THE ADOLESCENT IN THE FAMILY

Patricia Noller and Victor Callan

ROUTLEDGE

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The Adolescent in the Family

Patricia Noller

and

Victor Callan

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Preface

Adolescence has always been a controversial area of theory and research, and never more so than over the last twenty years. While adolescence was once just an area of academic discussion, many developments have made adolescence an area of great concern to members of the community at large, whether they be parents, politicians or those working with adolescents in education and/or welfare. With political and social issues such as youth unemployment, drug use and abuse and streetkids, almost everyone is aware of the problems facing particular groups of young people. In addition, many parents fear that these problems could affect their own family.

While once psychodynamic interpretations of adolescence with their emphasis on 'Sturm und Drang' (or Storm and Stress) clearly dominated our perceptions of what adolescence was like, there was an implicit belief that the family played little part in the lives of adolescents who were only interested in being involved with and pleasing their peer groups. Parents were very much seen as the outsiders. Today there is a much greater understanding of the complexity of the needs of adolescents and their strong desire to be close to both their parents and their friends. Adolescents are expected to establish their independence through renegotiating their relationships with their parents to involve more freedom and flexibility. While most adolescents are prepared to take on the new responsibilities associated with growing up, they also need the help and support of their parents as they work through this process. Sometimes the supportive environment is not there for the adolescents, because of family conflict, the breakup of marriages and societal problems such as high levels of youth unemployment. In this situation, a wide range of problems can result.

We have written this book for those who want to understand the part a supportive family can play in helping adolescents cope with the physical and emotional changes associated with this period of their lives. In particular, we have developed the theme that adolescents,

through conflict and negotiation, establish new but different relationships with their parents, relationships that can endure for a life-time.

Parents will find a lot of encouragement in this book and may also be helped in relating better to their adolescents. They will also see the consequences of resorting to styles of parenting involving high levels of coercion and control. For those parents who have experienced a divorce, we have pointed to the importance of partners maintaining a good relationship with each other and with their children. At the same time, they will realise the many difficulties in supporting adolescents through a cycle of separation, divorce and re-marriage.

Others who may find help in reading this book would be those who live and work with adolescents away from the family environment: teachers, welfare workers, social workers, church leaders, psychologists and psychiatrists may all find material in this book that will help them to understand young people better. We have attempted here to bring together the best research available, much of which is generally restricted to academic journals devoted to adolescents. We believe this information belongs with the public. We hope you find reading about adolescents and their needs and problems as interesting and enjoyable as the task of writing this book has been.

Patricia Noller
and
Victor Callan

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Chapter one

Theoretical perspectives and controversies about adolescents

Adolescence is all about growing up and becoming an adult. Typically, the term refers to the time between one's childhood and adulthood, beginning with the physical and emotional changes characteristic of puberty. While the end of adolescence is probably not as clearly specified as the beginning, it is characterised by such events as the adolescent leaving home, beginning a career or getting married. As Stone and Church (1968) suggest, one of the difficulties for parents and adolescents is that 'readiness for adulthood comes about about two years later than the adolescent claims and about two years before the parent will admit' (p.447).

While adolescents may move away from their family towards their friends, relationships with their families are important for most adolescents both during adolescence and for the rest of their lives. For this reason, we want to argue quite strongly that any serious consideration of the adolescent experience has to include the type of focus on the family that we will be attempting in this book. We will be taking the view that the quality of family relationships is crucial in determining the competence and confidence with which young people face this major transition from childhood to adulthood. We believe that family relationships affect the success with which young people negotiate the major tasks of adolescence, the extent to which they become involved in the problem behaviours generally associated with this time, and their ability to establish meaningful close relationships that are likely to last. The aspects of the family that seem to be particularly important are the encouragement of autonomy and independence, the degree of control desired by parents, the amount of conflict among family members, the closeness of family bonds and the love and support available to the adolescents.

