

Intergenerational Conflict in Arab Families: Salient Issues and Scale Development

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Abstract

Using a mixed-methods approach, we identified and explored intergenerational conflict issues that are salient to Arab adolescents and emerging adults ($N = 485$). We also developed and validated a scale that captures these issues across several studies. A qualitative study of Arab adolescents and emerging adults ($N = 26$) was first used to identify and describe unique intergenerational conflict items that are important to Arab families. An exploratory quantitative study ($N = 100$) and subsequent validation study ($N = 157$) were conducted to refine and validate the list of items. The final Arab Family Conflict Inventory consisted of 35 items that included both culturally specific items and items covering issues commonly found across ethnocultural groups. The scale was found to be psychometrically sound.

Keywords

developmental, child, adolescent, family, intergenerational conflict, interpersonal relationships

Intergenerational conflict refers to disagreements that commonly occur between parents and children. This is a widely studied topic as it is experienced by most families and affects individual development and family relations in many ways (Steinberg, 2001). Most conflict research has focused on either everyday issues in European or African American families, or cultural issues in Asian or Latino American families (Juang, Syed, & Cookston, 2012). As a result, we have a very limited understanding of either type of conflict in families from other backgrounds (Smetana, 2008). In particular, only a few studies have examined conflict in Arab¹ families (e.g., Rasmi, Daly, & Chuang, 2014). It is important to build our understanding of conflict in this population because Arab cultural norms and family dynamics differ from European American, Asian, and Latino cultures (Hofstede, 2001). This research is further limited by the fact that most existing conflict measures were developed for use with other populations and do not capture the full range of issues that are salient to Arab families. To address these gaps, we conducted a series of studies to examine conflict in Arab families as we developed and validated a new measure for use with this population.

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Intergenerational Conflict

Intergenerational conflict can be constructive and destructive for parent–child dyads in adolescence and emerging adulthood. On the positive side, conflict is often experienced as children seek to establish their independence from their parents and develop their own belief systems (Smetana, 2008). In this case, conflict can be constructive as it transforms the parent–adolescent relationship into one that is more egalitarian (Collins & Steinberg, 2008). However, conflict can also be destructive when it is both frequent and intense, or associated with clashing values. Many of these studies have found that conflict is associated with negative individual and familial outcomes in families from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds (e.g., Juang & Umana-Taylor, 2012). It is imperative that we deepen our understanding of this important developmental issue, particularly in underrepresented populations such as Arab families.

There are two parallel streams of intergenerational conflict research. The first focuses on conflict over everyday issues (Yau & Smetana, 2003). Guided by social domain theory, many of these studies have also looked at specific domains of conflict, including personal, prudential, multifaceted, and socially regulated issues (Smetana, Crean, & Campione-Barr, 2005). Generally, this type of conflict becomes less frequent and more intense as adolescents get older (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998). Most of this research has been conducted with European and (to a much lesser extent) African American families (Juang et al., 2012).

The second stream focuses on the conflict that occurs when parents and children hold different cultural values (Lee, Choe, Kim, & Ngo, 2000). Many of these studies have examined specific domains of conflict, including dating and marriage, education and career, and family expectations (Chung, 2001). Most of this research has been conducted with Asian and Latino American families based, in part, on the idea that conflict may be particularly detrimental to families that emphasize interdependence, obligation, and cohesion (Juang et al., 2012). The same reasoning may apply to Arab families, as they are also characterized by warm and interconnected relationships (Rasmi, Chuang, & Safdar, 2012).

Intergenerational Conflict in Arab Families

Existing research on conflict in European American families does not necessarily apply to Arab families given that these two groups differ markedly in their structure and socialization goals. The typical structure of an Arab family is patriarchal and patrilineal; fathers are the family leaders and mothers are the primary caregivers and disciplinarians. Parents socialize their children to be obedient and interdependent, emphasizing family obligations and filial piety (Abi-Hashem, 2008), resulting in warm, interconnected, and hierarchical parent–child relationships (Dwairy, Achoui, Abouserie, & Farah, 2006). These features allow parents to intervene in all aspects of their children's lives in childhood and beyond. As a result, conflict can be detrimental, as it disrupts the family equilibrium and violates family expectations.

