (1967) notion of "demandingness," and includes the active role that parents take to promote the respect of rules and social conventions. Parental control includes setting rules and norms, supervising behaviors, establishing limits that may not be broken, and putting consequences in place when these limits are broken. Three components of parental control are being used in this present research: *supervision*, *limits* and *consequences*.

Supervision is defined as the quantity and accuracy of the information that parents have on where their adolescents are and what their daily activities are, particularly outside of the home environment, at school or with friends (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). *Limits* are defined as what the parent allows or does not allow their adolescent to do, particularly with respect to behaviors that may place the adolescent at risk, such as alcohol consumption or activities with friends. Parents may administer punishments or consequences when the above-mentioned limits are broken, or when the rules are not respected. Studies indicate that parents use a wide variety of disciplinary strategies (Smetana, 1994). Parental *consequences* may be grouped into categories of physical punishment and anger,

penalties such as a withdrawal of privileges or additional chores, and discussion or negotiation. Permissiveness would fall at the end of the continuum of disciplinary behaviors since it is seen as a lack of parental reaction (Papps, et al., 1995). The way in which each of these measures of parental discipline were measured is discussed in Chapter 2.

1.4 Hypotheses

As seen in this literature review, there exists a robust and varied collection of studies confirming empirically that there are significant links between the many aspects of parental practices and the psychological well-being of adolescents. Based on these research findings, specific hypotheses have been formulated which form the building blocks for a theory-driven model that presents the relationship among the variables from a more global perspective.

First, it is hypothesized that parents who are rated as giving a low amount of supervision will have adolescents who report being more psychologically distressed.

Second, it is hypothesized that parents who impose few limits will have adolescents who rate higher on measures of psychological distress.

Third, it is hypothesized that adolescents with parents who adopt an authoritarian or physically punitive approach will be more psychologically distressed than those who are more communicative with their children.

Fourth, it is hypothesized that adolescents with a closer relationship to their parents will be less psychologically distressed.

Fifth, it is hypothesized that a closer relationship with the parents will have an effect on disciplinary practices. Specifically, parents who are closer to their children are hypothesized to be rated as imposing more limits, supervising more closely, and adopting less severe forms of punishment, given their greater involvement in their adolescent's life.

Sixth, it is hypothesized that adolescents who have a closer relationship with their parents will experience less conflict with them.

Seventh, it is hypothesized that adolescents who experience more conflict with their parents will be more distressed.

Eighth, it is hypothesized that adolescents experiencing greater levels of conflict with their parents will have a more difficult relationship expressed through higher measures of punishment and less supervision.

Ninth, it is hypothesized that girls will have more supervision and limits imposed on them than boys.

Tenth, it is hypothesized that female adolescents will score higher on measures of psychological distress than will male adolescents.

Eleventh, it is hypothesized that adolescents from homes in which there has been a separation or divorce will have a less structured family environment, reflected in fewer limits and less supervision.

Twelfth, it is hypothesized that adolescents from homes in which there has been a separation or divorce will score higher on measures of psychological distress.

Thirteenth, it is hypothesized that parents born outside of Canada will be stricter in their practices towards their adolescents – that they will impose more limits, supervise more closely and be more severe in their punishments.

1.5 Theoretical model

Figure 1 presents the theoretical model through which the hypotheses were tested. There are four main groups of variables: demographics, parental closeness and conflict, disciplinary behaviors, and psychological distress. Directional pathways representing the hypotheses are illustrated. The goal of this model is to

determine the relative importance of each of the parenting and demographic variables on measures of psychological distress in adolescents.

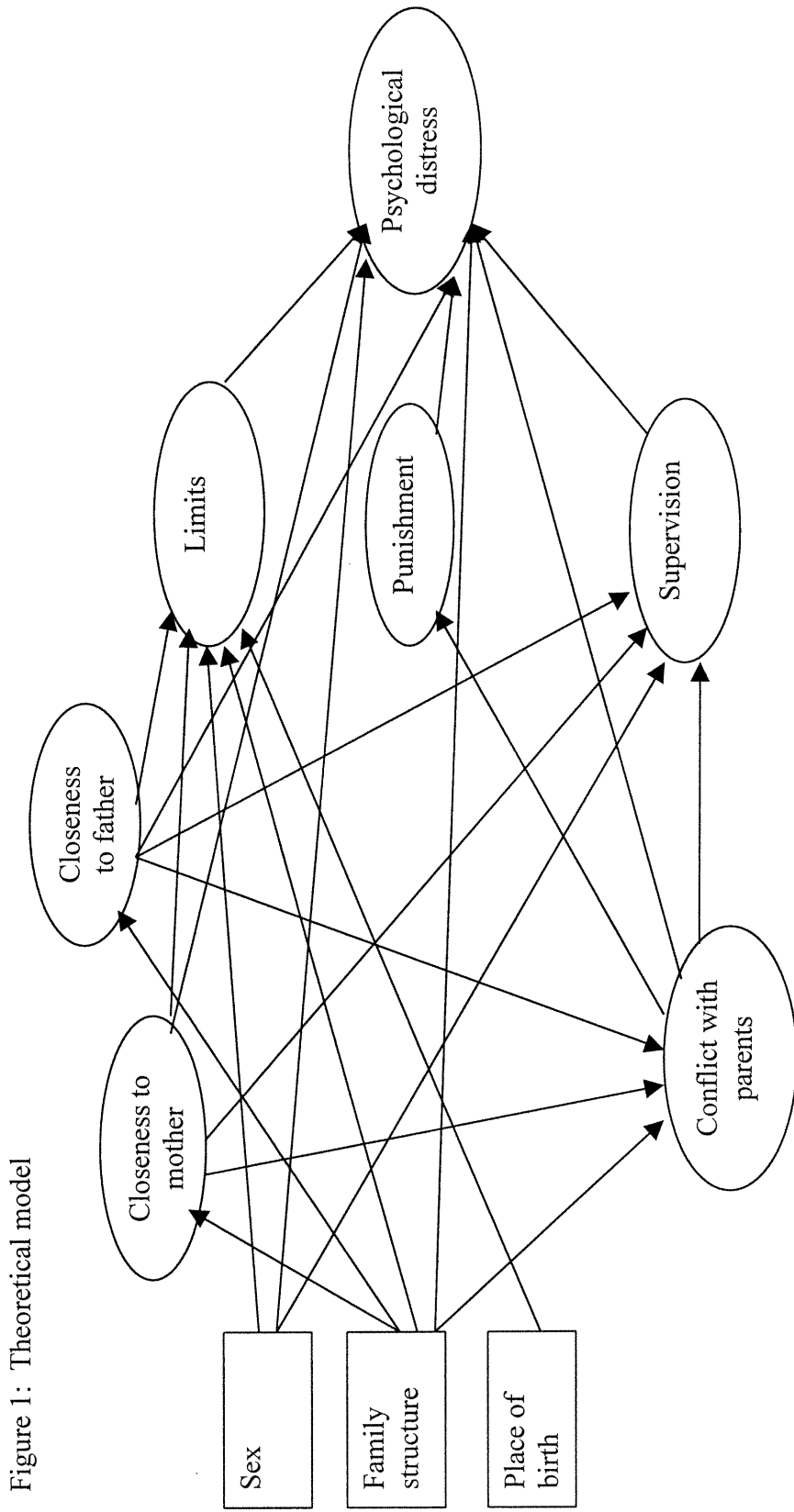


Figure 1: Theoretical model

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology used in the study – namely the subjects, instruments and procedures. Subjects' demographic variables are explained in terms of age, sex, socioeconomic status, family structure, ethnic background and school. The instruments used to collect the data are described and the statistical properties of the instruments are presented. Finally, the procedures used for data collection are explained and ethical considerations are addressed.

2.1 Subjects

As elaborated in the following section, Grade 11 students were recruited as subjects from three Montreal-area high schools. This sample was one of convenience, that is to say that it was not a purely random sample of Grade 11 students in Montreal. Nonetheless, as will be seen in the composition of the sample, efforts were made to recruit a group of subjects who represented a diverse student population in terms of family structure, and socioeconomic and ethnic background.

2.1.1 Age and sex

The sample was composed of 334 subjects, 141 girls and 192 boys. (One subject did not indicate gender on the forms.) Subjects were recruited from three Montreal-area French-language high schools. Subjects were in Grade 11 (Secondary 5) and the average age was 17 years, 1 month (SD = 0.54). The reason for choosing an older adolescent sample was that the authors of the psychological distress

questionnaire (Préville, Boyer, Potvin, Perrault & Légaré, 1992) indicated that older adolescents have a cognitive structure that enables them to better reflect on their own symptoms. They standardized their questionnaire for a population no younger than 15 years of age.

2.1.2 Socioeconomic status

Subjects were asked to name each of their parents' occupations as specifically as possible. Based on this information, the socioeconomic status was assessed using a Canadian socio-professional scale established by Blishen, Carrol and Moore (1987). The authors of this scale created a classification system based on years of schooling and revenue of 480 occupations in Canada. Subjects were grouped into one of four categories: high, medium, and low socioeconomic status, or homemaker. As may be seen in Table I, the sample was composed of a relatively equal proportion of fathers from each background. Mothers were more frequently in the medium and low socio-professional groups (69.5%), with the remainder relatively evenly divided between high and homemaker status.

Table I

Percentage of fathers and mothers in each socio-professional category

Category	Socio-professional status	
	Fathers (%)	Mothers (%)
High	33.5	15.8
Medium	37.4	31.3
Low	29.2	38.2
Homemaker	0	14.8

2.1.3 Family structure

Subjects were asked to indicate the marital status of their parents and with which parent(s) they currently lived. Subjects were grouped according to whether their parents were together or separated. Parents who were classified as being together could either be married or living together. If parents were separated, it could have been due to either divorce or separation. Subjects were grouped into this category regardless of whether their parent had a new partner. Subjects living in group homes, with other family members, or those who did not answer the question were classified in a third category.

The majority of subjects (68.0%) lived with both parents, 29.6% lived with one of their parents, and the remaining 2.4% of subjects had alternate living arrangements.

2.1.4 Ethnic origin

Subjects were asked to name the countries in which their parents were born. The majority of subjects were of Canadian background (75.5%). The remainder (24.5%) came from other countries in Asia, Africa, Eastern and Western Europe, and the Americas.

2.1.5 School

Subjects were recruited from three high schools in the greater Montreal area: Curé Labelle (n = 136), Brébeuf (n = 112) and Monseigneur Richard (n = 86).¹ It was determined that each school represented a different socioeconomic population and would therefore allow for a greater diversity of subjects.

Curé Labelle is a large secondary school with over 2000 students, located in the suburbs north of Montreal. The school offers a regular academic stream as well as a technical stream for those students with scholastic difficulties. The current study drew its subjects from the regular academic stream only. The school population is considered to be of middle socioeconomic background; however, there is a large amount of variation among the individual students' financial situations.

Brébeuf is a private school located on the island of Montreal, catering mainly to students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. In earlier grades, the student population is solely male; however, beginning in Secondary V (Grade 11) there are both male and female students.

¹ The author wishes to thank the students, administration and staff of the participating schools.

Monseigneur Richard is a secondary school located in a low-income neighborhood in the southern part of Montreal. It is a relatively small school with approximately 750 students.

2.2 Instruments

The instruments consisted of a number of questionnaires, all completed by the adolescents themselves. The questionnaires gathered demographic information on subjects and their families, measured the levels of closeness between the adolescents and their parents, assessed parental disciplinary practices in terms of supervision, limits and consequences, and measured the adolescents' levels of psychological distress and psychological adjustment. Please refer to Appendix A for the original battery of questionnaires.

2.2.1 Demographics

A first questionnaire gathered demographic information on the subject's age and sex, the parents' country of birth, and the family's socioeconomic status and structure. The socioeconomic status was determined by asking for parents' occupations, and then comparing with Blishen and colleagues' (1987) socio-professional scale. The authors of this scale created a classification system based on years of schooling and revenue for 480 occupations in Canada.

Subjects were asked to elaborate on their family structure. They were required to specify the marital status of their parents (married, common-law,

separated, divorced, or widowed), and with which parent(s) they were currently living. Subjects with separated or divorced parents were asked how long their parents had been separated, as well as at what frequency they had contact with the non-custodial parent.

2.2.2 Level of closeness

A questionnaire based on Parker's (1990) Parental Bonding Instrument was used to examine the levels of closeness between subjects and each parent.

In Parker's original questionnaire, there were two orthogonal factors: attachment-rejection and autonomy-overprotection. In the version that was constructed for use in this project, the attachment-rejection factor was retained, translated and validated with a French-speaking adolescent population (Claes, 1996). This statistical process suggested that all items in the attachment-rejection factor were strongly correlated; the weakest correlation was $-.50$, with a high internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$).

Analysis of the 17-item questionnaire revealed three factors: rejection, empathy and affection. The rejection factor contained statements that were negatively correlated with the overall measure of attachment such as, "My mother does not talk to me much." The empathy factor contained questions such as "My father understands my problems and anxieties." The affection factor contained statements such as "My parent expresses affection towards me."

Subjects rated each statement in the questionnaire according to a 4-point Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, 4 = always). Subjects completed two versions of the questionnaire – one for their relationship with their father, and one for their relationship with their mother. In situations where subjects were no longer in contact with a parent, they were requested to leave that questionnaire blank.

2.2.3 Level of conflict

In order to assess the level of conflict that subjects experienced with each parent, subjects were presented with a list of seven issues that are considered to be common sources of conflict (ex. household chores, school results). They were then asked to rate each issue for the frequency at which it caused conflict (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often). The items from this questionnaire were taken from the Issue Checklist by Prinz and colleagues (1979). A factor analysis revealed only one factor (α mother = .72; α father = .76). A high score on this tool indicates a high frequency of conflict.

2.2.4 Parental disciplinary practices

Adolescents were provided with three 4-point Likert-style questionnaires regarding parental disciplinary practices to assess supervision, limits, and consequences. These are discussed in the following three sections.

2.2.4.1 Supervision

In answer to six questions, subjects rated the degree to which parents were aware of their activities outside of school and with their friends (1 = not at all, 2 = slightly, 3 = somewhat, 4 = very much). For example, subjects were asked to rate the statement, "My parents know who my friends are." This questionnaire was constructed based on the works of Dishion & McMahon (1998). Analysis revealed one factor with an internal consistency of $\alpha = .85$.

2.2.4.2 Limits

In a second set of questions related to parental limit-setting (Claes, 1996), subjects rated the degree to which their parents accepted that they participated in each of ten behaviors or activities (1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, 4 = always). For example, subjects were asked to what degree their parents accepted that they had friends over to their house, or that they slept over at a friend's house. There are two factors in this measure; limits associated with activities that took place in the home ($\alpha = .79$), and limits associated with activities that took place outside the home ($\alpha = .69$).