How many young people have the continuous, tumultuous experiences frequently depicted as a feature of adolescence? Offer and Sabshin (1984) claim that only about 21 per cent of their large sample of teenagers experienced such a tumultuous adolescence. About the

same percentage were confident throughout the period and seemed to have very few problems. About 35 per cent 'moved through the period in spurts emotionally and mentally'. As we shall show later, the style of parenting is one very important determinant of the extent to which adolescents are likely to have major problems.

On the other hand, these figures do not allow us to deny that most adolescents are subject to conflict, confusion and stress. They are frequently unsure about themselves and about the direction of their lives. They are likely to experience periods of strong self-doubt, and feel quite uncertain about how quickly they want to grow up, or whether growing up will only make things worse. To further complicate the situation, such confusion is not always expressed as uncertainty, but rather as certainty, over-confidence, brashness and even anger at those who refuse to agree with them. Adolescents can also be unpredictable, so that within minutes they change from mature and adult-like behaviours to throwing childish temper tantrums. Parents find such unpredictability and moodiness very difficult to handle.

Many parents dread the onset of adolescence. Those parents who have 'been through it' often warn parents complaining about younger children that 'they've hardly started yet' or 'they don't know they're alive'. No wonder we hear proud parents of primary school children saying, 'You must come and meet our son, while he's still nice'. Rarely do we hear the parents of adolescents making similar invitations.

Research tends to support the views in the general community that raising adolescents can be difficult. For instance, Olson and his colleagues (1983), in a large cross-sectional study of families over the life-cycle found that adolescence was clearly the most stressful stage of the family life-cycle. Marital and family satisfaction, family pride and marital communication were all lower for families with adolescents than for any other group of families, and family stress was higher than at any other stage.

The theme of this book is the adolescent and the role played by the family in helping adolescents cope with the transition to adulthood. The family has a major role in shaping the identity of adolescents and their willingness to explore alternatives. Importantly, there is a significant body of theory about family functioning that points to the vital role played by the family in the development and adjustment of adolescents.

Understanding the functioning of families

How families function is conceptualized in a number of different ways, varying from a focus on the normal family (e.g. Olson *et al.*, 1983) or on the pathological family (Walsh, 1982). There are a number of models of family functioning, including Olson's Circumplex Model (Olson,

Sprenkle & Russell, 1979), Beavers' Systems Model (Beavers, 1981; Beavers & Voeller, 1983) and the McMaster Model (Epstein, Bishop & Baldwin, 1982; Epstein, Bishop & Levin, 1978). These models generally have two aims: to describe the most important dimensions of family functioning and to describe the dimensions which are most effective in discriminating between healthy and poorly functioning families.

Although the models are quite different in some ways, there is also a great deal of overlap and agreement. It is this agreement which has become our major focus here and elsewhere. In general, theorists agree that families should provide their members with moderate levels of cohesion (or closeness or connectedness) as well as moderate levels of flexibility about roles and rules. In addition, autonomy should be encouraged, and communication should be clear and direct.

For example, in the study by Olson and his colleagues (1983), families with adolescents showed high levels of stress and low levels of satisfaction. These researchers found, however, that those adolescent families with low levels of stress and high levels of satisfaction were balanced in terms of their cohesion and adaptability. That is, families that cope well with the transition to adulthood are close and supportive, but also flexible in their approach to solving family problems.

In another model of families, Beavers identifies two main dimensions: competence and family style. The dimension of competence includes power structure, degree of negotiation and encouragement of autonomy. The style dimension involves the extent to which the family is inward-focused (centripetal) or outward-focused (centrifugal). Healthy families are balanced on style, with some activities being family-centred and others involving outsiders and the community. Extremes of style are only evident in unhealthy families who are low in competence. These families tend to be either strongly centripetal, with intense family loyalties and activities generally centred in the family, or strongly centrifugal with weak family bonds and activities centred outside the family.

