

May 2005

**THE PERCEPTION OF PARENTAL CONFLICT BEHAVIOURS IN  
PROGENY MARRIAGES: A PILOT STUDY**

by

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MINI-DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

MAGISTER ARTIUM (PSYCH)

in



UNIVERSITY  
OF  
JOHANNESBURG  
PSYCHOLOGY

in the

FACULTY OF ARTS

at the

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

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May 2005



With so many spectacular colours in the world, it's a shame  
to make everything black and white.

DENNIS R. LITTLE

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would acknowledge the following people for their encouragement and participation in writing this dissertation:

- Dr Arnót Venter, thank you for your availability, support, teaching and never ending commitment at under sometimes trying times. It was a journey I learnt a lot from.
- My husband Giles. Thank you for believing enough in me to give me the opportunity to spread my wings and learn to fly, and for the continued support and love that I know is real.
- My mother and father. Mom, I know you can see me from where you are. Thank you for the sacrifices you made in making my initial step possible. Dad, for your constant encouragement and the hunger for knowledge you instilled in me. God bless.
- Marlene and Jann, my friends, my family and my confidants. Your love and belief in me was constant and unfailing and your messages, calls and prayers held me up at times when I felt that I could not.
- My research group, Sue, Katrin, Khosi and Gill. Thank you for the time you gave to me, the insight I gained and the glasses of wine we shared. Thank you for pushing me to times when I did not realise I needed it, and thank you for being there for me when I did.
- To Angus and Amy, my constant shadows and companions, who made this journey less lonely at times.
- To my God, my guides and my angels, I have not made your work as easy as you made mine. Blessings.

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## ABSTRACT

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Most people learn communication and behavioral skills in their families, which means the learning that takes place in the family of origin will affect how children learn to deal with conflict in adult life. People form the basis of their coping skills in early childhood, either through modeling or cognitive awareness, or in the case of inappropriate behaviour, through distortions. This means that communication skills and conflict styles that are acquired early in childhood might be perpetuated when these children become adults and marry.

Several studies have been conducted on conflict styles and the family of origin. However, very little is available on the application of conflict styles learnt in the family of origin and the impact they may have in the marriage of progeny children. This pilot study attempts to address this aspect.

This investigation examines whether the conflict styles experienced or perceived in the family of origin have any bearing on how progeny children deal with conflict in their own marriages. A quantitative pilot study of fourteen couples was undertaken in which each couple completed two questionnaires. The first one related to how the couples themselves deal with conflict, the second focussed on how they perceive that their parents dealt with conflict.

The theoretical model used to describe the structure of the family and its interconnectedness is systems theory. Social cognitive learning theory is examined in terms of how behaviour is learnt and attachment theory examines different types of attachment and the hypothesised resultant behaviours.

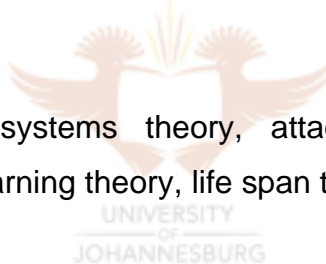
The results of the study indicated that there was a significant difference between the couples' and their parents' conflict styles, on some of the variables measured. The differences recorded were in terms of how couples deal with conflict in their marriage, as opposed to how they perceived their parents to deal with conflict in their own marriages. It can be hypothesised that the conflict styles couples perceived their parents to use did impact on the styles they used in their own marriage. In some cases however, they felt that they improved on the style perceived, instead of simply perpetuating the cycle they had experienced.

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## KEYWORDS

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Conflict resolution skills, systems theory, attachment theory, quantitative research, social cognitive learning theory, life span theory.



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## OPSOMMING

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Die meeste mense leer kommunikasie- en gedragsvaardighede in hul gesinne aan. Dit beteken dat die kennis wat kinders in hulle gesin van oorsprong betreffende hantering konflik opgedoen het word later deur hulle as volwassenes toegepas. Mense vorm die basis van hul hanteringsvaardighede tydens hul vroeë kinderjare deur modellering of kognitiewe gewaarwording, of in die geval van ontoepaslike gedrag, deur distorsie. Dit beteken dat kommunikasievaardighede en konflikstyle wat tydens vroeë kinderjare aangeleer is moontlik kan voortbestaan wanneer hierdie kinders volwassenes word en in die huwelik tree.

'n Aantal studies is uitgevoer oor konflikstyle en die gesin van oorsprong. Daar is egter min inligting oor die toepassing van konflikstyle wat aangeleer is in die gesin van oorsprong en die invloed daarvan op die huwelike van afstammeling kinders beskikbaar. Hierdie loodsstudie poog om hierdie aspek aan te spreek.

In die navorsing wat voorgelê word, word ondersoek of die konflikstyle wat ervaar of gewaar word in die gesin van oorsprong enige invloed uitoefen op die wyse waarop afstammeling kinders konflik in hul eie huwelike hanteer. 'n Kwalitatiewe loodsstudie is op veertien getroude paartjies uitgevoer waartydens elke paartjie twee vraelyste moes voltooi. Die eerste vraelys het te make met die wyse waarop die paartjies self konflik in hul eie huwelike hanteer en die tweede vraelys het op hul waarnemings van hoe hul ouers konflik hanteer het, gefokus.

Die teoretiese modelle wat in die studie toegepas is, is *sisteemteorie* om die gesinstruktuur en -verbintenis te beskryf, *sosiale kognitiewe leerteorie* tot opgevolk van hoe gedrag aangeleer is en, laastens, *verbintenisteorie*, wat verskillende tipes verbintenisse en die hipotetiese gevolglike gedrag ondersoek.

Die bevindinge van die studie het aangedui dat daar in sommige van die veranderlikes wat gemeet is 'n aansienlike verskil bestaan tussen die konflikstyle van die paartjies en hul ouers. Die verskille wat aangeteken is, is verwant aan hoe die paartjies konflik in hul eie huwelike hanteer, in teenstelling met hul waarnemings van die wyse waarop hul ouers konflik in hul huwelike hanteer het. Daar kan gehipotiseer word dat die konflikstyle wat die paartjies by hul ouers waargeneem het, die style wat hul in hul eie huwelike gebruik, beïnvloed. In sommige gevalle was hulle van mening dat hulle op hierdie style verbeter het, in plaas daarvan om die siklus van hulle ouers se konflikstyle te herhaal.



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## **SLEUTELWOORDE**

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Konflikhantering vaardighede, sisteemteorie, verbintenisteorie, kwantitatiewe navorsing, sosiale kognitiewe leerteorie, lewensduurte teorie.

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