2.2.4.3 Consequences

Third, subjects were asked to elaborate on their parents' reactions in a variety of situations. This questionnaire was based on a similar scale developed by Papps and colleagues (1995). The authors developed this instrument in order to assess parental consequences within the context of intercultural research.

In our study, subjects were presented with five scenarios in which they were asked to rate or to describe their parents' reactions. For example, subjects were asked how their parents would react if they came home later than expected, or if their marks at school dropped significantly. Subjects answered in short sentences that were then sorted according to the type of reaction.

Answers were coded according to six categories: corporal punishment, withdrawal of privileges, anger, discussion, reciprocity, or permissiveness. For example, when subjects replied that their parents would hit them in response to a misdeed, their answer was classified as *corporal punishment*. *Withdrawal of privileges* was another punitive category that was coded when the parents' reaction was to punish their child's behavior by taking away their privileges. Parents who reacted to their adolescents by yelling at them or by screaming were classified in the *anger* category. When subjects answered that their parents would reason with them or would try to come to an understanding, for example, the parenting behavior was classified as *discussion*. *Reciprocity* was coded when the parents required their adolescent to make amends for the behavior. For example, in the case of declining grades, an adolescent reporting that their parents would require them to spend more time studying would have parental behavior classified as reciprocity – this in contrast to a parent who would yell (*anger*) or who would not allow them to go out (*withdrawal of privileges*). Finally, *permissiveness* was

used to label those responses that indicated little or no reaction on the part of the parent.

Two assessors were given these categories along with the data and were asked to independently classify each parental response. For the most part, the assessors agreed on the categorization – those responses that were controversial were discussed with the research team and a consensus was met. In the cases where students answered more than one category of response, the response that was considered to be more severe was retained. For example, a subject answering that his parents would discuss, yell and hit him would be classified as corporal punishment.

Statistical analyses revealed that three of the five scenarios should be retained for the purposes of this study since two items were not consistent with the other measures. A content analysis of the responses from the three retained scenarios revealed an alpha of .62 which is considered weak but acceptable.

2.2.5 Psychological distress

The final questionnaire examined the subjects' level of psychological distress. The questionnaire is taken directly from a publication of the Quebec Government (Préville, Boyer, Potvin, Perrault & Légaré, 1992).

This 14-item scale was composed of three factors: (1) depression and anxiety, (2) cognitive problems, and (3) impulse control. Subjects were asked to rate the degree to which they experienced various symptoms within the previous week, such as feeling alone, having difficulty remembering things, or becoming easily irritated (1 = never, 2 = occasionally, 3 = fairly often, 4 = very often).

2.3 Procedures for data collection

The administrative bodies of three Montreal-area schools were approached and informed of the nature of this research. Each school agreed to allow their students to participate in the project during class time.

A research assistant addressed students during their Moral Education class, and informed them as to the nature of the research. They were told that a research team at Université de Montréal wanted to learn more about adolescents' relationships with their parents and friends. Students were informed of their right to choose whether to participate. Students who consented to the research then completed the questionnaires in their classrooms under the supervision of the

research assistant, without the teacher present. Those students who chose not to participate did quiet, individual work at their desks.

Subjects were requested not to indicate their name on the form in order to maintain anonymity. They were informed that they were allowed to ask any questions, whether to clarify one of the questionnaire items or with respect to the nature of the research.

2.4 Ethical considerations

All answers to the questionnaires were kept strictly confidential. The subjects were requested not to indicate their name on any of the forms. Subjects were informed both verbally and in writing of confidentiality issues and of the purposes of the present study. They were made aware that they were free to choose whether to participate in the project.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis. Three main analyses were performed on the data. First, multivariate tests were used to determine whether there were differences in subjects' responses to dependent measures according to sex, family structure, and parents' country of origin. Between-subject analyses were performed to examine these differences in more detail. Given the diversity of the countries of origin and the small sample size for each country, subjects were grouped into one of two categories – parents born in Canada, and parents born outside Canada.

Second, statistical tests were applied in order to determine the correlations between the dependent variables. The purpose of the correlational analysis was to confirm the individual pairings of variables that were proposed in the theory-driven directional model. The correlations were first determined using the whole sample. The sample was then divided according to sex and correlations were reanalyzed.

Once the viability of the model was confirmed by the correlational analysis, the model was used as the framework for the third and final step of the data analysis: structural equation modeling. This process entailed two analyses. First, the measurement model tested for the independence of the measures, and

indicated whether the model was suitable for structural analysis. Next, the structural model tested the hypothesized pathways and determined the significance of each. This final step in the analysis allowed for an understanding of the interactions between variables and revealed the significant links between parental practices and psychological distress for the sample as a whole, and for boys and girls separately.

3.1 Between-subject effects

3.1.1 Sex of adolescent

Table II shows the mean and standard deviation for each dependent variable, when the sample was divided according to the sex of the subject. The values were calculated based on the totals of the subjects' responses to each factor.

Multivariate tests of this data found that there were significant differences between boys and girls (Wilks' Lambda: $F = 3.12, p < .001$). Tests of between-subject effects examined the differences in more detail. Table III summarizes the results for each dependant variable along gender lines.

An examination of the results reveals that boys' and girls' responses differed significantly on four of the variables. In order of strength, these were: supervision, depression, paternal conflict and punishment. In this sample, one of

Table II

Mean score on dependent measures by sex of adolescent

Dependent measure	Girls (n = 141)	Boys (n = 193)	Total (N = 334)
Maternal affection	13.06 (2.93)	13.01 (2.61)	13.03 (2.74)
Maternal empathy	18.48 (4.26)	18.01 (4.01)	18.20 (4.12)
Maternal rejection ^a	25.21 (3.65)	24.93 (3.38)	25.05 (3.49)
Paternal affection	11.24 (3.55)	10.77 (3.24)	10.97 (3.38)
Paternal empathy	15.69 (4.76)	15.68 (4.35)	15.68 (4.52)
Paternal rejection ^a	22.60 (5.14)	23.35 (4.41)	23.03 (4.74)
Maternal conflict	17.15 (5.31)	17.59 (4.62)	17.41 (4.92)
Paternal conflict	15.04 (5.43)	16.30 (5.13)	15.77 (5.29)
Limits ^a	14.53 (3.42)	14.50 (3.49)	14.51 (3.46)
Supervision	18.94 (4.23)	17.36 (4.15)	18.03 (4.25)
Punishment	2.20 (0.77)	2.38 (0.78)	2.31 (0.78)
Depression	7.91 (3.32)	6.81 (2.67)	7.28 (3.01)
Anxiety	8.63 (2.85)	8.27 (2.64)	8.42 (2.73)
Irritability	7.47 (2.93)	7.01 (2.48)	7.20 (2.68)
Cognitive problems	3.22 (1.63)	3.16 (1.45)	3.18 (1.53)

Note. The values represent the mean score and standard deviation (SD).

^a These measures are reversed, i.e. higher values indicate less rejection and fewer limits.

Table III

Between-subject effects: Sex of adolescent

Dependent measure	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>
Maternal affection	0.03	.00	.86
Maternal empathy	1.10	.00	.30
Maternal rejection	0.50	.00	.48
Paternal affection	1.58	.01	.21
Paternal empathy	0.00	.00	.99
Paternal rejection	2.01	.01	.16
Maternal conflict	0.66	.00	.42
Paternal conflict	4.66	.01	.03
Limits	0.01	.00	.94
Supervision	11.72	.03	.00
Punishment	4.62	.01	.03
Depression	11.10	.03	.00
Anxiety	1.42	.00	.24
Irritability	2.41	.01	.12
Cognitive problems	0.14	.00	.71

the most significant effect sizes between the sexes related to the amount of supervision received from parents. Girls rated themselves as more closely supervised than their male counterparts ($F = 11.72, p = .01$). Also, girls ranked higher on measures of depressive symptoms than boys ($F = 11.10, p = .01$). Boys

reported more conflicts with their fathers than did the girls ($F = 4.66, p < .05$), and boys were punished more often than girls ($F = 4.62, p < .05$). There were no significant differences between boys and girls on all other measures.

3.1.2 Marital status of the adolescents' parents

Table IV shows the mean and standard deviation for each dependent variable when the sample was divided according to the marital status of each subject's parents. The two groups were divided into "intact" couples, which meant that the subject's parents still lived together and "separated," which meant that the subject's parents no longer lived together and may or may not have had a new spouse.

Multivariate tests of this data found that there were significant differences between subjects from homes where the parents were together and those from homes where the parents were separated (Wilks' Lambda: $F = 4.58, p < .001$). Tests of between-subject effects examined the differences in more detail. Table V summarizes the results for each dependent variable according to marital status.

Adolescents from intact families had more supervision than those in which the parents were separated ($F = 6.44, p < .05$). In families where the parents were separated, subjects reported having fewer limits imposed on their behaviors than did those from families where the parental couple was intact ($F = 22.93,$

$p < .001$). Ratings of depressive symptoms were higher for subjects from families where the parents were separated as compared to subjects whose parents were together ($F = 4.54, p < .05$).

Three of the measures that assessed the subjects' relationships with their parents were significantly different between the two marital groups. Adolescents with separated parents reported feeling more rejected by both the mother and the father, as compared to adolescents from intact families (mother: $F = 7.44, p < .01$, father: $F = 15.55, p < .001$). The measure of empathy with the father was significantly different for the two groups – subjects from intact families reported that the father was more empathetic than did subjects whose parents were separated ($F = 5.69, p < .05$).

3.1.3 Place of birth of the adolescents' parents

Table VI shows the mean and standard deviation for each dependent variable when the sample was divided according to the place of birth of the parents. Subjects were divided into two groups according to whether the parents were born in Canada or in another country.

Multivariate tests of this data found that there were significant differences between subjects whose parents were Canadian-born and those whose parents were born elsewhere (Wilks' Lambda: $F = 4.68, p < .001$). Tests of

Table IV

Mean score on dependent measures by marital status of parents

Dependent measure	Intact (n = 227)	Separated (n = 99)	Total (N = 326)
Maternal affection	13.16 (2.64)	12.82 (3.02)	13.05 (2.76)
Maternal empathy	18.31 (4.04)	17.94 (4.44)	18.20 (4.16)
Maternal rejection ^a	25.41 (3.04)	24.26 (4.32)	25.06 (3.51)
Paternal affection	11.20 (3.33)	10.45 (3.53)	10.97 (3.40)
Paternal empathy	16.08 (4.46)	14.78 (4.70)	15.68 (4.57)
Paternal rejection ^a	23.69 (4.34)	21.46 (5.41)	23.02 (4.79)
Maternal conflict	17.47 (4.91)	17.21 (5.07)	17.39 (4.95)
Paternal conflict	15.97 (5.28)	15.17 (5.41)	15.73 (5.33)
Limits ^a	13.92 (3.42)	15.85 (3.15)	14.51 (3.45)
Supervision	18.40 (3.92)	17.10 (4.89)	18.00 (4.27)
Punishment	2.29 (0.75)	2.38 (0.87)	2.32 (0.79)
Depression	7.05 (2.91)	7.82 (3.27)	7.29 (3.04)
Anxiety	8.32 (2.73)	8.71 (2.70)	8.44 (2.72)
Irritability	7.04 (2.53)	7.57 (3.00)	7.20 (2.69)
Cognitive problems	3.15 (1.53)	3.20 (1.54)	3.17 (1.53)

Note. The values represent the mean score and standard deviation (SD).

^a These measures are reversed, i.e. higher values indicate less rejection and fewer limits.

Table V

Between-subjects effects: Marital status of parents

Dependent measure	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>
Maternal affection	1.05	.00	.31
Maternal empathy	0.57	.00	.45
Maternal rejection	7.44	.02	.01
Paternal affection	3.32	.01	.07
Paternal empathy	5.69	.02	.02
Paternal rejection	15.55	.05	.00
Maternal conflict	0.17	.00	.68
Paternal conflict	1.58	.01	.21
Limits	22.93	.07	.00
Supervision	6.44	.02	.01
Punishment	1.06	.00	.30
Depression	4.54	.01	.03
Anxiety	1.44	.00	.23
Irritability	2.70	.01	.10
Cognitive problems	0.08	.00	.78

Table VI

Mean score on dependent measures by place of birth of parents

Dependent measure	Canada (n=269)	Other (n=61)	Total (N=330)
Maternal affection	12.97 (2.74)	13.36 (2.78)	13.14 (2.74)
Maternal empathy	18.40 (4.02)	17.54 (4.20)	18.24 (4.12)
Maternal rejection ^a	25.08 (3.55)	25.02 (3.13)	25.07 (3.47)
Paternal affection	11.01 (3.38)	10.79 (3.47)	10.97 (3.39)
Paternal empathy	15.76 (4.48)	15.39 (4.84)	15.69 (4.54)
Paternal rejection ^a	23.13 (4.73)	22.56 (4.92)	23.02 (4.77)
Maternal conflict	17.14 (4.84)	18.81 (5.06)	17.45 (4.92)
Paternal conflict	15.44 (5.31)	17.21 (5.09)	15.77 (5.31)
Limits ^a	15.12 (3.23)	11.86 (3.19)	14.52 (3.46)
Supervision	18.26 (4.18)	17.02 (4.48)	18.03 (4.26)
Punishment	2.28 (0.77)	2.38 (0.78)	2.29 (0.77)
Depression	7.26 (3.10)	7.34 (2.67)	7.28 (3.02)
Anxiety	8.28 (2.77)	8.95 (2.47)	8.41 (2.73)
Irritability	7.19 (2.79)	7.13 (2.17)	7.18 (2.69)
Cognitive problems	3.13 (1.49)	3.38 (1.60)	3.17 (1.51)

^a These measures are reversed, i.e. higher values indicate less rejection and fewer limits.

Table VII

Between-subject effects: Place of birth of parents

Dependent measure	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>
Maternal affection	1.01	.003	.32
Maternal empathy	2.15	.007	.14
Maternal rejection	0.02	.000	.90
Paternal affection	0.22	.001	.64
Paternal empathy	0.33	.001	.57
Paternal rejection	0.71	.002	.40
Maternal conflict	5.83	.017	.02
Paternal conflict	5.62	.017	.02
Limits	50.74	.134	.00
Supervision	4.28	.013	.04
Punishment	0.87	.003	.35
Depression	0.04	.000	.85
Anxiety	3.00	.009	.08
Irritability	0.03	.000	.87
Cognitive problems	1.36	.004	.25

between-subject effects examined the differences in more detail. Table VII summarizes the results for each dependent variable according to parents' place of birth.

The strongest significant difference between the two groups was found in the number of limits that parents were reported to set on their children's behavior. Subjects reported that parents born outside of Canada set more limits than those of Canadian origin ($F = 50.74, p < .001$). In fact, this difference accounted for 13.4% of the differences between the two groups. Adolescents of parents born outside of Canada reported that they had more conflict with both their mother and their father than did adolescents whose parents were born in Canada (mother: $F = 5.83, p < 0.05$, father: $F = 5.62, p < .05$). Subjects with parents born outside of Canada reported significantly more parental supervision than did children with Canadian-born parents ($F = 4.28, p < .05$).