Beavers' ideas are of special interest to researchers and practitioners, because he sees family style as relevant to the type of psychopathology likely to develop in some family members. Adolescents in centripetal families are more likely to develop internally focused symptoms such as depression or schizophrenia. Those in centrifugal families are more likely to develop externally focused symptoms such as delinquent behaviours, psychopathy and general acting-out.

For Epstein, in the McMaster model, the healthy family is one where closeness is moderate and the control of behaviour is flexible. All necessary roles are assigned to competent individuals who are accountable for their performance and communication is clear and

direct. Emotions are expressed at levels appropriate to the situation and problem-solving is effective. All of these models of the healthy family fit with the concerns of adolescence researchers for family environments where individuality and autonomy are encouraged, control is moderate and flexible and adolescents are likely to receive all the love and support they need.

Some major tasks for the adolescent

There are several developmental milestones through which adolescents must pass in order to achieve adulthood and healthy psychosocial functioning. As we shall show, each of these tasks is accomplished most effectively in families where autonomy is encouraged, the parents' level of control is low to moderate, conflict is generally low and members of the family feel supported and loved.

One task of adolescence could be labelled as emancipation from parents. This emancipation is accomplished gradually, but even so, not necessarily without stress and tension for both the parents and the adolescent. Psychosexual differentiation is also part of adolescence. The adolescent learns to deal with and control new capacities for physical sexual activity. Adolescents need to understand their sexuality, and the part it plays in close relationships. They also need to define their gender identity, grappling as well with the sex roles that are acceptable for their own and the opposite sex.

Adolescence also involves gaining the skills which are necessary for economic independence and for establishing a career. Adolescents cannot be truly independent until they are able to support themselves. They need to decide on the level of education they wish to achieve in order to pursue job opportunities. All of these tasks add to a sense of separation from parents.

We would like to argue that through the negotiation of these and other tasks, adolescents pass a further milestone of developing a realistic, stable, positive identity. This task is particularly important, since it can only be achieved if the other tasks have first been successfully negotiated. All of these tasks are basic to our discussion of adolescents and the family.

These milestones have probably always been part of the transition to adulthood. Recent social changes, however, have made such tasks more difficult, at least for some adolescents. Emancipation from parents is complicated by the increased need for higher education, the lack of job opportunities for many young people, increased levels of family breakdown and the tendency for some young people to move out of home into situations which are less than ideal. Sexual differentiation is

being affected by changing societal standards, more alternatives, a greater push to express one's sexuality and more opportunities to engage in sexual behaviours and explore sexual alternatives. Career goals for many adolescents are being badly affected by the lack of jobs, the intense competition throughout high school and higher education, as well as more existential concerns about the future of this world they are inheriting. Many ask whether there is any point in studying and working hard, when the world may not be here ten years from now. Finally, the challenge of establishing one's identity is being complicated by similar factors, as well as by the adolescents' disillusionment with the values of their parents. Today's adolescents are more concerned than most of their parents ever were, about the environment, the conservation of resources and heritage, the uses of nuclear power, personal freedom and the ideals of social and racial equality.

In sum, adolescence involves a series of milestones that include establishing individual sexual, social and work lives and a positive sense of identity. Parents want adolescents to be independent, but also to like themselves as young adults. Much of this volume is about these milestones, and the role of the family in producing independent, happy young people. The search for independence and a positive identity, however, is not without risks, as we shall see later.

Becoming independent from parents

Terms such as 'breaking away' or 'breaking free' are often used to describe the changes in the relationship between parents and their adolescents. As we will emphasise throughout this volume, however, for many adolescents there is no real break in their relationship with their parents, but rather a gradual movement toward more autonomy and independence. Of course, this change is unlikely to occur without some anxiety, and some anger and distress to both parents and adolescents. Parents resist changes to family rules that have worked very well in the past, while adolescents seem to want all the rules changed at once.

