

Change in Family Work Status: Effects on Parent-Adolescent Decision Making

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FLANAGAN, CONSTANCE A. *Change in Family Work Status: Effects on Parent-Adolescent Decision Making*. CHILD DEVELOPMENT, 1990, 61, 163–177. The interactions of parental work status, family integration, and sex of child on parent-adolescent decision making were examined in a 4-wave study of 504 adolescents and their mothers. 3 work status groups were compared. *Deprived* families reported a layoff or demotion at Time 1 and no recovery by Time 4. *Recovery* families reported similar work status losses at Time 1 and reemployment by Time 4. *Nondeprived* families reported stable employment at both times. Adolescents in deprived households, especially boys, reported the highest conflict with parents. Adolescents in recovery families reported high conflict when parents were unemployed, but levels declined when parents were reemployed. According to mothers, daughters in deprived households enjoyed the highest level of autonomy of any adolescent group.

Unemployment rates and economic distress during the early 1980s reached levels unknown since the Great Depression. Plant closings, layoffs, contract concessions, and demotions are facts of life for many contemporary parents, but we know little about their implications for family life or children's development. The nature of these implications are suggested by a substantial body of work from the Great Depression.

These studies showed that unemployment sharply increased the financial and role strains of parents and undermined the school achievement and health of children (Angell, 1936; Bakke, 1940; Cavan & Ranck, 1938; Elder, 1974; Komarovsky, 1940). The degree of disruption and hardship that families experienced was not uniform but depended in large part on characteristics of the family unit and its members. In particular, family integration, or the unity and mutual support characteristic of families, and family adaptation, or the flexibility shown by members, were resources that enabled families to pull together during hard times (Angell, 1936; Bakke, 1940; Cavan & Ranck, 1938; Komarovsky, 1940). In addition, the effects of the Depression on children depended on individual differences, such as the child's age and sex, and on the competing

tasks and opportunities of individual development (Elder, 1974; Elder, Van Nguyen, & Caspi, 1985).

This study examines the effects of parents' changing work status on family decision making in a sample of contemporary parents and their young adolescents. My thesis is that a decline in parents' work status places pressures on the parent role and diminishes parenting capacities. Experimental work has shown that mental preoccupations cause parents to become more peremptory and less responsive to their children (Zussman, 1980). Financial hardship has similar effects on parenting capacities. In families that are coping with a farm or a job loss, discipline of children and adolescents tends to be arbitrary, inconsistent, and nonnurturant (Elder et al., 1985; Harold-Goldsmith, Radin, & Eccles, 1988; Komarovsky, 1940; Lempers, Clark-Lempers, & Simon, 1989). In line with this work, a loss of family work status was expected to strain parent-adolescent authority relations.

Early Adolescence and the Transition in Parent-Child Authority Relations

Early adolescence is a transition time in the parent-child authority relationship as children assume more independence in decision making (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Mon-

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temayor, 1983; Yee & Flanagan, 1985). Although families generally experience little stress during this period, one would expect more tensions between parents and adolescents over authority and independence issues when parents are preoccupied with issues of family welfare. Sheldon and Fox (1983), for example, found that unemployed parents were more autocratic than employed parents and were less likely to consult their adolescents about family issues. Thus, adolescents are likely to experience less autonomy and more conflict when parents lose their jobs or are demoted.

Moderators of Stress

Psychological resources within the family.—As noted earlier, studies from the Great Depression showed that a family's ability to cope with financial hardship is not uniform but depends on family system strengths. Consistent with family stress theory (McCubbin et al., 1980; McCubbin & Patterson, 1982; Olson et al., 1983) and with research on economic dislocation and family life (Angell, 1936), social integration should help to moderate the impact of a stressor on family relations. Thus, financial hardship should be associated with greater strain on parent-adolescent relations in poorly integrated when compared to well-integrated families.

Sex differences.—The accentuation principle, discussed by Elder and Caspi (1988), refers to a process in which stress intensifies the distinguishing characteristics of individuals and relationships. For example, Cavan and Ranck (1938) found that financial hardship caused poorly integrated families to become increasingly disorganized and well-integrated families to draw even closer. Based on this principle, we expected sex differences in adolescents' perceptions of authority relations to be intensified by the parents' job loss or demotion. Several studies have documented a sex difference in the early adolescent's perceptions of autonomy and conflict in family decision making. Whereas girls report more emotional autonomy and self-reliance than boys (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986), boys tend to be more preoccupied with establishing their independence from parental control (Douvan & Adelson, 1966). If, under normal conditions, boys express more conflict with parents over rules, then, according to the accentuation principle, there is good reason to expect that financial hardship will exacerbate this tension.

Conversely, since job loss places a strain on the marital relationship (Atkinson, Liem,

& Liem, 1986; Liem & Liem, 1989; Perrucci, Targ, Perrucci, & Targ, 1987), girls who report more self-reliance under normal circumstances may be granted even greater independence and may be encouraged to take on a more mature role in the household. Several studies have shown, for example, that stress in the single-parent family may increase a daughter's domestic involvement and role as confidante vis-à-vis her mother (Fox & Inazu, 1982; Weiss, 1976). In short, an interaction between the adolescent's sex and the family's work status on adolescent conflict and autonomy was expected. Among the deprived families, boys should experience more conflict with parents and girls more autonomy than their peers in the other family work status groups.