3.2 Correlational analyses

Correlation values were determined between each dependent variable. Correlations were first examined for the sample as a whole, and then recalculated separately for boys and for girls.

3.2.1 Socioeconomic status

The socioeconomic status (SES) was correlated to two variables. There was a positive correlation between SES and conflicts with the mother. That is to

say that there tended to be more conflict between adolescents and their mother when the family was of a higher SES ($r = .14, p < .01$). Second, there was a negative correlation between SES and measures of parental supervision; adolescents from higher SES backgrounds tended to be supervised less ($r = -.149, p < 0.01$).

When the sample was divided according to gender, it was found that there were no significant correlations between any of the measures and the SES for girls. For boys, however, there were found to be significantly more limits ($r = -.14, p < .05$) and less supervision ($r = -.18, p < .05$) in families from higher SES backgrounds.

3.2.2 Closeness to the mother and father

There were three components to the measure of maternal and paternal relationships: affection, empathy and rejection (values were reversed for rejection, that is to say that a higher score indicates less rejection.) For the relationship with the mother, all three components were significantly strongly correlated to one another (see Table VIII). For the relationship with the father, the same three components were also significantly strongly correlated to one another (see Table IX). These findings were true when the whole sample was examined, as well as when the sample was divided according to gender.

Table VIII

Correlation between maternal closeness factors

	Maternal affection			Maternal empathy			Maternal rejection		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
Maternal affection	-	-	-	.73**	.69**	.70**	.72**	.64**	.68**
Maternal empathy	-	-	-	-	-	-	.71**	.63**	.67**
Maternal rejection	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

** p<.01

Table IX

Correlation between paternal closeness factors

	Paternal affection			Paternal empathy			Paternal rejection		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
Paternal affection	-	-	-	.82**	.70**	.76**	.76**	.68**	.71**
Paternal empathy	-	-	-	-	-	-	.78**	.74**	.76**
Paternal rejection	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

** p<.01

Table X

Correlation between maternal closeness and paternal closeness

	Maternal affection			Maternal empathy			Maternal rejection		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
Paternal affection	.25**	.43**	.35**	.27**	.39**	.34**	.20*	.39**	.31**
Paternal empathy	.14	.26**	.20**	.27**	.47**	.37**	.16	.34**	.26**
Paternal rejection	.23**	.31**	.27**	.22**	.36**	.29**	.31**	.44**	.37**

** p<.01

*p<.05

For the total sample, each of the three variables composing the measure of maternal closeness was positively correlated to the equivalent three variables in the measure of paternal closeness. For girls, all variables were intercorrelated except for two relating to the measure of paternal empathy. On this measure, no significant relationship was found between maternal affection-paternal empathy and maternal rejection-paternal empathy. That is to say that the subjects' ratings of their fathers' empathy was not related to their ratings of their mothers' levels of affection or rejection. These data are presented in Table X.

3.2.3 Conflict with the mother and father

Subjects reported the amount of conflict they had with each parent. There was a strong positive correlation between the amount of conflict with the mother and the amount of conflict with the father ($r = .68, p < .001$). This correlation remained strong when the sample was divided according to gender (girls: $r = .64, p < .001$; boys: $r = .71, p < .001$).

3.2.4 Psychological distress of subjects

The correlation between the four measures of psychological distress (depression, anxiety, irritability and cognitive problems) was examined, and was found to be significantly correlated both for the entire sample, and for each gender group. These data are presented in Table XI. These results indicate that the study's measures of depression, anxiety, irritability and cognitive problems were all significantly intercorrelated.

Table XI

Correlation between factors of psychological distress

	Depression			Anxiety			Irritability			Cognitive problems		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
Depression	-	-	-	.75**	.63**	.69**	.59**	.57**	.58**	.28**	.41**	.34**
Anxiety	-	-	-	-	-	-	.57**	.60**	.58**	.27**	.43**	.35**
Irritability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.37**	.40**	.38**
Cognitive problems	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

** p<.01

*p<.05

3.2.5 Parental disciplinary practices

Parental disciplinary practices were divided into three factors: limits, supervision and punishment. As may be seen in Table XII, there were few significantly correlated factors. Looking at the whole sample, supervision was negatively correlated to punishment. That is to say that parents who were rated as supervising more tended to have lower punishment scores. When the boys and girls were separated, this finding was only significant for boys.

3.2.6 Closeness to parents-conflict with parents

For the total sample, all measures of closeness with both mother and father were negatively correlated to the amount of conflict between each parent. This means that subjects reporting closer relationships with their parents tended to have less conflict

When the sample was divided into gender groups, not all of the correlations held true for girls. According to the girls in the sample, conflict with their mothers remained negatively correlated with all factors of the maternal relationship, but only two of the three factors of the paternal relationship remained significantly correlated. Also for the female sample, conflict with the father was negatively correlated to all factors of the paternal relationship, but only one factor of the maternal relationship was significantly correlated. This suggests that the girls' relationships (both closeness and conflict) with each parent were more independent of each other. These data are presented in Table XIII.

Table XII

Correlation between parental disciplinary practices

	Limits			Supervision			Punishment		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
Limits	-	-	-	-.05	.03	-.00	-.11	-.05	-.08
Supervision	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.06	-.18*	-.15**
Punishment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

** p<.01

*p<.05

Table XIII

Correlation between parental conflict and parental closeness

	Conflict with mother			Conflict with father		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
Maternal affection	-.29**	-.26**	-.27**	-.12	-.15*	-.13**
Maternal empathy	-.36**	-.34**	-.35**	-.14	-.19**	-.17**
Maternal rejection	-.38**	-.26**	-.32**	-.26**	-.23**	-.24**
Paternal affection	-.19*	-.23**	-.22**	-.24**	-.27**	-.26**
Paternal empathy	-.16	-.22**	-.19**	-.25**	-.28**	-.26**
Paternal rejection	-.27**	-.28**	-.27**	-.34**	-.35**	-.33**

** p<.01

*p<.05

3.2.7 Closeness to parents-psychological distress

Psychological distress was assessed using four measures of symptoms: depression, anxiety, irritability and cognitive disturbance. The correlations between these measures of psychological adjustment and maternal and paternal closeness are presented in Table XIV. As may be seen, most of the measures of parental closeness were significantly negatively correlated to psychological distress. That is to say that when parental closeness was strong, adolescents' reports of psychological maladjustment tended to be lower.

There existed some gender differences in these areas . Maternal affection seemed to be the only variable of parental closeness that was not correlated to depression in boys, whereas all variables of parental closeness were correlated to depression for girls. With respect to anxiety, all measures of parental closeness were correlated to this symptom in girls. In contrast, three out of the six closeness variables were correlated to anxiety in boys: maternal and paternal rejection, and paternal affection. Maternal affection and rejection were correlated to cognitive problems in girls, and all but one of the closeness variables were correlated to cognitive problems in boys.

Table XIV

Correlation between parental closeness and psychological distress

	Depression			Anxiety			Irritability			Cognitive problems		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
Maternal affection	-.25**	-.13	-.18**	-.21*	-.08	-.14*	-.24**	-.22**	-.23**	-.22**	-.18*	-.20**
Maternal empathy	-.30**	-.18*	-.22**	-.27**	-.13	-.19**	-.28**	-.24**	-.26**	-.12	-.18*	-.15**
Maternal rejection	-.34**	-.23**	-.27**	-.32**	-.20**	-.25**	-.32**	-.27**	-.29**	-.27**	-.20**	-.23**
Paternal affection	-.41**	-.15*	-.26**	-.34**	-.14*	-.23**	-.22**	-.16*	-.19**	-.06	-.12	-.09
Paternal empathy	-.36**	-.19**	-.27**	-.29**	-.12	-.20**	-.21*	-.14*	-.17**	-.01	-.14*	-.08
Paternal rejection	-.45**	-.28**	-.37**	-.40**	-.28**	-.34**	-.32**	-.27**	-.30**	-.16	-.22**	-.19**

* p<.05

** p<.01

3.2.8 Closeness to parents-disciplinary practices

Parental disciplinary practices in this study were measured using three variables: limits, supervision, and punishments. The correlation between parental practices and measures of parental closeness were calculated and are presented in Table XV. As may be seen, supervision seemed most strongly correlated to measures of both maternal and paternal closeness. There was also a negative correlation between maternal rejection and punishment – that is to say that mothers who were less rejecting of their adolescents tended to exhibit less punitive behavior. For fathers, some measures of closeness were correlated to the setting of limits, suggesting that the closer the relationship between father and child, the fewer the limits that were imposed. These findings were generally similar between the gender groups.

3.2.9 Conflict with parents-psychological distress

The four measures of psychological distress (depression, anxiety, irritability and cognitive problems) were compared to measures of conflict between the adolescent and each parent. All measures of psychological distress were significantly correlated to the presence of parental conflict. This finding was true for both boys and girls. That is to say that adolescents who reported experiencing conflictual parental relationships also reported more symptoms related to psychological distress. The results are shown in Table XVI.

Table XV

Correlation between parental closeness and disciplinary practices

	Limits			Supervision			Punishment		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
Maternal affection	.08	.07	.08	.42**	.30**	.35**	-.17*	-.04	-.09
Maternal empathy	.17*	.19**	.18**	.52**	.49**	.50**	-.21*	-.04	-.12*
Maternal rejection	.08	.08	.08	.49**	.40**	.44**	-.18*	-.14*	-.16**
Paternal affection	.08	.16*	.12*	.26**	.34**	.31**	-.02	-.08	-.06
Paternal empathy	.13	.15*	.14**	.16	.34**	.25**	-.07	-.11	-.09
Paternal rejection	-.01	.21**	.11	.25**	.28**	.25**	.03	-.20**	-.08

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table XVI

Correlation between parental conflict and psychological distress

	Conflict with mother			Conflict with father		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
Depression	.34**	.24**	.28**	.28**	.22**	.22**
Anxiety	.38**	.27**	.32**	.38**	.28**	.31**
Irritability	.40**	.26**	.32**	.34**	.23**	.27**
Cognitive problems	.33**	.24**	.28**	.24**	.25**	.24**

* p<.05

** p<.01

3.2.10 Conflict with parents-disciplinary practices

Higher ratings of conflict with parents significantly correlated with parental disciplinary practices. As may be seen in Table XVII, conflict with either parent was significantly correlated to higher ratings of limits, lower ratings of supervision, and higher ratings of punishment. These results indicate that adolescents who reported greater conflict with their parents also reported that their parents imposed more limits on them, supervised them less, and punished them more.

When the sample was divided by gender, there were fewer significant correlations found for girls. For girls, low ratings of supervision were correlated with parental conflict, and high punishment ratings were correlated to conflict with the mother.

Table XVII

Correlation between parental conflict and disciplinary practices

	Conflict with mother			Conflict with father		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
Limits	-.14	-.24**	-.20**	-.16	-.18*	-.17**
Supervision	-.51**	-.34**	-.42**	-.40**	-.34**	-.38**
Punishment	.27**	.29**	.28**	.15	.34**	.27**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

3.2.11 Parental disciplinary practices and psychological distress

The three measures of parental disciplinary practice (limits, supervision and punishment) were compared to the four measures of psychological distress (depression, anxiety, irritability and cognitive problems). Results are presented in Table XVIII.

The parental supervision variable was significantly correlated to all measures of psychological distress. Adolescents with lower levels of parental supervision tended to have higher ratings of maladjustment. This effect was more consistent for girls than for boys. The four factors of psychological distress were correlated to supervision for the girls, whereas the boys had only two significant correlations to supervision: anxiety and irritability.

High measures of anxiety in adolescents were correlated to more parental limits, less supervision, and more punishment. Higher ratings of parental limits were correlated to higher ratings of both depression and anxiety for boys. Higher ratings of punitive behavior were correlated to cognitive problems.

3.3 Structural Equation Modeling

The purpose of the structural analyses was to determine the validity of the model incorporating measures of closeness and conflict, measures of parental control, and adolescent psychological distress. That is to say that this analysis

Table XVIII

Correlation between disciplinary practices and psychological distress

	Limits			Supervision			Punishment		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
Depression	-.02	-.14*	-.08	-.34**	-.11	-.18**	.05	.05	.03
Anxiety	-.03	-.21**	-.13*	-.32**	-.14*	-.20**	.14	.11	.12*
Irritability	.15	-.14	-.01	-.36**	-.20**	-.25**	.12	.08	.09
Cognitive problems	-.00	-.08	-.05	-.29**	-.14	-.20**	.17	.17*	.16**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

went further than the correlational testing – it allowed the testing of a directional model involving the study variables of interest. The proposed model was tested using the method of structural equation modeling (SEM) to investigate the similarity between the model and the data collected in this study. Statistical analyses were completed using the Amos application, part of the SPSS 7.5 program. Maximum likelihood estimation method was used. This method of analysis has been shown to be effective in analyzing both normally and non-normally distributed data (Windle, Barnes & Welte, 1989; Reifman & Windle, 1995).

The proposed theoretical model was composed of three categories of latent variables: closeness and conflict (closeness to mother, closeness to father, and conflict with parents), parental control (limits, punishment, and supervision), and psychological distress. Each of the latent variables was constructed based on the observed data culled from the questionnaires. The statistical properties of each of these constructs was discussed in the Methods chapter, and each had an alpha coefficient that justified grouping the data together in the form of a latent variable. Given the validity of the latent variables, and the relationships between them as determined by correlational analyses, application of the theoretical model was supported (Figure 1).

Four indices were used to test the appropriateness of the model – that is, how well the data fit into the theoretical model. A general description of these

four indices follows. Chi squared indicates the level of correspondence between the theoretical model and the actual model, in which all possible sources of variance are included. The value of chi squared allows for a verification of the null hypothesis. A non-significant chi squared indicates that the null hypothesis should be retained. In contrast, a significant chi squared does not necessarily indicate that the data fit the model. The value of chi squared is to be used with caution, given that it is particularly sensitive to sample size (Kelloway, 1998).

The Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) assesses the proportion of variance and covariance explained by the model. The model is considered better adjusted the closer this value is to 1. In order to consider that the proposed model is well-adjusted, this Index should be greater than 0.90 (Kelloway, 1998).

The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is based on a non-normalized distribution of chi squared. The CFI compares the proposed model with an independent model that stipulates the absence of correlation between the measured variables. CFI values range from 0 to 1, with a higher value representing a greater adjustment. According to Kelloway (1998), a CFI greater than 0.95 is desirable as it indicates a good adjustment.

The fourth index, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), is based on the estimated residual variances. The RMSEA calculates the variance that the model does not explain, representing the approximation of

error within the population. The closer to 0, the better the model – a value smaller than 0.05 suggests a well-adjusted model (Kelloway, 1998).

Within a structural equation model, two complementary models are used: the measurement model and the structural model. The next two sections first explain the purpose of a measurement model together with the results from this study, and then report the purpose and results of the structural model. The data from both the whole sample and the sample divided by sex are examined.