The similarities between Arab, Asian, and Latino families are more apparent, but meaningful cross-cultural differences still exist. For example, Arab culture is honor based, emphasizing reputation and maintaining the status quo (Uskul, Oyserman, & Schwarz, 2010) with respect to social relationships and gender-based behavior codes (Rodriguez Mosquera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2002). Thus, Arab children are taught the salience of maintaining individual and familial honor and reputation by avoiding “shameful” behavior (Abi-Hashem, 2008). Children (especially females) can bring shame to their families by engaging in premarital sex, flirting, or dressing in a way that violates cultural norms (Ajrouch, 1999). Unfortunately, few of these specific issues are captured by existing measures of conflict, necessitating the development of a new measure that is more relevant to Arab families.

Measuring Intergenerational Conflict in Arab Families

Most existing measures were designed to capture conflict through adolescence, when children tend to separate and individuate from their families. This process is achieved, in part, by moving out of the family home (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). However, Arab adolescents do not seek to individuate in the same way that European American adolescents do, given their cultural emphasis on lifelong interdependent family relationships. For example, it is customary in Arab culture for children to continue residing in the family home until marriage (Ajami, Rasmi, & Abudabbeh, 2015). Recent statistics have shown that Arabs are delaying marriage (Rashad, Osman, & Roudi-Fahimi, 2005), which means that many continue living in the family home throughout emerging adulthood and beyond. At this stage, certain issues such as career and marriage choices may become more pronounced. To address these gaps, we developed and validated a measure that is relevant to Arab families in adolescence and emerging adulthood across three studies.

Preliminary Investigation

Our aim was to generate an initial list of items for the Arab Family Conflict Inventory (AFCI). We started by pooling items from existing measures that are widely used, reliable, and valid, such as the Asian American Family Conflict Scale (FCS; Lee et al., 2000), Intergenerational Conflict Inventory (ICI; Chung, 2001), and the Issues Checklist (IC; Robin & Foster, 1989). We also included 22 items used to assess prudential, socially regulated, multifaceted, and personal issues within parent-child dyads (Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006). At the end of this step, we had a list of 83 potential conflict items.

Our next step was to identify conflict issues that were specific to Arab populations. To do this, we collected data from two diverse groups of Arabs (see Table 1 for demographics of all samples presented in this article). Participants in Group 1 were Arabs living in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) who were recruited from an undergraduate elective course at a private university in exchange for course credit. Participants in Group 2 were immigrant Arabs who migrated to Canada with their parents from an Arab country and had lived in Canada for an average of 8.8 years ($SD = 5.48$). They were recruited through community and snowball sampling and incentivized with a chance to win a cash prize of US\$250. Participants in both groups were asked to indicate three issues around which they had recently experienced conflict with their mother and/or father. In Group 1, a total of 208 conflict issues emerged. Approximately half ($n = 102$) were equivalent to items on existing measures, whereas 35 were unique, including relationships with family members, not including siblings ($n = 10$), driving ($n = 5$), traveling alone ($n = 4$), and going out too much ($n = 4$). In Group 2, a total of 47 conflict issues emerged. Less than a quarter ($n = 10$) of these items were captured by existing measures of conflict, whereas 27 were unique. At the end of this step, we had an initial list of 131 conflict items relating to six broad domains: education, risky behavior, personal choice, culture and religion, family expectations, and dating and marriage.

Our final step in this stage was to consult with one cultural (i.e., a 23-year-old Emirati female student who grew up in the UAE) and one professional insider (i.e., a 54-year-old Lebanese American female counselor who has worked with Arab adolescents and emerging adults for almost 20 years). Both insiders indicated that the items raised in this initial phase were relevant to Arab families, as were many of the FCS, IC, and ICI items.