The Compensatory Effects of Reemployment

The effects of economic change on children have been studied by comparing families who have lost a substantial percentage of their income with those who have not (Elder et al., 1985; Silbereisen, Walper, & Albrecht, in press) or by comparing families who have lost, gained, or had no family income changes (Galambos & Silbereisen, 1987a). The present investigation focuses on employment as a transition rather than as a state of the family economy.

Individuals experience different patterns of layoffs, demotions, and rehiring during times of economic flux (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982). If parental job loss negatively affects family functioning, then returning to work should compensate for this initial upheaval and return a measure of stability to family life. A compensatory effect of reemployment on marital relationships and individual mental health has been demonstrated in other longitudinal work (Atkinson et al., 1986; Kessler, Turner, & House, 1989; Liem & Liem, 1989). This research has shown a decrease in men's perceptions of familial support and an increase in psychological symptoms after a layoff, patterns which reverse for men who become reemployed but get worse for those who remain unemployed.

In the present study, a similar compensatory effect of reemployment was expected on parent-adolescent relations. By studying patterns of economic transitions in families over a 2-year period, we identified three categories of family work status: a job loss or demotion with no recovery (the deprived group), a loss or demotion followed by reemployment (the recovery group), and continuous employment

(the nondeprived group). The effects of a family's work status on parent-adolescent decision making were examined across this same period. If parents' job loss disrupts their ability to respond to the developmental demands of their adolescents, then the deprived and recovery groups should report similar levels of conflict and autonomy at the time when both groups report a loss of work status. Differences between these groups should appear when the recovery group has regained their former status.

In summary, the hypotheses examined in this study are: (1) A parent's job loss or demotion will engender higher levels of parent-adolescent conflict and lower levels of adolescent autonomy. (2) Family integration will be associated with less parent-adolescent conflict and more autonomy. In addition, family integration will moderate the negative effects of deprivation on decision making. Among the deprived families, highly integrated ones will have lower levels of parent-adolescent conflict and higher adolescent autonomy than families with low integration scores. (3) Boys will report more conflict and girls more autonomy in family decision making. These sex differences will be intensified in deprived families. In addition, boys in deprived families should experience more conflict and girls more autonomy than their same-sex peers in other work status groups. (4) The recovery group will show a decrease over time in the level of parent-adolescent conflict and an increase in adolescent autonomy. Time of measurement was not expected to affect parent-adolescent decision-making practices in the deprived or nondeprived families since their work status remains the same.

Method

Sample

A subset of cases was selected from a 2-year, four wave panel study (the Transitions at Early Adolescence Project) investigating the effects of normative environmental transitions (e.g., the move to junior high school) and nonnormative changes (e.g., divorce) on early adolescent adaptation. The study was conducted in 12 working- and middle-class communities where auto and auto-related manufacturing are the main industries. Layoffs and plant shutdowns were common events in these communities, as evidenced by official unemployment statistics that ranged between 7.9% and 21%.

The study includes all families with reports from mother and adolescent at all four waves and no evidence of a member's promo-

tion at Wave 1. Comparisons of families with promoted workers with the deprived and nondeprived families at Wave 1 revealed that the promoted group had significantly higher income and parental education than the other two groups. In addition, there were more executives, managers, and professionals in the promoted category. Since the purpose of the study was to assess the effects of job loss and reemployment on family processes, employed workers and their families were included as a comparison group. The promoted workers and their families were not considered to be an appropriate comparison group since they had significantly more financial and educational resources than the others.

Mean age of the adolescents at Wave 1 was 11.5. More than 97% of the families were Caucasian, approximately 2% were African-American, and 1% were other minorities. Average family size was 2.6 children. Parents, on average, had 1 or more years of academic or technical education beyond high school. Twenty-two percent of the mothers worked full time and another 29% worked part time. Eighty-three percent were two-parent married families, another 6% remarried, and 11% were single-parent, mother-headed families. Most fathers were employed in manual labor, sales, and service and working mothers were employed mainly in clerical, teaching, and service occupations (U. S. Department of Commerce, 1980). A description of the sample by categories of family work status is provided in Table 1.

Of the 1,203 families that met the criteria for this study at Wave 1, 504 (42%) were finally included. Using Wave 1 data, we compared these sample families with those who dropped out (see Table 2). Among families who reported a status loss at Wave 1, there were two marginally significant differences ($p = .06$). Families who dropped out of the study had lower income and higher conflict scores, as reported by mothers, when compared to families who remained. Among the nondeprived families, the cases that dropped out had significantly lower income and parent education ($p = .01$) than those cases that remained. There was also a higher proportion of full-time working mothers, single-parent and remarried families, and minority families in both categories of family work status that dropped out of the study. In short, the sample families had more financial and educational resources and, possibly, fewer constraints on their time than the families who dropped out. The implications of attrition for interpreting results are delineated in the discussion.

TABLE 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF THREE FAMILY WORK STATUS GROUPS

CHARACTERISTICS	FAMILY WORK STATUS					
	Deprived (N = 66)		Nondeprived (N = 330)		Recovery (N = 108)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Parents' education ^a	3.39 _a	1.50	3.94 _b	1.33	3.58 _a	.96
Family income ^b	2.71 _a	1.30	3.88 _b	1.13	3.39 _c	.96
Number of children	2.62	1.12	2.70	1.16	2.59	1.15
Race:						
Caucasian (%)	95.4		98.2		97.2	
Afro-American (%)	1.5		.9		2.8	
Other minorities (%)	3.1		.9		0	
Marital status:						
Married (%)	75.8		82.1		88.0	
Remarried (%)	4.5		6.1		5.6	
Single parent (%)	19.7		11.8		6.4	
Mother's employment:						
Employed full time (%)	18.5		21.5		28.0	
Employed part time (%)	32.3		30.5		23.4	
Homemaker full time (%)	49.2		48.0		48.6	

NOTE.—Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$.