3.3.1 Measurement model

The measurement model represents a hypothesis about the relationship between the observed and latent (or unobserved) variables. The observed variables were the indicators which were selected based on the operational definition of the construct being measured. The latent variables represented the constructs that the indicators were presumed to measure and correspond to a hypothetical construct. For example, the latent variable of closeness is composed of three indicators: rejection, empathy and affection.

In the diagrams, the larger circles represent the latent variables being measured and the squares represent the indicators. The measurement model allows us to acknowledge and account for random error in this model.

The purpose of the measurement model is to examine the associations between the indicators of the latent variables. This is a way of testing for the independence of the measures. When the sample was divided according to the subject's sex, the analysis of the measurement model suggested that the study data fit the model (Chi squared = 260.67; df = 170; GFI = 0.92; CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.04). These results indicated that the models were equivalent for boys and girls, and that the same model could be used structurally with both the male and the female sample. In addition, the results indicated that a global analysis of the sample was appropriate.

3.3.2 Structural model

The model was tested for both the whole data sample and the sample divided according to sex, using structural equation modeling. As with the measurement model, the appropriateness of the structural model was tested and was found to be acceptable (Whole sample: Chi squared = 244.40; df = 110; GFI = 0.93; CFI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.06. Sample divided by sex: Chi squared = 301.26; df = 196; GFI = 0.91; CFI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.04). Figures 2, 3 and 4 illustrate the significant pathways among the variables of the model for the whole sample, for boys and for girls respectively. Numbers appearing in the figures represent beta values. The variables were standardized so that the same scale was used for all variables, thereby resulting in standard estimates. These figures may be found at the end of this chapter.

A majority of hypothesized pathways in the model were found to be significant and are discussed in the following pages. The sample is first discussed as a whole, and then according to male and female samples.

3.3.2.1 Whole sample

In terms of the parents' discipline behaviors of limits, supervision and punishment, none were found to significantly lead directly to psychological distress. These results are contrary to one of the primary hypotheses of this study. In contrast, a number of other variables had significant directional links to psychological distress.

The degree of maternal closeness had an influence on the amount of supervision ($\beta = .44$) and the number of limits ($\beta = .14$), but not on measures of psychological distress. High measures of closeness to the mother led to more supervision and fewer limits.

The pathway from paternal closeness to limits was also significant ($\beta = .14$), in the same sense as maternal closeness. In contrast to the data from mothers, the path from paternal closeness to supervision was not significant. The pathway from paternal closeness to psychological distress was significant ($\beta = -.17$). In other words, a higher level of closeness to the father led to significantly fewer limits and fewer symptoms of psychological distress.

The level of both maternal and paternal closeness influenced the amount of parental conflict (maternal closeness: $\beta = -.31$; paternal closeness: $\beta = -.28$).

Lower parental closeness led to more parental conflict.

A closer examination of the pathways from parental conflict revealed its influence on three variables. The amount of parental conflict had a significant impact on the degrees of supervision ($\beta = -.30$), punishment ($\beta = .36$), and psychological distress ($\beta = .40$). In other words, a high level of parental conflict led to significantly less supervision, more punishment, and higher ratings of adolescent psychological distress.

When the sample was analyzed within the context of the structural model, significant pathways emerged from each of the three demographic variables: sex, family structure and parental country of origin.

The sex of the adolescent had an influence on parental supervision and on measures of psychological distress. Girls rated themselves as more supervised than boys by their parents ($\beta = -.16$). The sex of the adolescent also predicted levels of psychological distress ($\beta = -.17$), where girls reported more symptoms than boys. The sex of the adolescent did not have an influence on the number of limits imposed by the parents.

The family structure predicted paternal closeness, parental conflict, and number of limits. The marital status of the parents predicted closeness to the father ($\beta = -.17$) but not to the mother; in the case of separated parents, closeness to the father was reported to be lower. There was a significant directional relationship from marital status to parental conflict ($\beta = -.13$), indicating that subjects experienced less conflict with their parents when the marriage was intact. Marital status was also shown to significantly influence the number of limits imposed by the parents ($\beta = .26$) in that parents who were together imposed more limits. Marital status did not predict psychological distress.

As hypothesized, the place of birth of the parents had an influence on the number of limits imposed on their adolescents ($\beta = -.39$). Parents who were born outside of Canada were reported to impose more limits on their adolescents.

3.3.2.2 Sample divided by sex: Boys

When the model was applied only to the male population, fewer paths in the model were found to be significant. In terms of the parents' discipline behaviors of limits, supervision and punishment, none were found to significantly lead directly to psychological distress in boys, in contrast to the results for the whole sample. There were, however, five significant pathways for boys between latent variables related to the influence of maternal and paternal closeness and parental conflict.

For boys, the degree of maternal closeness had an influence on the amount of supervision ($\beta = .40$), but not on the number of limits, as was the case for the whole sample. Levels of maternal closeness continued to have no significant effect on psychological distress. In sum, high measures of closeness to the mother led to more supervision of boys.

There was only one significant path leading from the latent variable of paternal closeness for the male sample. As had been found with the whole sample, closeness between father and son predicted neither limits, nor supervision, nor psychological distress. The levels of both maternal and paternal closeness for boys were found to influence the amount of parental conflict (maternal closeness: $\beta = -.21$; paternal closeness: $\beta = -.38$). That is to say that lower parental closeness led to more parental conflict for boys, which was also true for the whole sample.

Finally, results for the boys concurred with those of the entire sample once again in relation to the effects of parental conflict. The amount of reported parental conflict had a significant impact on the degrees of supervision ($\beta = -.25$), punishment ($\beta = .39$), and psychological distress ($\beta = .34$). High parental conflict led to significantly less supervision, more punishment, and higher ratings of psychological distress.

Two demographic variables that were investigated were family structure and country of origin of the parents. The three significant paths stemming from

marital status that were significant for the whole sample held true for the boys when the sample was divided by sex. First, marital status predicted closeness to the father ($\beta = -.15$) but not to the mother. In the case of divorce, boys reported less closeness to the father. Second, there was a significant directional relationship from marital status to parental conflict ($\beta = -.16$), where there was less conflict reported in families where the marriage was intact. Third, for boys, marital status was also shown to significantly influence the number of limits imposed by the parents ($\beta = .19$) in that parents who were together imposed more limits.

As with the whole sample, the place of birth of the parents had a significant influence on the number of limits imposed on their adolescent boys ($\beta = -.41$). Parents who were born outside of Canada were reported to impose more limits on behavior.

3.3.2.3 Sample divided by sex: Girls

The significant pathways in the structural model were somewhat different when the model was applied to the females in the sample as compared to the males. There were eight significant pathways relating to the influence of maternal and paternal closeness and parental conflict. A similarity that remained between the samples was that as with the previous analyses of the whole sample and the male sample, none of the parents' discipline behaviors of limits, supervision and

punishment were found to significantly lead directly to psychological distress in girls.

For girls, the degree of maternal closeness had an influence on the level of supervision ($\beta = .46$) and the number of limits ($\beta = .19$), as was the case for the whole sample. Maternal closeness continued to have no effect on psychological distress. That is to say that having a closer relationship with their mothers led girls to be more supervised and to have fewer limits imposed on their behaviors.

Closeness between fathers and their adolescent daughters predicted psychological distress ($\beta = -.29$). That is, a closer relationship with their fathers led to fewer symptoms of psychological distress in girls. This pathway was not found to be significant for boys.

As with the whole sample, the levels of both maternal and paternal closeness for girls were found to influence the amount of parental conflict (maternal closeness: $\beta = -.37$; paternal closeness: $\beta = -.20$). Lower measures of parental closeness led to more parental conflict not only for girls, but also for boys and for the sample as a whole.

Finally, results for the girls concurred with those of both the boys and the entire sample in relation to the effects of parental conflict. The amount of reported parental conflict had a significant impact on degrees of supervision

($\beta = -.36$), punishment ($\beta = .32$), and psychological distress ($\beta = .42$). High parental conflict led to significantly less supervision, more punishment, and higher ratings of psychological distress.

As for the two demographic variables, when the model was applied only to the female population, marital status was found to predict closeness to the father ($\beta = -.19$) and to the mother ($\beta = -.18$). In the case of separation, closeness to both parents was reported to be lower. This is in contrast to the data from the boys who had a significantly lower closeness to the father only. Marital status was also shown to significantly influence the number of limits imposed by the parents ($\beta = .37$) in that parents who were together imposed more limits on their girls. This finding was also true for the whole sample as well as for the boys. In contrast, there was no significant pathway from marital status to parental conflict, as had been observed with both the entire sample and the boys.

The place of birth of the parents again had a significant influence on the number of limits imposed on their adolescent girls ($\beta = -.35$). According to subject responses, parents who were born outside of Canada imposed significantly more limits for the girls, the boys and the whole sample combined.