Early adolescence is an extremely important developmental period. There is increased stress from the onset of puberty. The transition from primary to secondary school is associated with increasing levels of conflict and more and more arguments with parents (Petersen & Taylor, 1980), with relationships improving between middle and late adolescence. From our perspective, while high levels of continued conflict are associated with bad outcomes, conflict in early adolescence can help the adolescent achieve some of the necessary changes in roles and relationships. Parents and adolescents then settle into the new situation under the new rules. In this new situation, adolescents want more freedom to make decisions about their appearance, their social lives,

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their eating habits and what they watch on television or listen to on the radio. We will talk more about these changes later.

One common problem is that adolescents want considerable independence and autonomy while still living at home. Again, the family is important in determining how successfully this autonomy is achieved. Where parents accept and encourage their adolescents to gain independence, minimal conflict is likely. Where parents resist their adolescents' strivings toward independence, trying to maintain total control, high levels of conflict are likely to ensue. In such a family climate, adolescents may even rebel against what they perceive to be the unreasonableness of their parents, and leave home.

There are different styles or types of independence. In a useful discussion of independence, Steinberg and Silverberg (1986) highlight very different aspects of autonomy. According to them, each of these styles is important to adolescents. Emotional autonomy is a process of individuation. The adolescent lets go of childish views that their parents are infallible or perfect and reduces his or her childish dependence on them. As might be expected, realising that they are separate from parents and that parents can be wrong, frequently leads to conflict between adolescents and parents. Adolescents who, in the past, generally accepted their parents' advice may start to argue and become defiant. Parents who were once seen as 'knowing-it-all' may become the 'know-alls' who think they know everything but, according to their adolescents, really don't know very much. Parents who recognise the source of such defiance, and the importance of adolescents giving up their childish dependence on them, will be less troubled by these periods of conflict.

A second feature of establishing autonomy is dealing with peer pressure, particularly pressure to get involved in the use of alcohol or drugs, or to engage in anti-social behaviours. There is an interesting cycle of changes in parent–peer relations. Preadolescents accept their parents' standards, and resist peer pressure by falling back on the rules and guidelines adopted from home. Early and middle adolescents, on the other hand, begin to reject the views of their parents and try out new rules. At this stage they appear to be more influenced by peer pressure. Older adolescents, however, complete the cycle in that they have frequently learned a lot about how the world works. As a result, they don't necessarily assume that their parents are always wrong and their peers are always right. They may even accept that their parents have some (if only a little) wisdom and experience. Thus, they seem less likely than younger adolescents either to reject their parents' views out of hand or to be overinfluenced by their peers.

As the research by Steinberg and Silverberg (1986) also indicates, autonomy from parents and resistance to peer pressure are negatively

related. The more autonomous an individual feels from their parents, the more susceptible they are to peer pressure. Becoming autonomous from parents at too early an age may make adolescents more at risk of pressure from peers to engage in deviant behaviours. On the other hand, there is also evidence that adolescents who come from families where the parents are too controlling are also at risk (Burt, Cohen & Bjorck, 1988).

Other discussions of autonomy (e.g. Newman & Murray, 1983) point to the roles of behavioural and value autonomy. Behavioural autonomy involves the ability to make decisions about daily routines and personal preferences. Value autonomy involves thinking through values and making decisions about what is important. Behavioural and emotional autonomy generally precede value autonomy in adolescence, since separateness and confidence are essential to decisions about one's values. Some aspects of autonomy are also related to the development of identity in adolescents, an issue we will explore later.

Becoming independent from parents can also involve leaving home. The pattern today is very different from the past when young people generally lived with their parents until they left home to get married. With the increasing emphasis on autonomy, teenagers are likely to move out of home, to share a house with friends, to move in with a girlfriend or boyfriend, and, over a number of years, may even have several cohabiting relationships before getting married. Some young people even move back home in between relationships or house-sharing, especially if they are short of money or need to save. With more marriages breaking down, mature sons or daughters are even moving back home after a divorce, at least until they 'get back on their feet'. For some young people, however, returning home is not a satisfactory option, no matter how great their need. Going back may place financial pressures on the family, create conflict between parents and children or lead to physical abuse. Under these conditions, some adolescents feel that they can never go back home.