^a Response Options: 1 = grade school; 2 = some high school; 3 = high school completed; 4 = some college/technical; 5 = B.A.; 6 = some graduate school; 7 = M.A.; 8 = Ph.D./professional.

^b Scale (\$10,000 increments): 1 (under \$10,000) to 5 (over \$40,000).

Procedure

The Transitions study was described to sixth graders in their respective classrooms (spring 1983), and they were asked to carry permission letters to their parents. In the fall and spring of 1983 and 1984, questionnaires were group administered to the adolescents in their classrooms, and parents were mailed questionnaires with return-postage envelopes for completion in their homes. Follow-up contacts included postcards and phone calls to parents.

Independent Measures

Family work status.—Work status in this study represents a phenomenon of the family economy. Either or both parents could have been involuntarily laid off or demoted since such changes would be viewed as a disruption of the family's customary standards and a loss of their financial resources (Elder & Caspi, 1989; Moen, Kain, & Elder, 1983).

We measured family work status by comparing the mother's reports at Time 1 and Time 4 to the following question: "During the last 2 years, has your family experienced any of the following: a permanent layoff, a temporary layoff (how many months), a job demotion, or a rehiring?" Since the length of the study was 2 years, comparing Time 1 with Time 4 answers yielded three categories of change in the family's work status:

1. The *deprived group* included families with members who reported a layoff or demotion at both times of measure ($N = 66$). Ten families reported a temporary layoff at Time 1 and again at Time 4. Thirty families were downwardly mobile, reporting both a layoff and a demotion during the study, and 26 families reported a permanent layoff at both times.

2. The *nondeprived group* were families who reported no layoffs or demotions at either time of measure ($N = 330$).

3. The *recovery group* included families who reported a layoff or demotion at Time 1 but were reemployed at jobs that did not reflect a loss of status during the 2 years of the study ($N = 108$). At Time 1, 54 of these families reported a temporary layoff, 31 reported a demotion, and 23 reported a permanent layoff. It is important to note that reemployment for this group does not reflect a loss of status. A sizable body of literature has demonstrated that reemployment after layoffs very often means a demotion in status (Harrison & Bluestone, 1988; Sheak, 1988) and a financial loss that strains family relations (Perrucci et al., 1987). To be included in the recovery category, mothers had to answer that no demotions or job losses had occurred during the 2 years of the study.

TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF 504 STUDY CASES WITH 699 DROPOUT CASES BY WAVE 1 FAMILY WORK STATUS

MEASURES	WAVE 1 FAMILY WORK STATUS							
	Status Loss				No Status Loss			
	Remain (N = 174)		Drop Out (N = 274)		Remain (N = 330)		Drop Out (N = 425)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Parents' education ^a	3.51	1.08	3.44	.98	3.94	1.15	3.70	1.16*
Family income ^b	3.14	1.16	2.91	1.24	3.88	1.13	3.65	1.25*
Number of children	2.60	1.14	2.74	1.10	2.70	1.16	2.78	1.29
Financial worry:								
Adolescent's report	3.06	.96	3.17	1.03	2.71	1.04	2.84	1.00
Mother's report	3.23	1.01	3.42	1.04	2.62	1.01	2.70	1.07
Parent-adolescent conflict:								
Adolescent's report	2.05	.67	2.10	.67	1.98	.61	2.01	.63
Mother's report	1.99	.40	2.07	.45	2.01	.40	2.05	.44
Race:								
Caucasian (%)	96.5		89.6		98.2		90.6**	
Afro-American (%)	2.3		5.9		.9		4.8	
Other minorities (%)	1.2		4.4		.9		4.6	
Marital status:								
Married (%)	83.3		66.5**		82.1		71.6*	
Remarried (%)	5.2		14.3		6.1		9.5	
Single parent (%)	11.5		19.2		11.8		18.9	
Mother's employment status:								
Employed full time (%)	24.4		39.4*		21.5		32.9**	
Employed part time (%)	26.7		23.0		30.5		21.9	
Homemaker full time (%)	48.8		37.5		48.0		45.2	

^a Response options: 1 = grade school; 2 = some high school; 3 = high school; 4 = some college/technical; 5 = B.A.; 6 = some graduate school; 7 = M.A.; 8 = Ph.D./professional.

^b Scale (\$10,000 increments): 1 (under \$10,000) to 5 (over \$40,000).

* $p < .01$.

** $p < .001$.

Parents were asked to focus on a 2-year time frame for several reasons. First, the implications of economic dislocation for families may not occur with the loss of a parent's job but rather during the subsequent adjustment period. Second, literature on the effects of other family-system changes (e.g., divorce) shows a disruption of parenting over a period of approximately 2 years, during which time family members gradually adjust to their new circumstances (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1982). It is likely that reemployment occurred at different times during this 2-year period; however, the recovery group was not sufficiently large to test for the effects of specific moments of reemployment on parent-adolescent relations.

Although we do not know which family member was laid off or demoted, several indicators suggest that, in general, fathers experienced the dislocations. None of the families who reported a loss of status at Wave 1 had children who were old enough to be working.