Figure 2: Structural model: Significant pathways for whole sample

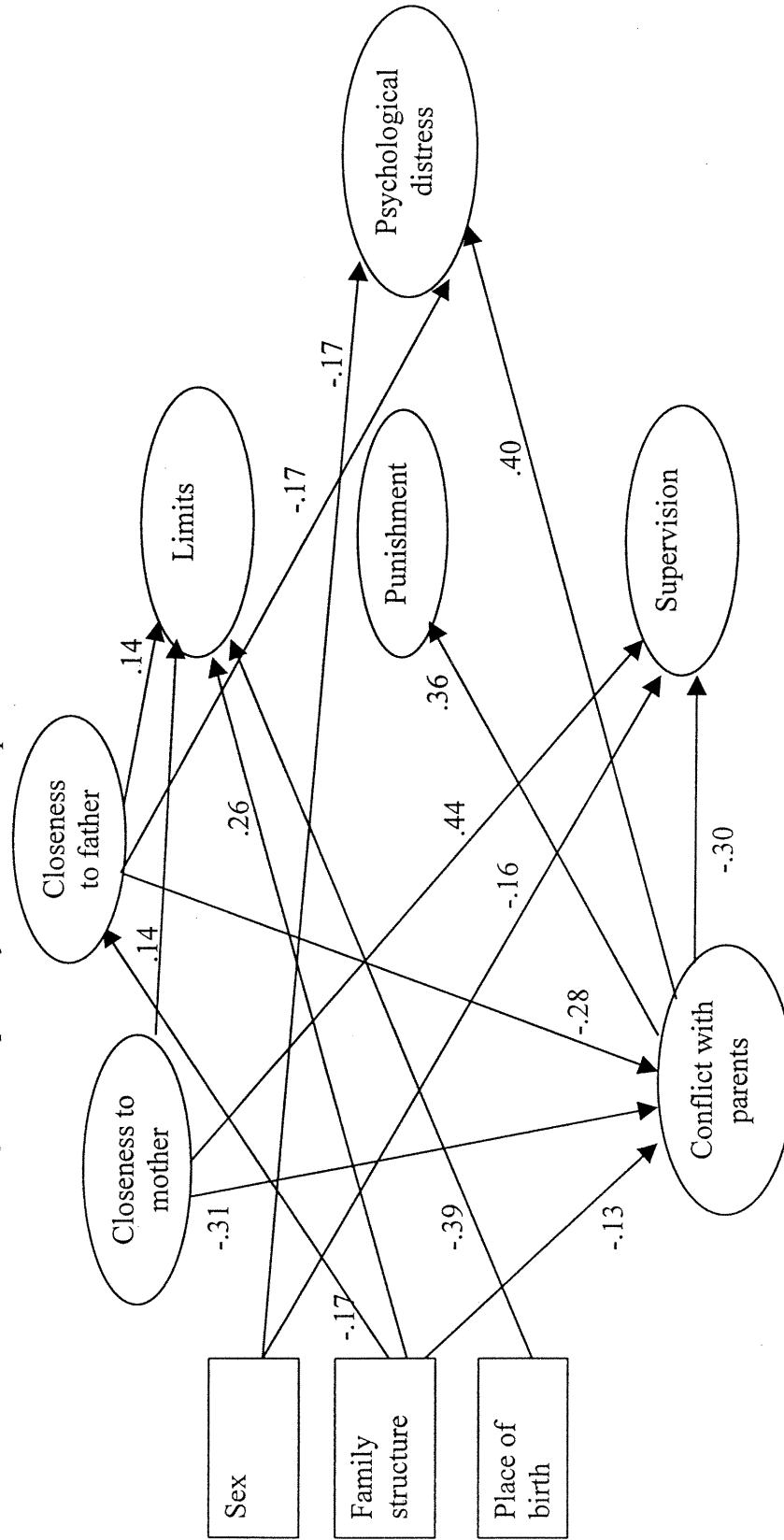


Figure 3: Structural model: Significant pathways for boys

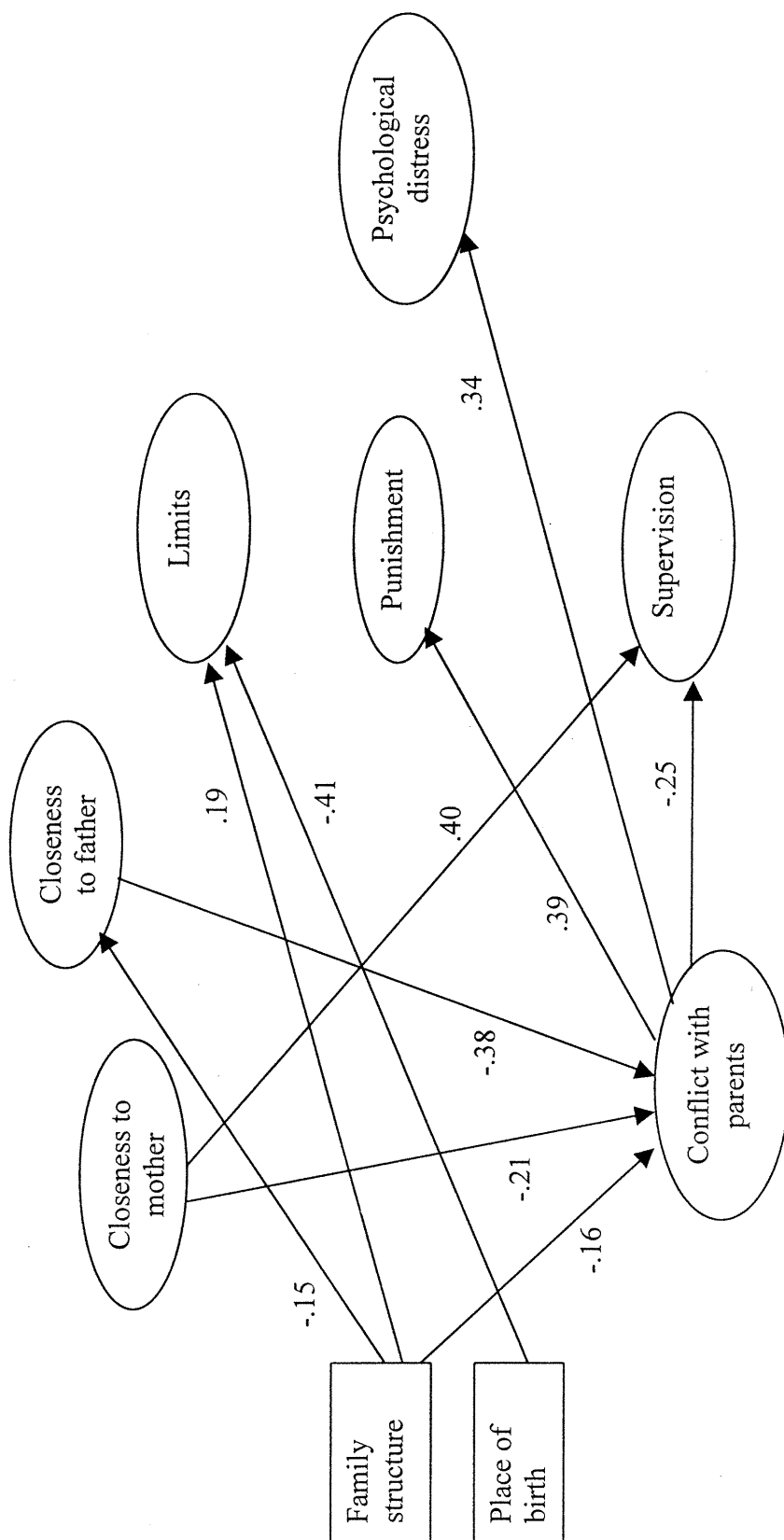
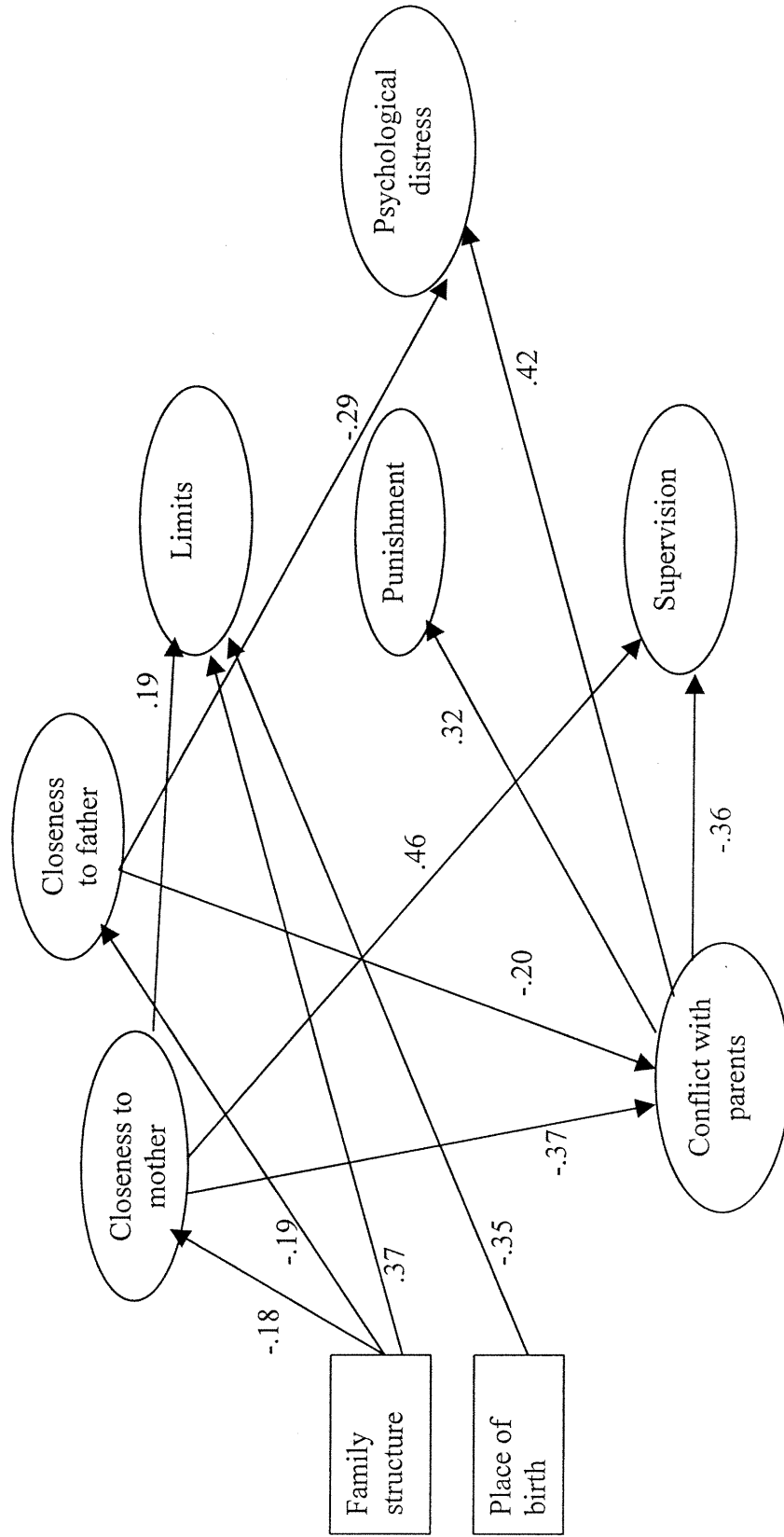


Figure 4: Structural model: Significant pathways for girls



CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Research has indicated that a variety of parenting practices can have an impact on the psychological well-being of children and adolescents. Studies have revealed psychological effects of the degree of closeness and the amount of conflict between parents and adolescents, and also of the particular disciplinary styles adopted by parents. Whereas these previous studies focused on the relationship between particular variables, the present study's goal was to incorporate many of these variables into a comprehensive directional model in order to provide a clearer picture of the interactions among closeness, conflict, disciplinary practices and psychological distress.

In order to determine the significant pathways in the model, data were collected through questionnaires given to 334 Grade 11 students from three schools in the Montreal region. The questionnaires included measures designed to assess each of the study variables. The data were then analyzed in three stages. First, the sources of variance were analyzed, followed by a determination of the correlations between the variables. Since these two statistical analyses supported the theoretical structural model, the model could then be tested using structural equation modeling. This third statistical process revealed the significant

pathways in the model for the whole sample, and for the sample divided according to sex.

This chapter is a discussion of the results in light of both the literature review and the initial hypotheses posed within the framework of the structural model. First, the lack of significant pathways from parental disciplinary styles to psychological distress is discussed. Though these relationships were non-significant, they contribute to a better understanding of the model. Second, the impact of closeness and conflict on parenting practices and psychological distress is explored. Third, the sources of variance are addressed: sex of the adolescent, family structure, and parents' place of birth. For each of these sections, results of the analysis of the structural model are taken into consideration for the sample as a whole, and then for the separate group of boys and girls. Strengths and weaknesses of this study are addressed as well as future directions for research. The chapter concludes with implications of this research on prevention of and intervention for psychological distress.

There are many psychological diagnoses related to depression and anxiety, most of which include the four domains assessed in this study (depression, anxiety, irritability and cognitive problems). It is important to note that this study did not attempt to diagnose any of the subjects with a particular psychological disorder; rather, the purpose was to determine the number and severity of

symptoms which would indicate a greater level of psychological distress (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Psychological distress was the ultimate focus of the study. Three significant pathways stemming from parental and demographic factors were found to have an impact on psychological distress: closeness to the father, conflict with parents, and sex of the adolescent. Each of these variables contributing to psychological distress in adolescents is addressed respectively in the sections on closeness with parents, conflict with parents and sources of variance. First, however, is an examination of the non-significant link between parental disciplinary styles and psychological distress.

Throughout this chapter's discussion of significant pathways, the reader may wish to refer to Figures 2, 3 and 4 found on pages 94 to 96.

4.1 Parental disciplinary practices

Several of the initial hypotheses posited in this research predicted that the type of parental disciplinary practices would have an effect on the level of psychological distress measures in adolescents. Specifically, it was hypothesized that parents who were weak in their levels of supervision and imposed few limits on their children would have adolescents who rated higher on measures of psychological distress. It was also hypothesized that punitive behavior would result in children with higher levels of psychological distress. This section

discusses the lack of support for these hypotheses within the context of previous findings and of the current structural model.

Research has indicated a curvilinear relationship between parental disciplinary behaviors and overall measures of psychological and behavioral adjustment. That is, parents practicing either extreme punitive or very permissive behavior have children with more psychological and behavioral difficulties (e.g. Dishion & McMahon, 1998; Steinberg, 1990). Specifically, research has indicated that parents who are too permissive tend to have children with symptoms of psychological distress, whereas parents who are too restrictive tend to have children with behavioral disorders (Amoroso & Ware, 1986; Baumrind, 1991).

Though there were significant links between these disciplinary variables in the correlational analyses for both boys and girls, these did not remain significant when all variables were incorporated into the structural model. These results suggest that the type of discipline exerted by a parent, whether in terms of limits, supervision or punishment, does not have a direct causal link to psychological distress symptoms for either boys or girls. The structural analysis indicates that other variables such as closeness and conflict with parents as well as gender are the only significant links to psychological distress within the context of the integrative model. Therefore, when disciplinary and relational variables are

incorporated together into a model, the disciplinary variables lose their predictive value in favor of those of closeness and conflict.

These unexpected results likely stem from the fact that previous studies cited in the literature review that examined the relationship between disciplinary practices and psychological distress were done mainly with correlational analysis. The present study, however, used a structural model that also incorporated closeness and conflict. This allowed for a more precise interpretation of the role played by each of the particular variables within the group of study variables. What follows is a discussion of the relational variables that do in fact have a significant directional relationship to psychological distress in adolescents.

4.2 Closeness to parents

Three components constituted the measure of maternal and paternal closeness: affection, empathy and rejection. Subjects answered questions on issues such as whether parents were affectionate and warm, whether parents understood what their children needed, and whether parents were unfair or absent from the relationship. These three components were significantly interrelated for each parent (with the rejection component inversed), indicating that they were measuring similar concepts within the domain of parental closeness. This allowed closeness to each parent to be a latent variable, meaning that rather than looking separately at affection, empathy and rejection, the model could treat the three components as a whole for each parent. The following two sections examine

significant pathways from parental closeness to psychological distress and from parental closeness to disciplinary practices.

4.2.1 Closeness to parents and psychological distress

This section discusses three main findings with regards to the pathways from closeness to psychological distress. First, a closer relationship to the father led to significantly fewer reports of distress. Second, this finding was particularly true for girls. Third, family structure affected levels of parental closeness, which in turn had an impact on psychological distress; a discussion is begun on this topic and is elaborated in a later section (4.4.2 Family structure). Each finding is presented and is then discussed within the context of the literature. The section closes with a discussion of the specificity of the father-daughter relationship as compared to the mother-daughter relationship.

In the correlational analysis, measures of parental closeness were significantly negatively correlated to psychological distress; that is, when the bond between an adolescent and their parent was strong, the adolescent reported fewer symptoms of psychological distress. However, taken within the context of the structural model of the whole sample, this only held true for fathers. The structural analysis of the pathways between parental closeness and distress indicated that a closer relationship with the father led to fewer symptoms of psychological distress, whereas with regards to the relationship with the mother, the effect of closeness was not significant. These findings, therefore, partially

supported the fourth hypothesis that a closer relationship *to the father* would protect against psychological distress.

As discussed in the theoretical context, the closeness between parent and child declines as the child progresses through adolescence (e.g. Helsen, Vollenberg & Meeus, 2000; Noller & Callan, 1986, 1988). Despite this decline in closeness, researchers have indicated that maintaining parental support and cohesion is important in the psychological development of adolescents. Parent-adolescent bonds have been shown to be important in maintaining psychological well-being, good self-esteem, and lower levels of anxiety and depression (Burt, Cohen & Bjorck, 1988; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Rice, 1990). The present study supports these findings, but only in the case of fathers and their adolescents.

A second main finding relating to parental closeness and psychological distress emerged when the sample was divided according to gender: the path from paternal closeness to psychological distress was only observed in girls. This gender difference supports others studies, such as one by Helsen and colleagues (2000), who found that lack of parental support appeared to be more important for girls than for boys when predicting emotional difficulties. In addition, literature on female depression has suggested that girls may be more vulnerable to psychological distress given their greater preoccupation with interpersonal concerns (Leadbeater, Blatt & Quinlan, 1995).

The importance of the father-daughter relationship revealed in this study supports previous findings by Collins and Russell (1991), Gilligan (1996) and Shek (1998). Collins and Russell (1991) focused on parent-adolescent dyads. Of all four combinations of dyads involving fathers, mothers, sons and daughters, they discovered that the father-daughter relationship was particularly marked by tension. In her study, Gilligan (1996) focussed on the role that parents play in their daughter's psychological development. Her studies indicated that girls with close relationships to their parents were better able to develop an ability for emotional regulation. She also found that positive parental relationships contributed to girls' intrapersonal understanding. Shek (1998) furthered this reflection when he discovered that father-adolescent conflict had a greater impact on psychological well-being than did mother-adolescent conflict. Taken together, these findings indicate that father-daughter relationships may be more tumultuous than other parent-adolescent dyads, that difficulties in the father-adolescent relationship may have a greater impact on psychological well-being, and that girls benefit more from a close relationship with their parents.

A closer examination of paternal closeness and psychological distress in girls reveals a third finding. There was a directional link from family structure to paternal closeness, suggesting that closeness to the father is negatively affected when the parents are not living together, which can then lead to psychological distress in girls. As discussed in the later section on family structure, fathers tend to be less present in the family unit following a divorce or separation. In the

majority of Canadian cases of divorce, the mother has custody over the children (Statistics Canada, 1999). This would lead to a greater variability in the physical and psychological presence of the father in families where the parents are separated, and would allow for a clearer examination of the impact of this relationship. Adolescents become less close to their fathers as a result of parental separation, and girls are affected more strongly by this distance in the relationship than are boys (Leadbeater, Blatt & Quinlan, 1995). Conversely, mothers are more often present following a separation, both physically and emotionally, which allows for a continuation of the existing mother-child relationship. This is indicated in the structural model given the lack of significant pathways from family structure to maternal closeness.

In sum, results of this portion of the analysis indicate that girls who have a closer relationship with their fathers are less likely to experience symptoms of psychological distress. When girls feel less connected to their fathers, particularly in the case of parental separation, they are more likely negatively affected psychologically than are boys.

4.2.2 Closeness to parents and disciplinary practices

The levels of closeness to parents had an influence on the number of limits placed on behavior and the level of supervision. Contrary to the first clause of the fifth hypothesis, a close relationship with either parent led to a lower level of limits – the opposite was expected. In agreement with the second clause of the

fifth hypothesis, a closer relationship with the mother led to an increased level of supervision; however, it was expected that a closer relationship with either parent would lead to a higher level of supervision. Finally, it had been hypothesized that a closer parent-child relationship would lead to parents adopting a less severe form of punishment; this hypothesis was not supported in either direction. That is to say that the level of closeness with the parents appeared to have no effect on consequences for misbehavior.