Unfortunately, many adolescents who leave home early are likely to end up living in poverty, or even homeless. These are times of high youth unemployment, combined with a lack of cheap housing. In desperation, these adolescents may seek a living through drugs, prostitution, or crime.

Sexual development and differentiation

As mentioned earlier, another important milestone for adolescents is the emergence of their sexuality. Coming to terms with one's sexual feelings and establishing a positive sexual identity are important aspects of individuation. Many changes are taking place in the young person's

body that prepare the adolescent for sex and reproduction. There is also very rapid physical growth in both height and weight. If you've had the experience of visiting a friend's family and seeing their teenagers before and after a growth spurt, you will know how dramatic the changes can be. The sexual development of adolescents is an anxious stage for both the parents and the teenager. Parents worry about their adolescents having sex, getting pregnant and even becoming teenage parents. They are concerned about whether their child has the maturity to make responsible decisions about their sexual activity, and whether they are able to cope with the emotional demands of a sexual relationship. Parents are also in a dilemma about their role in preparing their child for sexual activity. Should they provide advice about contraceptives, or say nothing for fear of encouraging sexual experimentation? In the 1980s, there was also the spectre of AIDS and the possibility of infection through sexual activity with a person who is HIV positive. Fear of AIDS in the 80s and 90s is putting pressure on families, and the community, to educate teenagers about safe practices. In addition, parents realise that the pressures towards early sexual activity are much stronger than they used to be. With the more general rejection of religion and associated moral teaching, and constant exposure to sexually explicit material through television, movies and songs, there are clear pressures to become sexually involved even while still at high school.

As they accept their emerging sexuality, adolescents need to consider their own sexual orientation or preference. For most, the preference is for heterosexual relationships; however, homosexuality and bisexuality are more common choices in the 1980s than previously. While there is still stigma, there is less need for secrecy than used to be the case. Parents, on the other hand, are still likely to be devastated by the knowledge that their child is involved in homosexual activity.

Changing sex roles now mean that females, more so than before, can consider all careers as appropriate for women. In addition, young males are now expected to care for themselves and participate in household chores, whether single or married. While sex roles adopted during adolescence may not necessarily apply throughout life, young people do need to think about such issues.

Career and educational choices

Adolescence is a time for making choices about educational and career goals. Once again, these choices will not necessarily be final, but can have an important impact on the young person's future. Probably the most crucial choice is whether or not to finish school. Those who finish school seem to have a higher probablility of becoming employed. They are also more likely to get further education and training, soon after

leaving school and later in life. While in recent times it was possible to gain mature age entry to educational institutions without the necessary qualifications, competition for tertiary places is now more intense. Such 'second chances' of mature entry are now very limited.

Young people who don't finish school and who leave home early probably run the greatest risk of ending up on the streets. Of course, these decisions to drop out of school or leave home may not be made by the adolescent, but by the family. If the family does not place a high value on education or does not have the financial resources to keep young people in school after the period of compulsory education, then parents may insist that the adolescent leave. Sometimes the issue is further complicated by the fact that there are jobs available for the young people while they are under 18 years of age. The jobs tend to be poorly paid, and adolescents are likely to be put off once they turn 18. Becoming unemployed at 18, with no qualifications, can be a devastating experience.

Those young people who have opportunities for further education need help in choosing the kind of training they would like to pursue. Making career decisions that take into account interests, abilities, willingness to study and financial resources requires help from a professional counsellor or vocational guidance person. Some adolescents may also need help in sorting out their own interests from the expectations of parents. For example, a student may feel pressure to train in pharmacy because of expectations that they will carry on with the family business. However, they may really hate science subjects and prefer to be an English teacher.

Identity development at adolescence

How adolescents succeed or fail in developing a clear sense of identity, is an important theme of this book. Erikson's (1963; 1968) eight stages of development provide a useful theoretical basis for concerns about identity and autonomy in adolescence. He argues that the establishment of a firm sense of ego identity provides a crucial bridge between childhood and adulthood, and is a requirement for the successful resolution of the following stage of initiating intimacy and the formation of stable intimate relationships.