Approximately half of the sample mothers listed "homemaker" as their occupation, and another 29% were employed part time.

Family integration.—Mothers were asked at the fourth wave to respond to seven items that measured the degree to which family members acted as an organized unit, were open to change, and were supportive of one another. The items were drawn from the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES II) (Olson, Portner, & Bell, 1982) and the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Insel, 1974). Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for this measure was .86. An average of these seven items was used as the measure of family integration, with a high score indicating high integration.

Average parent education.—The family's social class position as indexed by the average of mother's and father's educational level assessed at Wave 1 was used as a covariate in the analyses. Unlike family in-

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come, which is confounded with work-related changes, parents' educational level exists prior to such changes and therefore can be interpreted as unidirectional in its effects (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Dependent Variables

Adolescents' perceptions of family decision making.—Adolescents' perceptions of family decision making were measured with six items from a modified version of Epstein and McPartland's (1977) Family Decision-Making Scale (FDM), reported to have an internal consistency of .71 (Epstein & McPartland, 1977), and one original item. The validity of this measure has been established by its relation to children's independence and attitudes toward school (Epstein, 1983).

The response format of the original FDM scale was modified from a two-point to a four-point Likert scale in order to capture broader variation in decision-making practices. In addition, one original item was added at Wave 2 to capture broader variation in the socialization of independent thinking. The items target the adolescent's relationship with both parents rather than with only his or her mother or father.

A principal components analysis of these seven items yielded two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, accounting for 50.8% of the variance. These factors were rotated using an oblique rotation because there was no reason to assume that the factors would be uncorrelated. The four items loading on the first factor, *Adolescents' Perceptions of Parent-Adolescent Conflict*, are the child's reports that they fight with their parents about rules, that parents worry about what they are up to, treat them "like kids," and fail to explain reasons for rules. The three items loading on the second factor, *Adolescents' Perceptions of Autonomy*, are adolescents' reports that they often participate in family decisions, that parents trust them, and that they encourage them to think independently. Composites for these two factors were created by taking the mean of the item scores. Cronbach's alpha was calculated at two different waves as an index of the internal consistency of each composite. Values were .68 and .71 for the conflict measure and .62 and .62 for the autonomy measure. The validity of these revised FDM measures has been established by their rela-

tion to the adolescent's independence and intrinsic motivation at school and to his or her self-consciousness and self-esteem (Flanagan, 1989; Yee & Flanagan, 1985).

Mothers' perceptions of family decision making.—The original FDM scale was developed for use with adolescents. Based on these measures, parallel items (with some minor changes in item wording) were constructed for parents. These were used to measure the mother's perception of her decision-making practices with the target adolescent. A principal components analysis of these seven parent items yielded two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, accounting for 56.9% of the variance. These factors were rotated using an oblique rotation since there was no reason to assume that the factors would be uncorrelated.

The factor solution for mothers differed from that for adolescents. The item tapping a lack of reasoning about rules did not load above .30 on either of the factors and was therefore dropped. The item measuring the extent to which a mother trusts her adolescent loaded negatively on the first factor and positively on the second factor. The decision to include this item in the first factor was based on its stronger loading on that factor. The three items loading on the first factor, *Mothers' Perceptions of Parent-Adolescent Conflict*, are the mother's report that she and her adolescent often fight about rules, that she worries about what her child is up to, and that she feels she cannot trust her adolescent. The three items in the second factor, *Mothers' Perceptions of Adolescent Autonomy*, are the mother's reports that she encourages independent thinking, treats her child in a mature way, and that her adolescent frequently participates in family decisions. Composites for these two factors were created by taking the mean of the item scores. The coefficient alpha values were .54 and .63 for the conflict measure and .57 and .63 for the autonomy measure for mothers.¹ The validity of the parent measures has been established based on the correlation between mother's and father's report of conflict with their adolescent and on the relation between the parent's report of conflict and autonomy and their assessments of the adolescent's personality characteristics (Flanagan, 1986).

¹ The correlation between Waves 3 and 4 (taken 6 months apart) was .57 for the conflict measure and .53 for the autonomy measure for the adolescent sample and .62 and .51 for the mothers' reports of conflict and autonomy, respectively. Perceptions of family decision making were not expected to remain stable over this 6-month period.

Similar factor names were retained for mothers and adolescents for clarity of presentation and because the different factor solutions reflect the mother's or the adolescent's assessments of family practices from their unique position in the decision-making relationship. From the adolescent's point of view, fighting with parents about rules and feeling that parents do not explain their rules are consistent perceptions. In contrast, mothers who fight with their adolescents about rules feel that their rules are reasonable, but they tend to mistrust their children.

Items comprising the conflict measure for adolescents and mothers were measured at each of the four waves. However, only two items in the autonomy measure reported by mothers and adolescents were measured at Wave 1. Therefore, analysis of the second factor was limited to Waves 2-4.

Results

Four repeated-measures analyses of covariance were conducted. The between-subjects factors in each analysis were the family's work status (deprived, nondeprived, or recovery), family integration (high, low), and sex of child. Parents' average education was used as the covariate, and time of measurement (Waves 2-4 for the autonomy measures and 1-4 for the conflict measures) was the within-subjects factor.

In order to examine interactions, univariate simple effects tests (ANCOVAs) were performed. A significance level of .05 was used in these analyses. The Results section is organized by dependent measure. For each dependent measure, adolescents' perceptions are discussed first, followed by the mothers'. The results of the repeated-measures tests are followed by discussions of the simple effects tests.