Study 1: Focus Groups

We conducted focus groups to refine the initial item list and identify additional conflict issues. Participants were Arab (Egyptian, Emirati, and Lebanese) adolescents and emerging adults who

Table 1. Demographic Information for All Studies.

Demographic information	Preliminary investigation Group 1	Preliminary investigation Group 2	Study 1 Focus groups	Study 2	Study 3
Sample size	83	119	26	100	157
Gender (% female participants)	70	59.5	46	48	55.4
Age (<i>M</i> , <i>SD</i>)	18.93, 1.48	20.33, 2.09	18.75, 1.19	19.25, 1.79	20.87, 1.61
Marital status (% single)	96.4	95.0	100	95	96.2
Living arrangements (% living with at least one parent)	90.4	—	92.3	83	98.7
Religious affiliation (% Muslim, % Christian)	90.4, 7.2	76.5, 14.3	84.6, 11.5	89, 10	98.7, 1.3
Religiosity (% moderately, % actively involved in faith)	54.2, 33.7	—	61.5, 26.9	57, 34	31.8, 65.6
Ethnocultural identity (% identifying as Arab)	100	100	100	100	100
Full-time student status (%)	100	60.5	100	100	100
Part- or full-time employment status (%)	0	39.5	0	0	0
Financial support from parents ^a (%)	95.2	69.2	88.5	93.5	87

^aAverage of three separate indicators: food and rent, tuition and education costs, and pocket money.

were living in the UAE and recruited from undergraduate psychology courses and snowball sampling in exchange for a small box of gourmet chocolates. More than half ($n = 38$) of the 68 conflict issues identified in this study were unique. At the end of the focus group, participants were asked to indicate which of the 131 conflict items generated in the preliminary investigation were relevant for Arab families.

Salient Conflict Issues and Domains

Both authors independently coded the data using a typological approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify the salient conflict issues and domains that emerged. Participants reported conflict around the same broad categories identified in the preliminary investigation. As discussed previously, many of these issues have been identified in research with African, Asian, European, and Latino American youth. However, it appeared that conflict across the focus groups was inextricably linked to honor. Specifically, most participants indicated that conflict stemmed from a desire to protect individual and familial reputation. An 18-year-old Emirati female (ID 1) attributed her parents' restrictiveness to preserving her honor:

... I want to do many things [and my parents say], "No, you can't because your uncle, your auntie is going to talk about it." ... Here one thing happens, it spreads around very fast. So you have to think about what you do, what you say, how you act, and how you dress because if it goes around then the rumor doesn't stop for a long time.

These rumors, in turn, affect the entire family. A 19-year-old Emirati female (ID 3) explained,

... the fact that the rumor has spread will haunt you for the rest of your life. It's like there's no way to erase it. And it's always going to be there next to your name ... it just affects a girl, her future, her marriage.

A 20-year-old Emirati male (ID 15) highlighted the idea that misconduct will also affect the parents' reputation, "My dad doesn't want people to look at him in a bad way like, 'How did you raise this kid?'" The following section presents data extracts for each broad conflict category.

Education. Issues included the importance of academic achievement and getting grades that satisfied their parents. Some of these issues were related to honor. A 17-year-old Egyptian female (ID 12) explained that Arab youth, particularly males, are often pressured to pursue certain degrees to preserve their reputation:

The whole idea of, "You should be an engineer" or "You should study medicine." To [parents] that's the kind of successful majors. Because in places like Egypt, if you are a business student people look at you like it's not that you chose to study business, it's that you could not get grades high enough to take you to other schools (Other Egyptian participants agree).

Risky behavior. Issues included driving recklessly and using drugs, which partly seemed to center on maintaining the family's reputation. A 17-year-old Emirati male (ID 14) said,

One of the problems here is you carry your family name. [Your parents] tell you, "Remember, you are carrying your family name. Don't make a bad image of us. Don't be that guy who took drugs when he was young and now his kids are taking drugs." The image of the family is going to keep carrying on.