Newman and Murray (1983) define identity as 'like a blueprint for future commitments and life choices. It is a set of beliefs and goals about one's relationship with family members, lovers and friends, one's roles as worker, citizen and religious believer and one's aspirations for achievement' (p.294). There is a progressive strengthening of the sense of identity throughout adolescence. Significantly, the adolescent should considers a range of identity alternatives rather than settling for the most

obvious choices (such as those of parents or other authority figures). How the young person evaluates his or her identity is also crucial. Ideally, the sense of self-acceptance and personal uniqueness are high and the adolescent is confident and positive about the future.

The formation of an identity occurs through two related processes: personal exploration and psychological differentiation (Campbell, Adams & Dobson, 1984). Personal exploration involves examining attitudes, values and opinions, comparing these with alternatives and making a commitment to particular values and positions. Psychological differentiation, on the other hand, involves a gradually increasing awareness of the kind of person you are and of your separateness from others. At this point, individual adolescents become more conscious of their similarities to and differences from others.

Identity is also formed through a series of decisions which have particular implications for identity formation. Such decisions might include whether to go to college or university, whether and whom to date, how much effort to put into study and leisure, whether to take drugs and whether to stay at home with parents or to move away. Many of these decisions, of course, also have implications for the rest of a person's life. Making these decisions and forming a clear identity are important because of the increased level of self-esteem, increased stability of the self-concept and lower levels of anxiety which emerge as a consequence of identity formation (Bernard, 1981).

There are also a number of different aspects of identity, including personal identity, sexual identity, religious identity and political identity. Identity development includes decisions about how I relate to others, what kinds of work and activity I like, whether I like taking risks. One adolescent's identity, for example, might include the following aspects: 'I am a warm person who gets on well with other people, I like to enjoy myself and I don't really like working hard. I like work which is active (I couldn't bear to sit at a desk all day!) but where I can set my own pace. I don't really like study much, so I don't want a career where I would need to study for further qualifications. I like outside activities, and enjoy taking risks in sporting activities. I look forward to getting married and having a family some day, but am not in any particular hurry. I would like to have a good time first.'

Another young person of similar age may have a quite different identity. 'I am a fairly quiet, shy person. I don't like going around in a big group, and prefer going out with one or two friends to a concert or a movie. I like to have a fair amount of time on my own. I love reading and study and hope to get to the top of my chosen career of law. I don't like team sports or rough games and get my exercise by swimming and jogging, generally alone. I have a pretty serious approach to life and want to be of service to my fellow human beings. I am fairly religious

and go to church each Sunday. I'm not much interested in politics, at this stage. I hope to marry but that will have to wait until I have finished my study and established myself in a practice'.

Identity status

Basic to these differences in identity are the family experiences of adolescents, their individual personalities and whether or not they have experienced an identity crisis. In a theory of identity status, Marcia (1966; 1976) describes four different statuses which are defined in terms of whether the individual has experienced some form of identity crisis and whether there is commitment to a specific identity. Crisis involves some serious consideration of alternative possibilities such as different ideologies or life goals, while commitment involves the relatively firm choice of a specific identity (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Types of identity status

	Committed to Identity	
	Yes	No
Identity Crisis Yes	Identity Achievement	Moratorium
No	Foreclosure	Diffusion

The four identity statuses are:

Identity achievement – individuals in this group have gone through a period of crisis and have developed relatively firm commitments;

Moratorium – individuals in this group are currently in a state of crisis and are actively exploring and seeking to make identity-related choices;

Foreclosure – individuals in this group have never experienced a crisis although they have committed themselves to particular

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goals and values which generally reflect wishes of authority figures;

Identity diffusion – individuals in this group do not have firm commitments and are not actively exploring or trying to form some commitments; these adolescents or adults may or may not have been through a crisis period, but whether they have or not, there has been no clear resolution of their identity or commitments.