Parent Education

The analysis of variance indicated a significant association between parents' mean education and the family's work status, $F(2,502) = 8.88, p = .0002$. On a scale of 1 to 8, the mean levels of parent education were 3.39 ($SD = 1.50$), 3.58 ($SD = .96$), and 3.94 ($SD = 1.33$), respectively, for the deprived, recovery, and nondeprived groups. Post hoc comparisons using Scheffé contrasts indicated that parents' average education was significantly higher among the nondeprived families than either of the other groups.

Family Integration

A two-level categorization of families based on a median split of the sample yielded

246 families (48.8%) with high integration scores and 258 (51.2%) with low scores. The analysis of variance indicated no significant association of family work status with level of family integration, $F(2,502) = 1.63, p = .20$.

Parent-Adolescent Conflict

Adolescent perceptions.—As the results in Table 3 show, there was a main effect of sex of adolescent and an interaction of sex with work status and with family integration on adolescent's perceptions of conflict. In addition, as predicted, there was an interaction of time of measurement with family work status; the effect of this status on parent-adolescent conflict depends on the time of measurement (see Fig. 1).

Simple effects tests revealed that, while there were no differences between groups at Time 1 or 2, at Time 3 the difference between the deprived ($M = 2.19, SD = .68, Adj. M = 2.17$) and recovery ($M = 1.88, SD = .58, Adj. M = 1.86$) groups was significant, $F(1,498) = 10.71, p = .001$. Adolescents in nondeprived families reported more conflict ($M = 2.02, SD = .60, Adj. M = 2.02$) than the recovery, $F(1,498) = 5.64, p = .02$, and less than the deprived group, $F(1,498) = 3.28, p = .07$, at this time. There were no significant differences between family work status groups at the fourth time of measurement. Conflict among adolescents in deprived households declined slightly between Time 3 and 4 ($M = 2.03, SD = .66$), while that of the recovery ($M = 1.92, SD = .62$) and nondeprived ($M = 2.04, SD = .64$) groups remained the same.

Although the exact times when parents were laid off or regained jobs cannot be determined, two things are clear. First, at Time 1 both the deprived and recovery families reported a loss of status, and there were no differences in levels of conflict at that time. Second, during the 2 years of the study, one group of parents were reemployed, and their adolescents' reports of conflict declined significantly during those 2 years (i.e., there is an effect of time for the group who returns to work, $F[3,312] = 4.65, p = .003$), whereas no significant declines were found among the deprived or nondeprived groups (i.e., the effects of time within each of these groups were not significant).

The repeated-measures test also showed, as expected, a main effect of child sex and a significant interaction of family work status with child sex on adolescents' perceptions of conflict. As the results of the simple effects test in Table 4 indicate, a loss of family work status affected adolescent boys' perceptions of

TABLE 3

F STATISTICS FOR THE EFFECTS OF FAMILY INTEGRATION, FAMILY WORK STATUS, CHILD SEX, AND TIME OF MEASUREMENT ON ADOLESCENTS' AND MOTHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CONFLICT

	PERCEPTIONS OF PARENT-ADOLESCENT CONFLICT		
	<i>df</i>	Adolescents' Perceptions	Mothers' Perceptions
Between-subjects effects:			
Family integration	1	3.69	12.92***
Family work status	2	1.76	3.34*
Child sex	1	7.93**	7.11**
Family integration $\times$ work status	2	.93	2.67
Family integration $\times$ child sex	1	3.78*	.33
Family work status $\times$ child sex	2	4.53**	2.60
Integration $\times$ work status $\times$ child sex ...	2	.80	.33
Covariate: mean parent education	1	2.65	.01
Within-subjects effects:			
Time of measurement	3	3.96**	3.37*
Time $\times$ family integration	3	1.46	2.69*
Time $\times$ family work status	6	2.88**	1.06
Time $\times$ child sex	3	2.29	.24
Time $\times$ integration $\times$ work status	6	1.74	1.34
Time $\times$ integration $\times$ child sex	3	.34	.50
Time $\times$ family work status $\times$ child sex ..	6	.75	.46
Time $\times$ integration $\times$ work status $\times$ sex	6	1.17	.75

NOTE.—One, two, or three asterisks indicate that the effect is significant at or below .05, .01, or .001, respectively.