Personal choice. Issues included going out and studying abroad. Some participants indicated that their parents were protecting their individual and familial reputation by restricting clothing style and curfew. A 20-year-old Egyptian female (ID 11) said, "I'm not allowed to go home late. I have to dress in a way. [My dad] always says that people are going to start talking."

Culture and religion. Issues included religious views and following cultural traditions, partly because deviating from these traditions would bring shame to the family. An 18-year-old Emirati female (ID 4) said, "Most parents worry about . . . how other people see it, and how it looks to society. That's one of the biggest things here—they worry about what other people say."

Family expectations. Issues included relationships with extended family and listening to parents when they each have different rules. A 20-year-old Emirati male (ID 18) also noted that conflict can arise when Arab adolescents and emerging adults fail to uphold their family obligations, as it reflects poorly upon the child and his or her parents, "This also goes to the reputation. If they don't see you in the marriage or the funeral, they will speak. They will say, 'Where's the son of this person? Where is he?'"

Dating and marriage. Issues included marrying someone outside their cultural or religious group, and when to get married. Several participants indicated that dating can instigate conflict because it leads to gossip within the community. A 20-year-old Emirati male (ID 18) said, "If you go out with girls a lot, the family members would see you and they'll speak about you . . . Because in the Arab families they are not open-minded towards [these things]." Dating could then make it difficult for an individual to get married, ultimately bringing shame to the entire family. A 21-year-old Egyptian male (ID 22) stated,

They're afraid that [their daughters] will get involved in stuff and then they're unclean or they're not pure anymore. Their parents don't want that because it brings shame on parents because they didn't raise their parents to be wife material, technically. [Interviewer: What is "wife material?"] Virgin.

Discussion

The results of this study both supported and extended the preliminary investigation. The items raised by focus group participants were consistent with the six domains and reflected issues that were either captured by existing measures (e.g., the importance of education) or identified as unique items (e.g., when to get married) in the preliminary investigation. The qualitative nature of this study extended the preliminary investigation by highlighting the relation between conflict and the maintenance of individual and familial honor.

Study 2: Refining Our Items

At the end of Study 1, we had a pool of 137 conflict items for the AFCI. We started refining our items by considering how frequently each item was raised in earlier phases, as well as how relevant the insiders perceived each item to be to Arab families. We eliminated items that were identified as irrelevant (e.g., "Using the television") and combined other related items (e.g., "How teens spend their own money," "Allowance," and others were combined to form "Spending habits"). This process resulted in a refined pool of 63 items that we tested empirically.

Method

Participants and procedures. Participants were Arabs living in the UAE who were recruited from an undergraduate elective course at a private university in exchange for course credit.

Measures

AFCI. Participants rated each of the 63 items on a scale ranging from 1 (*no conflict over this issue*) to 6 (*a lot of conflict over this issue*). Items related to education, risky behaviors, culture and religion, family expectations, and dating and marriage. A total score for the AFCI was computed by averaging the scores for each conflict issue. Higher scores reflected more conflict. The total scale demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .95$).

Results

We balanced comprehensiveness with efficiency by refining the pool of items in two stages. First, we discarded 16 items that had mean scores below the midpoint and were also rated as "No conflict over this issue" by at least half the sample. We kept four items meeting these criteria as they were on the cusp and rated as important in previous rounds of data collection. Second, we discarded seven items that were not clearly relevant to the six domains. We kept three that could fit multiple domains and were rated highly in previous data collections. This process resulted in a final pool of 40 items. Test-retest reliability of these 40 items was assessed over 7 weeks ($r = .73$). Given that conflict is a dynamic activity that can change over time, the test-retest is at acceptable levels.

Discussion

Similar to the preliminary investigation and Study 1, participants reported some conflict items that were similar ($n = 26$) and some conflict items that were distinct ($n = 14$) to previous investigations. Conflict issues tended to localize around the six domains identified previously.