Each of these findings is discussed in the text that follows. First is an examination of the link between closeness and parental limits that is found only in girls, as well as hypotheses about the differences between the sexes with respect to this finding. Second, is a discussion of the pathway between closeness to the mother and supervision. This discussion raises methodological issues regarding the measurement of parental supervision. In addition, the lack of pathway between the same variables for the father is addressed.

First, when the sample was divided by gender, the link between parental closeness and limits held true only for girls. This would suggest that girls are given fewer limitations to their behaviors when they have a close relationship with their parents. Conversely, girls who have a more distant relationship with their parents have more restrictions imposed on their behavior. As discussed later in this chapter, the boys and girls did not differ in terms of the measures of limits. This indicates that parents are more consistent in applying limits to their sons'

behavior; however, the limits they set to their daughters' behavior is dependent on the relationship they have with her.

A closer parental relationship led to fewer limits imposed on girls' behavior. This pathway was not found for boys. Research findings relating to girls and psychological distress could be applied in the case of parental relationships. Studies have suggested that girls have a greater preoccupation with interpersonal concerns than boys (Gilligan, 1996; Leadbeater, Blatt & Quinlan, 1995). Thus the greater impact that the quality of the parental relationship has on a girl could also influence her behavior and communication with her parents. Girls who feel closer to their parents may be more likely to be attuned to and act in accordance with the expectations of their parents, thereby limiting the number of external limits that parents would have to set. In addition, girls with a closer relationship are more likely to communicate with their parents (Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck & Duckett, 1996) and to negotiate the limits that are set.

A second finding that related parental closeness and disciplinary practices involved measures of supervision. A greater closeness to the mother led to higher levels of supervision for the whole sample, as well as when divided according to sex. The questionnaire relating to supervision asked subjects whether their parents knew information relevant to their lives such as who their friends were, the types of activities they were involved with after school and their school work and behavior. It is possible that if both parents and adolescents had responded to

this questionnaire, the answers might not have concurred. For example, parents might have reported that they knew where their children were and what they were doing, when in fact the child was outside of the home, involved in activities of which parents were unaware. A related study by Callan and Noller (1986), detailed in Chapter 1, suggested that adolescents are more accurate in their assessments of family dynamics; however, they rate their families more positively than outside raters. It had been determined prior to administering the questionnaire that the adolescent respondents would be more accurate than either their parents or outsiders in their assessment of their parents' knowledge of their activities and whereabouts.

It is important to examine the methodology of this study before interpreting the results related to closeness and supervision, since it affects the interpretation. Because adolescents who were reportedly closer to their mothers were also more supervised, one could hypothesize that this was due to the greater communication between mother and child. In fact, a study by Kerr and colleagues (1999) discussed the issue of parental supervision and adolescents' self-disclosure. They found that when parents were aware of their children's activities, it was generally because the children spontaneously shared this information with the parents.

Recent research has suggested that as adolescents age, they spend less time with their parents; however, the time they do spend with their parents is

more concentrated in certain areas such as one-on-one communication (Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck & Duckett, 1996). One could hypothesize that the mothers who have a closer relationship to their child are not actually supervising their day-to-day behaviors more, but rather are more aware through interpersonal communication. A more distant relationship would suggest less communication between mother and child, and therefore a mother would have less knowledge of her adolescent's activities and whereabouts, making her less able to supervise.

The pathway between closeness and supervision held true only for mothers and not for fathers. This would suggest that either the mothers in the present study made more of an effort to supervise or the children allowed their mothers more access to their lives. It is possible that the results are due to a greater interpersonal interest on the part of women in general (Leadbeater et al., 1995), who are more interested in cultivating a close relationship with their child. Research has also indicated that mothers are more often perceived as the central figure in the family with respect to emotional issues. Adolescents are more likely to spend more time with their mothers, to talk more frequently with her for a longer time, and to discuss more personal issues with her than they are with their fathers (Collins & Russell, 1991; Noller & Callan, 1990).

In sum, the first main finding was that girls who have a closer relationship with their parents have fewer limits imposed on their behavior. Two possible explanations for this finding are proposed. First, parents may be setting fewer

limits on their daughters' behaviors when they are closer to her due to the increased communication and chance for negotiation of these limits.

Alternatively, parents might not have to set as many limits since their daughters have internalized the unspoken codes of acceptable behavior in the family because they are close to their parents. The second main finding was that mothers who are closer to their children supervise them more and know more about their children's activities and whereabouts. Again, the communication between the parent and child are important in allowing adolescents to share their lives with their parents. These findings highlight the importance of interpersonal closeness between parents and children within the context of parenting behaviors.

4.3 Conflict with parents

Subjects rated their level of conflict with parents by responding to a list of issues that are common sources of conflict within a family. They rated the level to which issues such as household chores and school marks created conflict between them and their parents. Since the levels of conflict with each parent were strongly positively correlated, this suggested that adolescents experienced relatively similar levels of conflict with each parent. In the structural model, therefore, it was decided that overall conflict with parents would be considered single latent variable. In other words, rather than examining pathways from conflict with each parent separately, the study combined maternal and paternal conflict to form one variable.

The following three sections address pathways stemming from parental closeness to each of three other variables: parental conflict, psychological distress, and disciplinary practices.

4.3.1 Closeness to parents and conflict with parents

As was hypothesized, lower measures of closeness to the mother and to the father in the model each led to an increased amount of parental conflict for the whole sample as well as when divided by gender. As was discussed in Chapter 1, psychodynamically-oriented theories supposed that conflict was a natural component to the parent-child relationship as the child aged through adolescence. This conflict with parents was seen to aid in the development of autonomy (Blos, 1979; Freud, 1958). In contrast, other empirically-based researchers have more recently suggested that although the relationship between the parent and the child changes during adolescence, conflict is not necessary to the development of autonomy (e.g. Steinberg, 1990).

This latter perspective seems to be best supported by the present study's findings in that those adolescents who were closer to their parents experienced less conflict. A close relationship with parents is often characterized by positive communication (Larson et al., 1996), which in turn diminishes the probability of conflict. If issues such as household chores are discussed between parent and child, there is more likelihood of reaching an agreement on the issue, thereby avoiding conflict. Adolescents who are more distant with their parents likely

communicate with them less, leaving more room for misunderstandings and conflict to arise.

According to the results of the present study, strengthening the parent-child relationship by developing closer ties with each parent would likely decrease the amount of conflict between adolescents and their parents. This is particularly important given that research has indicated that the presence of serious conflict in a parent-child relationship can lead to negative psychological outcomes such as depression (Allen et al., 1996; Steinberg, 1990). This finding was also supported by the present study and is addressed in the following section.

4.3.2 Conflict with parents and psychological distress

The seventh hypothesis predicted that higher levels of parental conflict would lead to higher measures of psychological distress. This was supported by the present study for the whole sample as well as when the sample was divided according to sex. This finding has been supported by the empirical literature (Allen et al., 1996; Steinberg, 1990) which suggests that high levels of conflict can lead to stress within a family and can cause distress among family members.

Since the present study was done within the context of a theoretical model, it is possible to examine more than one pathway to a final point. Of particular interest is the three-way pathway stemming from parental closeness and leading to parental conflict and then to psychological distress. (Please refer to Figure 2.)

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This would suggest a more complex source of psychological distress. Not only is conflict between parent and child possibly detrimental to the overall well-being of the adolescent, but also this conflict is particularly present when closeness to the parents is low. This finding supports the perspective of attachment theorists who have posited that weak parental attachment can create difficulties in the parent-adolescent relationship. These difficulties may involve distortions or a lack of understanding in communication between the parties, and may also generate hostility in the relationship (e.g. Van Ijzendoorn, Schuengel, Bakermans-Kranenberg, 1999).

4.3.3 Conflict with parents and disciplinary practices

As hypothesized, subjects who rated higher levels of conflict with their parents tended to be less supervised and to be punished more severely. These two findings held true for the whole sample as well as when divided according to sex.

The first finding was that parents who were rated as experiencing a greater conflictual relationship with their adolescents tended to supervise them less. As was discussed earlier regarding the pathway between closeness and supervision, there are fewer opportunities to supervise if children do not communicate their activities and whereabouts with parents. One would imagine that a family experiencing high levels of conflict, which was likely precipitated by low levels of closeness, would be less likely to have an adolescent eager to communicate his or her activities and whereabouts, particularly if some of these activities or destinations are points of contention. The lack of communication between parent

and child would make supervision more difficult, and would likely contribute to the parent being less aware of their child's life outside the home.

A second finding relating conflict with parents and disciplinary behaviors was that parents who were experiencing conflictual relationships with their adolescents tended to punish them more severely. When faced with a misbehavior, such as coming home after curfew or having a significant drop in grades, parents in conflict with their adolescents tended not to be permissive, or to discuss the matter with their child - rather they tended to adopt a more punitive approach by limiting their privileges, by giving them additional chores, or by reacting by yelling.

Given a relationship that is already strained by conflict with a lack of communication, this could potentially lead parents to adopt more coercive disciplinary measures. In addition, since these parents are less aware of their child's activities, the child could have a greater possibility of getting involved in unacceptable or delinquent behaviors which might lead parents to take a more punitive approach (Dishion & McMahon, 1998).

4.4 Sources of variance

This structural research focused on three sources of variance between the groups: sex of the adolescent, the family structure and the parents' place of birth.

Each of these sources of variance will now be examined in more detail, in view of current research in this area.

4.4.1 Sex of adolescent

There were two variables along which girls and boys differed: parental supervision and depressive symptoms. The ninth hypothesis of the study was that girls and boys would differ in the level of supervision and limits imposed by parents. This hypothesis was partially confirmed given the difference in ratings of supervision; however, there were no significant differences in the ratings of parental limits. The tenth hypothesis was confirmed – that girls would rate higher on measures of psychological distress than boys.

The first significant gender-related finding was that the girls reported being more closely supervised by their parents than did the boys. The level of parental supervision had been determined based on subjects' reports of whether the parents knew who their friends were, knew the types of activities they were involved with after school, and were aware of their school work and behavior. Overall, parents were more knowledgeable of more aspects of their daughters' lives than their sons'.

The results of the current study taken together with previous findings suggest that the gender of the child plays an important role in parenting behaviors. The higher ratings of supervision could be due to factors related to the daughters,

to their parents, or to a combination of factors. For example, adolescent girls' earlier physical maturity might lead parents to supervise them more closely than their sons who attain puberty at a later age (Berk, 2000). On the other hand, the difference could be due to learned parenting behaviors that traditionally encouraged different qualities in daughters and sons. The "double-standard" that parents treat their children differently due to their gender is one that continues to exist according to the present study, although it may not be as prevalent as it was in past decades (Ruble & Martin, 1998). In sum, there are a number of hypotheses for the reasons why parents supervise their daughters more than their sons; however, the findings of the present study do not clarify the reasons for these differences.

The structural model suggested no differences between the sexes in terms of parental limits. In other words, the study sample of adolescent boys and girls reported a relatively equal number of limits to their behavior. Taken as a whole, the results of gender differences in parental disciplinary behaviors suggest that although parents may equally limit the activities of their sons and daughters, they may follow up more closely on whether these limits are being respected when it comes to their daughters.

Outside of parental variables, another important difference was found between the sexes: girls rated themselves higher than boys on symptoms related to psychological distress, even when all the other variables were factored into the

structural model. This confirms the eighth hypothesis, and suggests that there exists a difference between the sexes on this measure regardless of parental relationships or parental discipline. This was an expected result, given that adolescent girls have historically been found to display more depressive symptomatology than their male counterparts (e.g. Hill & Lynch, 1983). Petersen and Ebata (1987) found that by age 17 years, girls had a significantly more depressive affect and a poorer emotional well-being than boys. As discussed in Chapter 1, two studies from Quebec also support these findings. Santé Québec's study (1993) reported that from a sample of 825 young adolescents, girls reported four times more internalizing symptoms than boys. A more recent study of 306 French-speaking Quebec adolescents revealed that girls aged 14 to 17 years also reported significantly more depressive symptoms than boys (Marcotte, Alain & Gosselin, 1999).

A number of hypotheses for the differences in depression ratings between girls and boys were elaborated in the first chapter. For example, girls may face greater biological and social challenges associated with adolescence, and may also have particular personality and behavioral factors that place them more at risk, such as a greater response to social stress, a less effective coping system, or a greater preoccupation with interpersonal concerns (Compas, Orosan & Grant, 1993; Leadbeater, Blatt & Quinlan, 1995; Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 1994). None of the above-cited authors found strong evidence for hormonal or biochemical causes of depression. In fact, Ruble and colleagues (1993) suggested

that estrogen levels accounted for only one percent of the variance in rates of depression in women, whereas life events were significantly more important in the development of depression.

4.4.2 Family structure

Subjects were divided according to whether their parents lived together or apart. There were significant differences between the groups on three measures: limits, closeness to father, and conflict with parents.

The first significant difference between families in which the parents were together or separated was in the measure of limits. In families where the parents were separated, subjects reported having fewer limits imposed on their behavior versus those from families where the parental couple was intact. These results partially confirmed the eleventh hypothesis that parental separation would lead to both fewer limits and less supervision; however, there was no significant difference between the groups with respect to supervision. These findings support research by Dornbusch and colleagues (1987) who found that single parents were generally more permissive in the behaviors they allowed their children to engage in. This could be due to the fact that a two-parent household might be more capable of setting and enforcing limits, given that there are more adults present to do so. In fact, Hetherington and colleagues (1978) highlighted the difficulty that single mothers have in supervising their children, given the number of home and work demands placed on them. On the other hand, if a single parent were less

able to set limits, this would also suggest that he or she would be equally less able to fully supervise the children; a finding that was not supported by the present study. Another possibility is that parental separation changes the nature of the parent-child relationship, such that the parents become less restrictive of their children's behaviors, even though they continue to monitor them.

The second significant difference with respect to family structure was the measure of paternal closeness. Adolescents from families that were not intact reported a weaker relationship with their father. That is to say that in cases of separated parents, the adolescents in our sample were not as close to their fathers as to their mothers. There are two possibilities that may explain this lack of closeness. First, research has suggested that children may interpret their parents' separation from an ego-centric point of view. Children may feel that they are a cause of the dissolution of the marriage, or that by choosing to separate from a spouse, the parent is also choosing to separate from the child (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Thus, if adolescents sense that they are the cause of parental separation, this could lead to a distancing from the parents. This first theory, however, does not account for the specificity of the link towards the father. If children distance themselves from parents who separate, then one would expect the pathways in the model to indicate less closeness towards both mother and father.