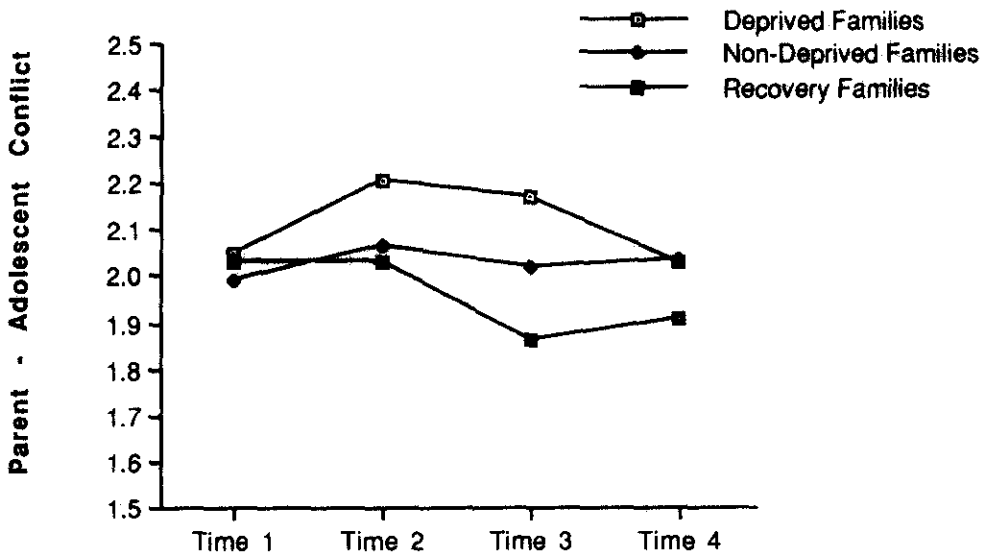


FIG. 1.—Effects of family work status on adolescents' reports of conflict with parents (adjusted means)

TABLE 4
MEAN CONFLICT LEVEL OF BOYS AND GIRLS IN THREE FAMILY WORK STATUS GROUPS

	FAMILY WORK STATUS GROUP		
	Deprived	Nondeprived	Recovery
Girls:			
<i>M</i>	1.96	2.04	1.87
<i>SD</i>	.48	.56	.44
<i>n</i>	29	161	55
Boys:			
<i>M</i>	2.24 _a	2.01 _b	2.07 _{a,b}
<i>SD</i>	.53	.45	.56
<i>n</i>	37	169	53

NOTE.—Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$. No adjusted means differed from the means by more than .02.

parent-adolescent conflict, $F(1,496) = 5.05$, $p = .03$, but had no effect on girls' reports. Boys in deprived households reported a significantly higher average level of conflict than boys in nondeprived families ($p = .01$) and marginally ($p = .09$) higher than boys in recovery families. The marginal difference between the deprived and recovery groups is, no doubt, due to the fact that the recovery group had high levels of conflict at Time 1 and 2. A comparison of sex differences within family work status groups is also noteworthy. Boys in deprived families reported more conflict than girls in deprived families, $F(1,496) = 5.34$, $p = .02$, and boys in the recovery group reported more conflict than girls in that group, $F(1,496) = 4.89$, $p = .03$. There were no sex differences in the nondeprived group.

There was also an interaction effect of sex and family integration on the adolescents' perceptions of conflict. Follow-up tests showed that there was an association between the level of family integration and boys' perceptions of conflict but no such association for girls' perceptions of conflict. Boys in the low-integration group reported more conflict ($M = 2.17$, $SD = .48$) than boys in the high-integration group ($M = 1.93$, $SD = .48$), $F(1,497) = 13.78$, $p < .0001$. However, there was no interaction of family integration with family work status. Thus, the moderator hypothesis was not confirmed in the adolescent reports of conflict.

Mothers' perceptions.—The results of the repeated-measures analysis for mothers' perceptions of parent-adolescent conflict are also shown in Table 3. There were main effects of family work status, family integration, and sex of adolescent, as well as an interac-

tion of family integration and time of measurement on mothers' perceptions.

The simple effects tests indicated that mothers in the recovery group reported significantly lower mean levels of conflict ($M = 1.94$, $SD = .36$, $Adj. M = 1.93$) than either the deprived ($M = 2.03$, $SD = .30$, $Adj. M = 2.04$) or the nondeprived groups ($M = 2.01$, $SD = .35$, $Adj. M = 2.01$). The time $\times$ family work status interaction was not significant for the mothers' reports. In contrast to the results for adolescents, mothers in recovery families did not report a decline in conflict with their adolescents over time.

A significant inverse relation between family integration and maternal reports of conflict was obtained. The strength of this association, however, differed across work status groups. Family integration was associated with less conflict among nondeprived (high integration $M = 1.93$, $SD = .29$, $Adj. M = 1.93$ vs. low integration $M = 2.10$, $SD = .38$, $Adj. M = 2.10$), $F(1,496) = 20.88$, $p < .0001$, and among recovery families (high integration $M = 1.80$, $SD = .32$, $Adj. M = 1.80$ vs. low integration $M = 2.04$, $SD = .36$, $Adj. M = 2.04$), $F(1,496) = 13.29$, $p < .0001$. However, there was no association between family integration and mothers' reports of conflict among the deprived families. As in the results for adolescents, the moderator hypothesis was not supported.

Mothers reported a higher level of conflict with sons ($M = 2.03$, $SD = .35$, $Adj. M = 2.03$) than with daughters ($M = 1.97$, $SD = .33$, $Adj. M = 1.97$). The interaction of sex and work status, however, was only marginally significant ($p = .07$). In contrast to the

TABLE 5

F STATISTICS FOR THE EFFECTS OF FAMILY INTEGRATION, FAMILY WORK STATUS, CHILD SEX, AND TIME OF MEASUREMENT ON ADOLESCENTS' AND MOTHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ADOLESCENT AUTONOMY

	PERCEPTIONS OF ADOLESCENT AUTONOMY		
	<i>df</i>	Adolescents' Perceptions	Mothers' Perceptions
Between-subjects effects:			
Family integration	1	2.87	35.52***
Family work status	2	2.86	3.26*
Child sex	1	10.41**	12.75***
Family integration × family work status	2	.88	1.10
Family integration × child sex	1	.00	.03
Family work status × child sex	2	.59	4.63**
Integration × work status × child sex	2	.14	.18
Covariate: mean parent education	1	.13	.20
Within-subjects effects:			
Time of measurement	2	1.30	1.12
Time × family integration	2	.90	.44
Time × family work status	4	.30	.63
Time × child sex	2	2.53	3.02*
Time × integration × family work status	4	.17	2.12
Time × integration × child sex	2	.34	3.76*
Time × family work status × child sex	4	.49	.73
Time × integration × work status × sex	4	.72	1.39

NOTE.—One, two, or three asterisks indicate that the effect is significant at or beyond .05, .01, or .001, respectively.

adolescents' reports, the family's work status did not have a differential effect on mothers' perceptions of conflict with sons and daughters.