Study 3: Validating Our Measure

Our next step was to identify the factor structure of the AFCI and evaluate its psychometric properties.

Method

Participants and procedures. Participants were Arabs living in the UAE who were recruited from an undergraduate business course at a public university in exchange for course credit.

Measures

AFCI. Participants rated each of the 40 items that were refined in Study 2. This scale demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .95$).

ICI. To assess convergent validity, participants completed Chung's (2001) 24-item ICI. This scale measures conflict in three domains: family expectations, education and career, and dating and marriage. Items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*no conflict over this issue*) to 6 (*a lot of conflict over this issue*). A total score for the ICI was computed by averaging the scores for each conflict issue. Higher scores reflected more conflict. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .91.

Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment. To assess predictive validity, participants completed Armsden and Greenberg's (1987) 25-item *Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment-Revised*. This scale measures parent-child relationships in three domains: trust, communication, and alienation. Items were rated on a scale from 1 (*almost never or never true*) to 5 (*almost always or always true*). A score for parent-child relationships was computed by summing the scores for each conflict issue (negatively worded items were reverse coded). Higher scores reflected stronger relationships. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .90.

Results

Factor structure. We pooled the Study 2 and Study 3 data to have enough statistical power to examine the factor structure of the AFCI. We performed a principal-factors analysis with direct oblimin rotation on the initial 40 items, specifying a six-factor solution that was supported by the scree plot. We then iteratively eliminated several items based on low factor loadings. Several of these items were also vague, not highly ranked in previous data collections, and had low cross-loadings across multiple factors. At the end of this process, we had a total of 35 items across six factors that accounted for 62.4% of the total variance explained. Consistent with Field's (2005) recommendation, only items loading greater than $|.40|$ were used to construct the six subscales of the AFCI (Table 2). The psychometric properties and descriptive statistics of the final AFCI are presented in Table 3.

Convergent and predictive validity. There was a large positive correlation between the AFCI and the ICI ($r = .88$), suggesting convergent validity. This strong positive correlation remained even when the nine common items were removed from the AFCI ($r = .83$). There were also strong positive correlations between related domains from the two scales, including family expectations ($r = .85$), education ($r = .85$), and dating and marriage ($r = .96$, all $ps < .001$).

The AFCI captured conflict to a greater extent than the ICI. A series of paired comparisons revealed that participants reported significantly more conflict on the AFCI overall ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.12$), as well as around education ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.26$) and family expectations ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.41$), than they did on the ICI ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.00$; $M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.09$; $M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.13$, respectively). There was also a negative correlation between the AFCI and parent-child relationships ($r = -.21$, $p = .004$), demonstrating predictive validity.

Gender, age, religiosity, and conflict. We examined how age, gender, and religiosity relate to conflict using the AFCI. Conflict was associated with age ($r = .16$, $p = .01$), gender ($r = .22$, $p = .001$), and religiosity ($r = .23$, $p = .23$). To further explore these differences across all six

Table 2. Factor Analysis of the Arab Family Conflict Inventory.

Factor and item	Factor					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Factor 1: Education						
How much time to spend studying	.82					
Importance of academic achievement	.79					
Getting grades that satisfy my parents	.76					
Importance of materialism and success	.61					
Procrastination/time management	.58					
Being compared with others	.45					
Factor 2: Risky behavior						
Using illegal drugs		-.95				
Drinking alcohol		-.93				
Smoking cigarettes		-.85				
Using bad language (swearing)		-.83				
Smoking shisha		-.64				
Moving out of the house		-.56				
Driving recklessly		-.43				
Hanging out with friends who your parents think are a bad influence		-.41				
Factor 3: Personal choice						
Vacationing without supervision			.73			
Staying overnight at a friend's house			.72			
Clothing choices			.62			
Going out too much			.64			
Studying abroad			.61			
Wanting more freedom to make your own decisions			.51			
Coming home on time			.50			
Factor 4: Culture and religion						
Religious views				-.82		
Practicing religion (e.g., going to church/mosque, wearing the scarf)				-.82		
Following cultural traditions				-.70		
Factor 5: Family expectations						
Relationship with brothers and sisters					-.81	
Relationship with other family members, not including siblings					-.78	
Listening to my parents when they each have different rules or expectations					-.63	
Spending time with the family					-.60	
Prioritizing family interests over your own					-.58	
Helping around the house					-.50	
Factor 6: Dating and marriage						
Whom to marry						-.77
When to get married						-.72
Marrying someone outside your cultural or religious group						-.66
Whom to date	-.45					-.51
When to begin dating	-.50					-.44