Another possibility for the distancing in the relationship could be due to the lack of presence of the father following a parental separation. Following a divorce, 61.2% of mothers gain custody of the children versus 11% of fathers. In the remaining 27.6% of cases the couple has joint custody (Statistics Canada, 1999). The physical absence of the father in the family after a divorce and limited visitation times would also likely weaken a parent-child relationship. This second theory appears more likely, given the Canadian statistics on custody. A more in-depth study comparing the parent-child relationship in cases of custodial mothers versus custodial fathers would help to respond to this hypothesis.

A third significant difference between intact and separated families was that adolescents from families in which the parents were separated experienced more conflict with their parents. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this is partly due to the level of closeness with the parents. That is to say that the closer children are with their parents, the less likely there is to be conflict. In addition, subjects with separated parents were less close to their fathers, which would predict that they would also experience more conflict with their fathers.

On the other hand, had the conflict only been due to the levels of closeness with parents, the direct link from family structure to parental conflict would not have remained in the structural model. The results of this study therefore suggest that the actual state of having parents who are separated predicts a higher level of

conflict in the family, regardless of the level of closeness between the parent and adolescent.

The importance of being able to resolve family conflict was highlighted by Ayoub and colleagues (1999) who found that families that experienced higher levels of conflict had children with greater levels of psychological distress. Those families that were able to minimize the levels of conflict often had children who fared better in the long term. On the whole, families that were not intact seemed less able to minimize conflict and continued to have higher levels of conflict than those that were intact.

4.4.3 Parents' place of birth

For the final analysis based on sources of variance, subjects were divided into two groups depending on whether their parents were born in Canada or in another country. This was done in order to determine whether cultural factors would affect parental relationships, disciplinary practices, and psychological distress. Given the constraints of the sample, subjects were not grouped according to parental country of origin. Had there been a much larger sample, it would have been possible to examine the differences between continents or even countries of origin. It was hypothesized that the parenting practices would be more restrictive in terms of limits, supervision and punishment.

The only difference between the two groups in the structural model was found in the number of limits on behavior. Those adolescents with parents born outside of Canada reportedly had more limits set on their behavior by their parents than those with Canadian-born parents. Subjects were questioned on limits related to their curfew, their interactions with their friends, and their behaviors. For example, subjects were asked whether their parents would allow them to come home after midnight on a weekend, to sleep over at a friend's house (of the same sex), or to drink wine or beer with their friends. There are two hypotheses that suggest why non-Canadian parents might impose more limits on their adolescent child's behavior.

First, it has been shown that North American parents tend to adopt a more liberal view of child rearing than their counterparts in other countries, such as those in Asia and Africa (Jambunathan, Burts & Pierce, 2000). North Americans tend to adopt a more democratic approach to family life and a more open atmosphere, where limits are discussed, and parents and children have input into family decisions. It is possible that when foreign-born parents come to Canada they maintain the more restrictive or authoritarian practices that are traditional to their country of origin. Limits are set by parents and are not discussed, thereby leaving the adolescent little or no possibility of negotiating otherwise.

A second hypothesis is that most immigrants seek to fit into their host culture. They do not want to appear to be difficult, or to be demanding of too

many services. Their parental practices may be seen as an extension of this desire to be accepted – they do not want their children to stand out from the others by getting into trouble with the school or community, and may impose more limits on behavior so as to encourage their children to conduct themselves in a proper manner (Taylor, Chatters, Tucker & Lewis, 1990).

4.5 Implications of the research

The implications of this research stem from the three significant pathways to psychological distress that emerged from the structural model: conflict with parents, closeness between girls and their fathers, and the sex of the adolescent. The pathway from girls to psychological distress supports the findings of numerous empirical studies that adolescent and adult females experience more psychological symptoms of distress than males. This issue has previously been addressed in Chapter 1 and will not be discussed further in this section. The two pathways relating to the parent-adolescent relationship have implications for prevention and family intervention of psychological distress, as does the lack of a significant pathways emerging from disciplinary practices. The discussion in this section focuses therefore on the clinical implications of parental practices first in terms of discipline, where no pathway was found, and then in terms of conflict and closeness where significant links were supported.

Contrary to much of the literature in the domain, this research suggests that what parents do in terms of disciplinary practices has no significant impact on

adolescents' psychological well-being. The implication of this finding is that familial interventions for psychological distress in adolescents should focus elsewhere than on disciplinary practices; rather, the focus should be on issues related to conflict with parents and parental closeness.

Conflict with parents was the one familial variable that had an impact on levels of psychological distress that recurred in all three groupings of subjects. Adolescents reporting higher levels of conflict with their parents had greater levels of psychological distress. It is important to note that not all conflict within a family is necessarily harmful, according to the literature. Researchers have suggested that conflict is a normal and natural part of familial relationships. According to conflict theory, conflict is seen as helpful to the relationship since it allows the family to address contentious issues. A family with good communication abilities should be able to negotiate the conflict in order to reach a resolution. The theory dictates that conflict becomes problematic when the family is no longer able to communicate on these issues (Eshleman & Wilson, 2001)

Placing the study results within the context of conflict theory leads to the implication that rather than necessarily seeking to eliminate conflict, families should focus on communication and conflict resolution skills. This recommendation addresses both prevention and intervention. First, an awareness of the effects of high levels of conflict should be publicized to parents and adolescents alike. Second, families should be encouraged to communicate and to

resolve small conflicts as they arise. Families who recognize the existence of disruptive parent-adolescent conflict should develop, or seek help in developing, their communication skills before it results in feelings of psychological distress. Finally, families experiencing high levels of conflict with distressed adolescents could seek family therapy to address and attempt to resolve the conflictual relationship.

The third important implication relates to closeness of the father to adolescent girls; girls who felt a weaker connection to their fathers rated higher on distress symptoms. This result, along with other findings in the literature, implies that encouraging fathers and daughters to nurture their relationship would help prevent negative psychological outcomes for girls. This is particularly true in the case of parental separation which tends to negatively affect paternal relationships more than relationships with mothers, given that fathers are more frequently absent from the home following a separation. If parents are separated, results of this study would recommend that daughters and their fathers should be encouraged to maintain, when possible, a relationship that involves closeness and affection.

In conclusion, these findings suggest that all families should be encouraged to communicate and to seek help when communication becomes conflictual. Families should seek to nurture close parent-adolescent relationships, particularly those between fathers and daughters. Results of the study indicate

that those families with adolescents in distress should seek help in resolving family disputes, as well as in developing a closer, more affectionate and empathetic relationship with their adolescent.

4.6 Strengths and weaknesses of the present research

There are three main strengths to the present study: the sample composition, the strength of the instruments, and the statistical methodology. In contrast, a limitation of this study lies in the directionality of the model.

First, the sample used in this study was relatively large with over 300 subjects. Although this was a sample of convenience, efforts were made to obtain students representing a variety of backgrounds in terms of family structure, socio-economics and ethnic origin. In addition, this study highlighted the situation of Québécois students, in contrast to the main body of literature that tends to be American.

A second strength of the study was the psychometric qualities of the battery of questionnaires. The instruments that composed this battery had high levels of factorial validity and of internal consistency. Having well-constructed instruments contributed to the validity of the present study's results, which in turn lent more credence to the conclusions.

Finally, the statistical methodology of structural equation modeling allowed for the testing of a comprehensive directional model. As indicated in the present research, correlational analysis initially confirmed some of the hypotheses, such as the relationship between parental disciplinary practices and psychological distress. However, within the context of a structural model, some of the hypotheses were negated and correlations became non-significant. The structural model highlighted the importance of other factors, such as the impact of conflict and closeness with the father on psychological distress. Performing an exclusively traditional multivariate analysis would have led to different and inaccurate conclusions.

The main limitation of this study lay in the directionality of the model. The model constructed for this study was based on study hypotheses, which were in turn based on developmental theory and previous empirical findings. The direction of the arrows in the theoretical model was also based on theory and previous research results. The limitation to this study is that it is difficult to discern whether the pathways could be reversed, or be bi-directional. For example, in the model, conflict with parents led to high ratings of punishment. It is equally possible that being punished could provoke conflict between the parent and adolescent, which would require the pathway to point in the opposite direction. This limitation highlights the importance of having a sound theoretical model, since this is a limitation of path analysis.

4.7 Future directions for research in this area

There are two main areas where further research in this area would be useful. First, further investigation is needed to establish the degree of importance of conflict with parents on adolescent psychological distress. Secondly, an exploration of the impact of the father's relationship to daughters is needed with regard to symptoms of psychological distress.

The results of this research clearly indicated that higher levels of conflict with the parents led to higher levels of psychological distress in both male and female adolescents. Of interest in future research is the nature of conflict with the parents that is particularly problematic in the development of psychological distress. One might investigate how some families cope with their conflict in a positive manner, while others are less able to do so.

A second area for further study involves the impact of the relationship with the father. As seen in the female sample, the relationship with the father was directly affected by the family structure, which in turn led to psychological distress. Only the relationship with the father appeared to be negatively affected by parental separation, and not with the mother. This could be due to the often-limited presence of the father in the case of parental separation (Statistics Canada, 1999). A study could be conducted comparing adolescent girls of custodial mothers with those of custodial fathers to see whether the pathways to psychological distress differ. An alternate hypothesis would be that the particular

contributions that the father brings to his relationship with his daughter is important in the development of psychological distress symptoms, and is not related to his presence or absence within the parental dyad.

4.8 Conclusion

Research has indicated that parents play an important role in the psychological development of adolescents. Psychological theories and empirical research have focused on the importance of parental disciplinary behaviors, the level of closeness in parent-child relationships and the amount of conflict between the two parties. This study investigated the significance of these parental variables on psychological distress in adolescents within the framework of a directional model. Parenting practices were dissected into disciplinary behaviors (limits, supervision and consequences), closeness to each parent, and overall conflict with parents.

Three high schools in the Montreal area cooperated in providing study data from over 300 French-speaking Grade 11 students. The students responded to a battery of questionnaires that had previously been shown to have good psychometric qualities. Preliminary data analysis revealed that the theoretical model fit the data, and the structural model was tested under three conditions: whole sample, boys and girls.

A number of significant pathways emerged, and the male and female profiles differed in some important respects. First, parental conflict was the most consistent significant pathway to psychological distress for both genders. Regardless of the choice of gender sample tested, analyses indicated that conflict between the parents and the adolescents was the most likely factor leading to psychological distress. According to the model, conflict with parents was predicted by the level of closeness to the parents. Adolescents who reported a more distant relationship with their parents were significantly more likely to experience conflict with them. For girls, a lack of closeness to the father was also a direct pathway to psychological distress. This was discussed in light of attachment theorists who highlight the developmental importance of the father-daughter relationship.

Main demographic findings included the greater number of girls reporting symptoms of psychological distress, regardless of parental factors. This finding has long been supported by scientific study and a number of hypotheses for this difference between the sexes was discussed. A second demographic finding indicated that adolescents had a weaker connection to their parents when the latter were separated, particularly in the case of fathers. Parental separation can affect a child's relationship with each parent, particularly if only one parent has custody. Relationships with fathers are likely more affected given the prevalence of Canadian mothers who gain custody of their children.

In the model, none of the three types of disciplinary practices was found to lead to psychological distress in adolescents. Demographic and parental relationship variables influenced the form of parental disciplinary practices; however, none of these connections revealed significant pathways to psychological distress.

In conclusion, findings of the present study suggest that relational variables of conflict and closeness with parents are important in predicting psychological distress. What the parents do in terms of their disciplinary styles do not appear to have an impact on psychological distress in adolescents.

Implications of this study are that family interventions for adolescents experiencing psychological distress should focus on strengthening the relationships between parents and their children. This could diminish the amount of conflict and reduce the possibility of psychological distress symptoms. Further directions for study include a deeper examination of the impact of parental conflict and of the father-daughter relationship on psychological distress. In addition, future studies should focus on prevention through means of developing closer parent-adolescent relationships and positive communication skills to deal with conflict.

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APPENDIX A

**BATTERY OF QUESTIONNAIRES
ADMINISTERED TO THE SUBJECTS**

1. Quel est ton âge: ans mois
2. Sexe (cocher): féminin
 masculin
3. Dans quelle classe es-tu (indiquer):.....
4. Lieu de naissance des parents (indique le pays où ils sont nés)?
Père:
Mère:
5. Est-ce que tes parents sont (cocher la bonne réponse):
 mariés
 séparés ou divorcés
 autre (spécifie).....
6. Actuellement, avec quel(s) adulte(s) habites-tu (encercler)?
a) père et mère
b) mère seulement
c) père seulement
d) mère et nouveau conjoint
e) père et nouvelle conjointe
f) autre (spécifie):.....

SI TES PARENTS SONT SÉPARÉS OU DIVORCÉS, réponds aux questions 6, 7 et 8
SI TES PARENTS VIVENT ENSEMBLE, passe à la page suivante, question 9

7. Depuis combien de temps sont-ils séparés?..... ans
8. Est-ce que tu vois encore le parent avec lequel tu n'habites plus (cocher)?
 oui
 non
9. Si tu le (la) vois encore, combien de fois tu le (la) rencontres (spécifie):
dans un mois: OU une année:

10. Combien as-tu de frère(s)? de demi-frère(s)?
 Combien as-tu de soeur(s)? de demi-soeur(s)?

11. Quel est ton rang dans la famille? (encercler)

- | | | | |
|----|------------|----|-----------------------|
| a) | 1er enfant | e) | 5e enfant |
| b) | 2e enfant | f) | 6e enfant |
| c) | 3e enfant | g) | 7e enfant |
| d) | 4e enfant | h) | jumeau/jumelle: |

12. Ton père travaille-t-il? (encercler)

- a) oui, à temps plein
- b) oui, à temps partiel
- c) non, il est au chômage
- d) non, il est invalide
- e) non, il est à la retraite
- f) mon père est décédé

13. Quel est l'emploi de ton père?

- S'il a plus d'un emploi, indique celui auquel il consacre le plus de temps.
- Décris l'emploi le plus précisément possible.
- S'il est sans emploi, à la retraite ou décédé, indique ce qu'il faisait avant.

EXEMPLES: Emploi: opérateur de presse d'imprimerie
 vendeur d'assurances

Emploi:

14. Ta mère travaille-t-elle? (encercler)

- a) oui, à temps plein
- b) oui, à temps partiel
- c) non, elle est au chômage
- d) non, elle est invalide
- e) non, elle est à la retraite
- f) ma mère est décédée

15. Quel est l'emploi de ta mère?

- Si elle a plus d'un emploi, indique celui auquel elle consacre le plus de temps.
- Décris l'emploi le plus précisément possible.
- Si elle est sans emploi, à la retraite ou décédée, indique ce qu'elle faisait avant.