Autonomy

Adolescents' perceptions.—The results of the repeated-measures analysis for adolescents' perception of autonomy are shown in Table 5. There was a main effect of adolescent's sex on perceptions of autonomy, but no other between- or within-subjects effects reached significance.

Simple effects tests revealed, as expected, that girls ($M = 2.74$, $SD = .50$, $Adj. M = 2.74$) were more likely than boys ($M = 2.56$, $SD = .50$, $Adj. M = 2.56$) to report that their parents encouraged their opinions and participation in family decision making. The hypothesis that a loss of family work status would diminish the adolescent's autonomy in family decision making received marginal support ($p = .06$). Simple effects tests indicated that adolescents in recovery families reported more autonomy ($M = 2.42$, $SD = .50$, $Adj. M = 2.42$) than those in deprived ($M = 2.24$, $SD = .52$, $Adj. M = 2.24$) or in nondeprived families ($M = 2.30$, $SD = .49$, $Adj. M = 2.30$). Contrary to prediction, neither the two-way interaction between child sex and work status nor the three-way interaction be-

tween child sex, work status, and time were significant.

Mothers' perceptions.—The results of the repeated-measures test for mothers' reports of adolescent autonomy are also shown in Table 5. Main effects of family integration and sex of child and an interaction of family work status and child sex were obtained.

There was a significant positive association between family integration and the amount of autonomy that mothers granted their adolescents (high integration $M = 3.03$, $SD = .35$, $Adj. M = 3.03$ vs. low integration $M = 2.79$, $SD = .34$, $Adj. M = 2.79$). In addition, both the main effect of sex and the sex × family work status interaction effect were significant. Parallel to the finding for adolescents, mothers of daughters reported that their adolescent enjoyed more autonomy ($M = 2.95$, $SD = .37$, $Adj. M = 2.95$) than did mothers of sons ($M = 2.86$, $SD = .36$, $Adj. M = 2.87$). In contrast to the adolescents' reports, the predicted interaction of child sex with work status was supported. The results of the simple effects test are presented in Table 6. Family work status affected the amount of autonomy that mothers granted their daughters but had no effect on sons' autonomy. Specifically, daughters in deprived households were granted more autonomy

TABLE 6
MEAN LEVEL OF MOTHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ADOLESCENT AUTONOMY BY
CHILD SEX AND FAMILY WORK STATUS

	FAMILY WORK STATUS GROUP		
	Deprived	Nondeprived	Recovery
Daughters:			
<i>M</i>	3.13 _a	2.91 _b	2.96 _b
<i>SD</i>	.34	.35	.40
<i>n</i>	29	161	55
Sons:			
<i>M</i>	2.82	2.86	2.93
<i>SD</i>	.32	.36	.37
<i>n</i>	37	169	53

NOTE.—Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$. No adjusted means differed from the means by more than .02.

than daughters in the other two family work status groups, $F(1,496) = 7.16$, $p < .01$. In addition, there was a significant sex difference within the deprived group, but no sex difference in the recovery families or in the nondeprived families. As predicted, mothers in deprived families allowed their daughters significantly more autonomy than they allowed their sons, $F(1,496) = 14.79$, $p < .0001$. There was no effect of time of measurement for any family work status group.

Discussion

The results add to a growing literature demonstrating the influence of economic change on the quality of parent-child relationships (Flanagan, in press; Galambos & Silbereisen, 1987a, 1987b; Lempers et al., 1989; McLoyd, in press; Radin & Harold-Goldsmith, 1989; Silbereisen et al., in press). When families are coping with a job loss or demotion, adolescents report higher levels of conflict with parents than their peers report. Reemployment after a temporary setback, however, shows a compensatory effect. That is, the conflict associated with a loss of work status declines when the family recovers. The nondeprived families, who experienced no work-related changes, served as a comparison group in this study. Levels of conflict among them remained quite stable over time. This finding extends earlier work demonstrating a compensatory effect of reemployment on an individual's mental health and marital relationship (Atkinson et al., 1986; Kessler et al., 1989; Liem & Liem, 1989) to its effect on the parent-adolescent relationship.

Mothers' perceptions of conflict were not as sensitive to changing patterns of family employment as their adolescents'. This differ-

ence may be due to the fact that the adolescents were commenting on their relationship with both parents, while the mothers commented only on their own relationships with their children. Change in work status may affect the adolescents' perception of conflict with fathers but not with mothers; thus, the decline in conflict for the recovery group may indicate a compensation in father-child relations. This interpretation is consistent with other studies demonstrating that the unemployed man's reaction to job loss mediates the effects of unemployment on his spouse (Atkinson et al., 1986; Dew, Bromet, & Schulberg, 1987) and on his children (Elder et al., 1985). Just as the quality of the Depression mother's parenting of her early adolescent children was relatively unaffected by economic hardship (Elder et al., 1985), the contemporary mother's ability to accommodate to her adolescent's demands for increased independence shows few signs of the strains of deprivation.