Note. Values less than |.40| were not listed. The six-factor solution accounted for 62.4% of the total variance.

Table 3. Psychometric Properties of the Arab Family Conflict Inventory Subscales.

Variable	Education	Risky behavior	Personal choice	Culture and religion	Family expectations	Dating and marriage
<i>M</i>	3.12 ^{a,b}	3.26 ^a	2.94 ^{b,c}	2.70 ^c	2.76 ^c	2.81 ^c
<i>SD</i>	1.30	1.66	1.27	1.54	1.35	1.51
Median	3.17	3.00	2.71	2.33	2.40	2.60
Range	5	5	5	5	5	5
No. of items	6	9	7	3	5	5
Internal consistency	.84	.91	.82	.84	.85	.85
Subscale correlations						
Education		.37**	.45***	.46***	.59***	.31***
Risky behavior			.42***	.28***	.31***	.66***
Personal choice				.34***	.56***	.48***
Culture and religion					.50***	.30***
Family expectations						.35***

Note. Significant differences among individual factors are denoted by different superscripts.

domains, we conducted a repeated-measures ANOVA with gender and religiosity included as between-subjects factors and age as a covariate. Results indicated a Domain \times Gender interaction, $F(5, 248) = 9.52, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$. Females reported significantly more conflict than males on the overall scale ($M = 3.19, SD = 1.10; M = 2.74, SD = 0.95$, respectively) and four domains: risky behavior ($M = 3.51, SD = 1.82; M = 3.09, SD = 1.54$, respectively), personal choice ($M = 3.43, SD = 1.23; M = 2.41, SD = 1.07$, respectively), family expectations ($M = 2.88, SD = 1.31; M = 2.55, SD = 1.28$), and dating and marriage ($M = 3.14, SD = 1.58; M = 2.44, SD = 1.33$, respectively). Females ($M = 2.86, SD = 0.98$) also reported significantly more conflict than males ($M = 2.54, SD = 1.01$) on the ICI.

Discussion

This study identified the factor structure of the AFCI and showed it to be a reliable and valid measure capturing conflict around items that are similar to and distinct from previous investigations with African, Asian, European, and/or Latino American youth. We offered some preliminary analyses demonstrating that there may be some interesting and important differences in conflict with respect to gender, age, and religiosity.

General Discussion

This study extended our understanding of conflict by examining this issue in an underrepresented ethnocultural group, developing and validating a 35-item scale that captures the conflict issues that are salient to Arab families, demonstrating that conflict is an issue that is relevant to both adolescents and emerging adults from Arab families, and highlighting the relation between conflict and honor in Arab families.

Consistent with previous research, our studies found that Arab families experience conflict over issues that are similar to other ethnocultural groups, including education, risky behavior, personal choice, culture and religion, family expectations, and dating and marriage (Chung, 2001; Juang & Umana-Taylor, 2012; Smetana et al., 2005; Smetana et al., 2006).

We also found that Arab families experience conflict over issues that are distinct to those reported by other ethnocultural groups. This is evidenced by the fact that 15 of the final 35 items

on the AFCI were unique to those captured in existing conflict measures. All 35 items, however, were still applicable to the overall domains. The results of Study 1 suggested that many of these issues may be related to the emphasis on honor in Arab culture (Uskul et al., 2010), supporting some previous research with immigrant Arab Canadian emerging adults (Rasmi, Daly, & Chuang, 2014). Study 3 demonstrated that conflict would have been significantly underreported had the most applicable existing scale (the ICI) been used.