EXEMPLES: Emploi: vendeuse dans un grand magasin à rayons
 gérante de banque

Emploi:

A. Cette partie du questionnaire te demande de parler des **relations avec ta mère**. Lis chacune des phrases et encercle le numéro qui montre à quel point, cette phrase correspond à ce que tu vis (à quel point cette phrase est vraie pour toi):

1 = Cela ne correspond **pas du tout**

2 = Cela correspond **parfois**

3 = Cela correspond **souvent**

4 = Cela correspond **tout à fait**

		pas du tout	parfois	souvent	tout à fait
1]	Ma mère aime discuter des choses avec moi.....	1	2	3	4
2]	Elle ne comprend pas ce dont j'ai besoin.....	1	2	3	4
3]	Elle me fait sentir que je suis de trop.....	1	2	3	4
4]	Elle m'exprime son affection.....	1	2	3	4
5]	Elle m'aide à me sentir mieux quand j'ai des problèmes	1	2	3	4
6]	Ma mère semble froide avec moi.....	1	2	3	4
7]	Si elle voit que quelque chose ne va pas, elle me demande de lui en parler.....	1	2	3	4
8]	Elle ne me fait pas de compliments.....	1	2	3	4
9]	Je pense que je suis une cause d'ennui pour elle.....	1	2	3	4
10]	Elle paraît comprendre mes problèmes et mes inquiétudes.....	1	2	3	4
11]	Ma mère me parle avec une voix chaleureuse et amicale.....	1	2	3	4
12]	Elle ne m'aide pas autant que j'en ai besoin.....	1	2	3	4
13]	Je trouve que ma mère est injuste avec moi.....	1	2	3	4
14]	Elle me sourit souvent.....	1	2	3	4
15]	Elle est affectueuse envers moi.....	1	2	3	4
16]	Ma mère ne me parle pas beaucoup.....	1	2	3	4
17]	Je peux compter sur elle lorsque j'en ai besoin.....	1	2	3	4

B. Maintenant on aborde la question des rapports quotidiens avec ta mère. Cela concerne les contacts, les activités et les conversations.

CONTACTS. Contact veut dire: **passer un certain temps** avec ta mère, à deux ou avec d'autres personnes, sans nécessairement parler toujours ensemble. Par exemple: prendre un repas ensemble, regarder la télévision ensemble, se déplacer ensemble.....

1. Si on prend une journée normale d'école, pourrais-tu dire **combien de fois** tu es en contact avec ta mère durant une journée? nombre de contacts:.....fois.

2. **Combien d'heures** (en moyenne approximativement) passes-tu en compagnie de ta mère dans une journée normale d'école? Durée des contacts en heures:.....heures.

ACTIVITÉS. Il s'agit des **choses qu'on fait ensemble** soit à l'intérieur de la maison (bricolage, cuisine....) ou à l'extérieur de la maison (faire des achats, sport, sorties...)

1. Est-ce qu'il t'arrive de faire des activités de ce genre avec ta mère? (encercle le chiffre)

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------|
| 1) pratiquement jamais | 3) quelquefois |
| 2) rarement | 4) souvent |

lesquelles?

2. Est-ce qu'il t'arrive de faire des activités **seul(e)** avec ta mère?

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------|
| 1) pratiquement jamais | 3) quelquefois |
| 2) rarement | 4) souvent |

lesquelles?

CONVERSATIONS. Peux-tu dire si tu parles des sujets suivants avec ta mère et si cela t'arrive:

- | | | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 1) pratiquement jamais | | | | |
| 2) rarement | | | | |
| 3) quelquefois | | | | |
| 4) souvent | (encercle le chiffre de ta réponse) | | | |

	jamais	rarement	quelquefois	souvent
1. Est-ce que tu parles de tes goûts et de tes intérêts avec ta mère (musique, mode, les choses que tu aimes ou que tu détestes..).....	1	2	3	4
2. Est-ce qu'il t'arrive de parler de sujets plus personnels comme tes sentiments ou tes émotions	1	2	3	4
3. Est-ce qu'il t'arrive de parler de la sexualité en général (les relations sexuelles, la contraception, l'homosexualité, les maladies transmises sexuellement..).....	1	2	3	4
4. Est-ce qu'il t'arrive de parler de ta propre sexualité (préoccupations personnelles, questions et interrogations sur la sexualité, expériences sexuelles).....	1	2	3	4

CONFLITS. Comme tu sais, il arrive à la plupart des adolescents d'avoir des discussions, des disputes, des conflits, avec les parents. Voici une série de questions qui peuvent faire l'objet de conflits entre parents et adolescents. Peux-tu dire si ta mère te critique, te fait des reproches ou des remarques désagréables sur chacune de ces questions et si cela arrive: 1. jamais, 2. rarement, 3. quelquefois, 4. souvent (encercle ta réponse)

	jamais	rarement	quelquefois	souvent.
1. les tâches domestiques,	1	2	3	4
2. l'apparence (vêtements, coiffure...)	1	2	3	4
3. l'argent	1	2	3	4
4. les résultats scolaires	1	2	3	4
5. ton comportement à l'école	1	2	3	4
6. les heures de sortie	1	2	3	4
7. la fréquentation des amis	1	2	3	4
8. la consommation d'alcool	1	2	3	4
9. la consommation de drogues	1	2	3	4
10. autre source de conflit laquelle?.....	1	2	3	4

11. Pourrais-tu dire approximativement **combien de fois** tu as vécu ce genre de conflit au cours du **dernier mois**.

Nombre de conflits au cours du dernier mois:.....

12. Il existe entre les parents et les jeunes des conflits qui peuvent **beaucoup t'affecter** (te frustrer, te faire mal), soit parce que ce conflit revient constamment, parce que le parent crie ou utilise des mots blessants ou parce que tu réagis fortement, verbalement (cris, pleurs) ou en claquant les portes...

Est-ce qu'il y a un conflit important de ce genre entre **ta mère et toi** sur une des questions dont nous venons de parler ou sur toute autre question? (cocher)

oui [] non []

Si oui: A quelle fréquence ce conflit revient-il, pendant un mois?

nombre de conflits importants sur un mois:.....

13. Est-ce qu'il t'arrive de penser que ta mère ne te comprend vraiment pas (encercle ta réponse)

1) jamais 3) quelquefois
2) rarement 4) souvent

14. Est-ce qu'il t'est déjà arrivé de penser que tu es quelqu'un de différent de ce que ta mère pense que tu es? (encercle ta réponse)

1) jamais 3) quelquefois
2) rarement 4) souvent

C. Cette partie du questionnaire te demande de parler des relations avec ton père. Lis chacune des phrases et encercle le numéro qui montre à quel point, cette phrase correspond à ce que tu vis (à quel point cette phrase est vraie pour toi)

		1 = Cela ne correspond pas du tout 2 = Cela correspond parfois 3 = Cela correspond souvent 4 = Cela correspond tout à fait			
		pas du tout	parfois	souvent	tout à fait
1]	Mon père aime discuter des choses avec moi.....	1	2	3	4
2]	Il ne comprend pas ce dont j'ai besoin.....	1	2	3	4
3]	Il me fait sentir que je suis de trop.....	1	2	3	4
4]	Il m'exprime son affection.....	1	2	3	4
5]	Il m'aide à me sentir mieux quand j'ai des problèmes.....	1	2	3	4
6]	Mon père semble froid avec moi.....	1	2	3	4
7]	Si il voit que quelque chose ne va pas, il me demande de lui en parler.....	1	2	3	4
8]	Il ne me fait pas de compliments.....	1	2	3	4
9]	Je pense que je suis une cause d'ennui pour lui.....	1	2	3	4
10]	Il paraît comprendre mes problèmes et mes inquiétudes.....	1	2	3	4
11]	Mon père me parle avec une voix chaleureuse et amicale.....	1	2	3	4
12]	Il ne m'aide pas autant que j'en ai besoin.....	1	2	3	4
13]	Je trouve que mon père est injuste avec moi.....	1	2	3	4
14]	Il me sourit souvent.....	1	2	3	4
15]	Il est affectueux envers moi.....	1	2	3	4
16]	Mon père ne me parle pas beaucoup.....	1	2	3	4
17]	Je peux compter sur lui lorsque j'en ai besoin.....	1	2	3	4

D. Maintenant on aborde la question des rapports quotidiens avec ton père. Cela concerne les contacts, les activités et les conversations.

CONTACTS. Contact veut dire: passer un certain temps avec ton père, à deux ou avec d'autres personnes, sans parler toujours ensemble. Par exemple: prendre un repas ensemble; regarder la télévision ensemble, se déplacer ensemble.....

1. Si on prend une journée normale d'école, pourrais-tu me dire **combien de fois** tu es en contact avec ton père durant une journée? nombre de contacts:.....fois.

2. **Combien d'heures** (en moyenne approximativement) passes-tu en compagnie de ton père dans une journée normale d'école? Durée des contacts en heures:.....heures.

ACTIVITÉS. Il s'agit des choses qu'on fait ensemble soit à l'intérieur de la maison (bricolage, cuisine....) ou à l'extérieur de la maison (faire des achats, sport, sorties...)

1. Est-ce qu'il t'arrive de faire des activités de ce genre avec ton père? (**encercle le chiffre**)

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------|
| 1) pratiquement jamais | 3) quelquefois |
| 2) rarement | 4) souvent |

lesquelles?

2. Est-ce qu'il t'arrive de faire des activités **seul(e)** avec ton père?

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------|
| 1) pratiquement jamais | 3) quelquefois |
| 2) rarement | 4) souvent |

lesquelles?

CONVERSATIONS. Peux tu dire si tu parles des sujets suivants avec ton père et si cela t'arrive:

- | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| 1) pratiquement jamais | | | | |
| 2) rarement | | | | |
| 3) quelquefois | | | | |
| 4) souvent (encercle le chiffre de ta réponse) | | | | |

	j	r	q	s
	amais	arement	uelquefois	ouvent
1. Est-ce que tu parles de tes goûts et de tes intérêts avec ton père (musique, mode, les choses que tu aimes ou que tu détestes..).....	1	2	3	4

2. Est-ce qu'il t'arrive de lui parler de sujets plus personnels comme tes sentiments ou tes émotions	1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---	---

3. Est-ce qu'il t'arrive de lui parler de la sexualité en général (les relations sexuelles, la contraception, l'homosexualité, les maladies transmises sexuellement.).....	1	2	3	4
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4. Est-ce qu'il t'arrive de lui parler de ta propre sexualité (préoccupations personnelles, questions et interrogations sur la sexualité, tes expériences sexuelles).....	1	2	3	4
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E. Les questions suivantes cherchent à savoir si tes parents savent ce que tu fais et avec qui tu te tiens en dehors de la maison. Réponds en encerclant un des chiffres suivants:

	1 = ne savent pas du tout	2 = savent un peu	3 = savent assez bien	4 = savent très bien
	pas du tout	un peu	assez bien	très bien
1. Mes parents savent qui sont mes amis.....	1	2	3	4
2. Mes parents savent à quoi je dépense mon argent.....	1	2	3	4
3. Mes parents savent où je suis après l'école.....	1	2	3	4
4. Quand je sors le soir, mes parents savent avec qui je suis.....	1	2	3	4
5. D'habitude, mes parents savent ce que je fais durant les temps libres avec mes amis.....	1	2	3	4
6. Quand je sors le soir, mes parents savent à quelle heure je vais rentrer.....	1	2	3	4

Voici une série de choses que certains parents acceptent alors que d'autres ne l'acceptent pas. Peux-tu lire les phrases suivantes et encercler un chiffre selon que:

	1 = tes parents n'acceptent jamais cela	2 = il leur arrive d'accepter parfois cela	3 = ils acceptent souvent cela	4 = ils acceptent toujours cela
	jamais	parfois	souvent	toujours
1. rentrer tard les week-end (après minuit).....	1	2	3	4
2. recevoir des amis à la maison quand mes parents y sont.....	1	2	3	4
3. découcher chez un ami (de même sexe que moi).....	1	2	3	4
4. rencontrer mes amis après l'école durant les jours de semaine.....	1	2	3	4
5. boire de la bière ou du vin avec mes amis à la maison	1	2	3	4
6. recevoir des amis à la maison quand mes parents sont absents.....	1	2	3	4
7. recevoir à la maison des amis(es) de l'autre sexe.....	1	2	3	4
8. accepter que des amis (de même sexe que moi) dorment à la maison.....	1	2	3	4
9. organiser une fête avec des amis à la maison.....	1	2	3	4
10. aller en vacances chez des amis.....	1	2	3	4

Voici un certain nombre de situations qui peuvent se présenter. Si tu n'as jamais vécu ces situations imagine que cela pourrait t'arriver. A ton avis, comment tes parents vont réagir:

1. ils te **punissent**, pas de sortie, pas d'argent de poche, pas de télévision.....
2. ils sont en **colère**, crient, menacent, formulent des reproches, mais sans te punir
3. ils **discutent** avec toi, essaient de te raisonner, cherchent des solutions.....
4. ils ne **disent rien**, laissent faire les choses ou font quelques commentaires.....

indique en une courte phrase quel sera la réaction de tes parents

1. Tes parents et toi avez convenu d'une heure de rentrée un samedi soir et tu rentres beaucoup plus tard que l'heure convenue (plus de deux heures de retard), sans avoir prévenu

.....

2. A ton dernier bulletin tes notes ont connu une baisse importante

.....

3. Tes parents viennent de recevoir une lettre de l'école indiquant que tu as manqué des cours

.....

4. Par ta maladresse tu as brisé une chose de valeur à laquelle tes parents tiennent beaucoup (le magnétoscope, un objet précieux, un meuble...)

.....

5. Les voisins se plaignent de toi à tes parents car, lors d'une discussion, tu as été grossier et tu les as insultés

.....

F. Pourrais-tu dire si, au cours de la dernière semaine, tu as éprouvé les choses suivantes:

	jamais	temps en temps	assez souvent	très souvent
1. Je me suis senti(e) tendu(e) ou sous pression.....	1	2	3	4
2. Je me suis senti(e) désespéré(e) en pensant à l'avenir.....	1	2	3	4
3. Je me suis laissé(e) emporter contre quelqu'un ou quelque chose.....	1	2	3	4
4. J'ai eu des trous de mémoire.....	1	2	3	4
5. J'ai ressenti des peurs ou des craintes.....	1	2	3	4
6. Je me suis senti seul(e).....	1	2	3	4
7. Je me suis senti négatif(ve) envers les autres.....	1	2	3	4
8. J'ai eu des difficultés à me souvenir des choses.....	1	2	3	4
9. Je me suis senti(e) agité(e) ou nerveux(se) intérieurement.....	1	2	3	4
10. Je me suis senti(e) découragé(e) ou j'ai eu le cafard.....	1	2	3	4
11. Je me suis senti(e) facilement contrarié(e) ou irrité(e).....	1	2	3	4
12. J'ai eu de la difficulté à m'endormir ou à rester endormi(e).....	1	2	3	4
13. Je me suis fâché(e) pour des problèmes sans importance.....	1	2	3	4
14. J'ai pleuré facilement ou je me suis senti(e) sur le point de pleurer.....	1	2	3	4