What are we to make of the fact that there is a significant difference between the deprived and recovery groups at Time 3 but none at Time 4, when, in fact, adolescents in deprived families report a slight decline in conflict with parents? One possibility is that families gradually adjust to their deprived status. For example, parent-adolescent conflict over rules and decisions may decline because parents adopt a laissez-faire attitude or because adolescents have accommodated their decision-making style to ignore parents' rules. As they mature, these adolescents may avoid conflict with parents simply by avoiding their parents. Such an interpretation is consistent with Komarovsky's (1940) results, indicating that independence for these

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adolescents is often gained at the expense of their unemployed parents' authority.

Integration is a family strength that appears to attenuate parent-adolescent conflict. However, according to mothers, family integration is not associated with less conflict in deprived households. Since there was no relation between a family's work status and their level of integration, it is not the case that the deprived group lacks such family resources. Nonetheless, these systemic resources do not appear to moderate the daily strains between parents and adolescents among families who are dealing with an extended period of deprivation.

Boys' perceptions of conflict were more sensitive than girls' to the level of family integration and to change in the family's work status. Low integration or a loss of work status were associated with higher levels of conflict for boys, but not for girls. Taken together, these results suggest that conflict with parents intensifies for adolescent boys when parents are "unavailable" due to a lack of family strengths or to parents' preoccupation with changing employment conditions. Again, since mothers in deprived families did not report more conflict with sons, the boys' reports may reflect increased conflict with fathers. When the father's work status is unstable, boys may lose respect for their fathers and feel more free to challenge paternal authority. As Elder et al. (1985) found, Depression hardship increased adolescent boys' negative perceptions of their fathers as well as their moodiness and anger.

The strain of a family's economic hardship has an opposite effect on decision-making practices with daughters. Mothers in deprived households reported that they granted their daughters more autonomy than they granted their sons. This suggests that one accommodation of family life to the pressures of financial hardship may be that mothers depend more on their daughters and that girls are pressed into an earlier maturity. That sons are not recruited into a greater decision-making role under these circumstances may be due to differences in the closeness of the mother-adolescent relationship or to the mothers' perceptions of her adolescent's maturity. Girls enter puberty an average of 2 years earlier than boys, and parent may treat children who look more mature in a more adult-like manner. If households become more labor intensive as a result of unemployment, or if mothers' psychological burden increases as families accommodate to job loss,

then they may share the weight of these role burdens with their adolescent daughters. The sex differences found in these data are consistent with research from the Great Depression that also showed economic deprivation to be associated with an increase in boys' objections to parental authority but with an increase in girls' acceptance of parental judgment (Elder 1974). In sum, these results suggest that the effects of economic change on the parent-adolescent relationship depend on the child's sex and on the salience of specific issues for adolescent girls and boys.

Several weaknesses of this study should be noted. The measurement of deprivation and recovery could have been improved with more detail about which family member(s) actually experienced a dislocation at their workplace. A more accurate measure of family dynamics could have been obtained by asking adolescents to respond to the items separately for mothers and fathers, providing a direct test of the effects of the family's work status on each parent's relationship with their offspring. In addition, including data from fathers would have provided a third perspective on parent-adolescent relationships.

The relatively low alphas for the conflict and autonomy measures, particularly for mothers, were also a problem. Since Cronbach's alpha is sensitive to the number of items in a scale, additional items tapping conflict, trust, and independence issues may have improved these measures. With additional items, one could also determine whether the lower internal consistency obtained for mothers' perceptions reflects the fact that we are tapping a broader construct among mothers compared to adolescents. Given the bias in measurement error, there is bound to be some bias in the results. However, since significant results were obtained despite the low internal consistency of the measures, it is likely to mean that the results are conservative.

Sample attrition was a problem. Since cases were included only if both mothers and adolescents participated in all four waves of data collection (over 2 school years), the families that remained in the study may represent a better organized and more resilient group than those who never participated or who dropped out. The comparison of families that dropped out with those that remained in the study suggests that this may, in fact, be the case. Besides their lower income and lower parent education scores, the attrition cases had slightly larger families, more sub-

jective financial concern, and higher parent-adolescent conflict scores. There were more minority families, full-time working mothers, single-parent, and remarried families among the group that dropped out. Taken together, these differences suggest that families who remained in the study may have had more resources and fewer strains compared to the group that dropped out. Finally, as noted earlier, there was no relation between family work status and family integration in families that remained. Since unemployment decreases family cohesion and support (Atkinson et al., 1986), the deprived families may have had more psychological resources than families in the general population who are struggling with economic dislocations. However, if the sample underrepresents the population that is affected by economic changes, the fact that there are statistically meaningful results is all the more striking.

Several strengths of the study should be mentioned. First, the longitudinal design is an advantage over cross-sectional studies in supporting the argument that a family's economic condition is not simply correlated with but has an effect on family relations. In addition, the compensatory effect of reemployment on family relations can only be uncovered with longitudinal data. Second, by adding measures of work status to a study of normative change in early adolescence, we were able to test the accentuation principle and found that a change in work status intensifies the sex differences in decision making that are normally found among adolescents and their parents. Finally, the fact that the data are derived from two sources shows that perceptions of family processes and the effects of economic change on these processes can vary according to the source of information. In the case of parent-adolescent decision making, perceptions appear to vary according to the role in the relationship played by the informant.

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