The results of our quantitative studies identified some important gender differences with regard to conflict. Specifically, females reported significantly more overall conflict than males. This was specifically visible within the domains of risky behavior, personal choice, family expectations, and dating and marriage. This disparity may be attributed to the differential treatment of Arab sons and daughters (Ajami et al., 2015). Specifically, several studies have found that females are afforded less social freedom than males as a way to safeguard their individual and familial honor and reputation. Thus, the behavior of female adolescents and emerging adults is more restricted (Ajrouch, 1999). As a result, females are also likely to spend more time around the house than males, thus increasing the opportunity for conflict. Interestingly, no gender differences emerged on the education or culture and religion domains. This is likely due to the fact that education has become increasingly important for both men and women throughout the Arab region (Rashad et al., 2005), and because Arab culture and religious expectations are strong for sons and daughters.

We also found that conflict is a salient issue that can extend beyond adolescence and into emerging adulthood for Arab families. Indeed, the results of our study suggested that conflict actually increased as a function of age. This is an important finding because the vast majority of research on conflict has focused on adolescents and overlooked emerging adulthood (Syed & Mitchell, 2013). The focus on conflict in parent–adolescent dyads is largely due to the fact that autonomy development and individuation tend to occur in adolescence (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). However, research has shown that individuals from European and Western backgrounds tend to desire autonomy at an earlier age (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003). This finding is likely related to the fact that Arabs continue to live in the family home until marriage—which can occur in emerging adulthood and beyond—and maintain strong ties to their nuclear and extended families throughout the family life cycle (Ajami et al., 2015). Because autonomy and conflict are intertwined, it is imperative that we study these issues in older developmental groups when we examine families from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds.

Finally, we developed and validated a scale that can be used with confidence to capture conflict within Arab families. Our measure maintains consistency by incorporating items that are seemingly common across cultures, as it concurrently captures culturally specific issues in a nuanced way. The results of Study 3 demonstrated that the AFCI has sound psychometric properties, both as an overall scale and within the six individual subscales.

Limitations and Future Directions

Like all studies, this research is not without its limitations. The most apparent is that we used self-report data. However, these types of data are appropriate for this program of research, as conflict is seen through a very personal lens, and perceptions of conflict are relevant. Future research should also obtain data from all family members given that conflict is, by nature, (at least) a dyadic interaction. Therefore, combining self-report and other-report data within family dyads would allow a more comprehensive investigation of the issues and motivations behind them. Future research should also examine gender differences of the parent and child by investigating conflict in mother–son, mother–daughter, father–son, and father–daughter dyads.

This research focused on both the extent and nature of intergenerational conflict in Arab families, as opposed to the process. However, the results of our focus groups suggested that intergenerational

conflict is inextricably linked to the emphasis on honor in Arab culture. Future research should further examine the relations among honor, parental restrictions and justifications, and conflict.

The generalizability of our study is also limited in two ways. First, although students are broadly representative of the targeted age group, we also need to consider that not all Arab adolescents and emerging adults attend university. Extending future investigations outside of the university context would extend our knowledge of conflict within Arab families. Second, our primary data collection was conducted within the UAE, with some data also sourced from immigrant Arab Canadians. Collecting data from other Arab nations, as well as other immigrant contexts (such as the United States or Australia) is an important avenue for future research. It should be noted that although our primary data collection was conducted within UAE universities, we do have a diverse sample with representatives from 14 of the 22 Arab nations.

Conclusion

Our program of research extended our understanding of conflict in Arab families. In particular, we identified the conflict issues that are culturally unique to this population. In doing so, we developed and validated the 35-item AFCI.

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Note

1. The term *Arab* refers to any individual who originates from a country that is part of the Arab League.

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