Some writers, like Waterman (1982), argue that changes in identity status can be either developmentally progressive or regressive. Progressive changes involve either spending time actively thinking about and evaluating identity alternatives or developing personally meaningful commitments. Presumably, in order to make meaningful commitments, however, some period of reflection is essential. A change from some other status to the identity diffusion status is generally viewed as developmentally regressive, since identity concerns are put aside, at least temporarily, without any satisfactory resolution.

The greatest gains in identity formation seem to occur during college years (Adams & Fitch, 1982; Waterman & Goldman, 1976). Studies show significant increases in the number of students in the identity achievement status and decreases in the moratorium, diffusion and foreclosure status groups. These findings are just what would be expected if adolescents are generally moving toward the identity achieved status.

Decreases in foreclosure status suggest that some students, at least, come to reject the views of their parents that they had previously adopted as their own. For example, experiences in college can undermine the traditional religious beliefs of students without helping the students to explore alternatives and establish new belief systems. (See Waterman, 1982.) While the move from the foreclosure status to the identity achieved status is seen as positive, moving from the foreclosure to the diffusion status is generally seen as regressive.

It also seems clear that identity development does not occur evenly across different areas of identity. Meilman (1979) and Archer (1981) both explored this issue. Foreclosure is most frequent in areas of sex role attitudes, vocational choice, and religious beliefs; diffusion, on the other hand, is most common in the area of political ideology. Many students have little interest in politics and only the really interested students tend to be in the identity achieved status. In our own work (Noller & Bagi, 1985; Noller & Callan, in press) politics is much more of an issue for older adolescents than for the younger ones.

Identity status and adjustment

One reason for emphasising the importance of identity status is the

evidence for clear relationships between identity status in adolescents and their overall psychological adjustment (Bernard, 1981; Donovan, 1975). Identity achievers are the healthiest of the four status groups in their general adjustment and also in their relationships with both peers and authority figures. Thus families which encourage identity exploration and achievement are also likely to produce adolescents with healthy psychological adjustment

Identity achievers tend to be nurturant with their peers and to be high in internal control and self-esteem and low in anxiety, particularly if they are males. Identity achievers also seem more capable of forming close, stable relationships than the other groups of adolescents. Foreclosures, on the other hand, tend to be well adjusted, not very anxious, but distant from their peers. They are inclined to be manipulative and controlling to get their own way. Those in the diffusion status are not very open with their peers and overly compliant in peer presssure situations. They often pretend to agree even when they don't. The most negative relationships with peers involve those in the moratorium status who tend to be hostile to their peers (Campbell, Adams & Dobson, 1984).

The four identity status groups also differ with regard to their relationships with authority figures. Those in the identity achievement status tend to be cooperative with authority figures and those in the foreclosure status tend to be in awe of authority figures. After all, these are the young people who have adopted the values and attitudes of their authority figures, without much questioning of their positions. While those in the diffusion status group have normal MMPI profiles, they tend to be fearful of authority figures (Donovan, 1975). Moratoriums are less well-adjusted and more anxious than any of the other groups probably because they are still working through identity issues. They also tend to be involved in power struggles with authority figures, as they seek to work out and test their own positions on a range of issues.

Sex differences in identity formation and status

As mentioned earlier, there is some evidence that the progression through the stages of identity may be different for males and females. Adolescents need to establish priorities, and decide what issues are important to their identity. In Hodgson's (1977) study, for example, male identity was focused on issues of individual competence and knowledge, with males being more advanced in the resolution of these identity issues. Female identity, on the other hand, centred on issues of relating to others, with women being more advanced in the achievement of intimacy than men. Furthermore, the large body of literature relating to the intimacy problems experienced by adult males shows that such

differences persist way beyond adolescence (e.g. Balswick, 1988; McGill, 1986).

There is also evidence that males and females are influenced in their progress toward identity formation by traditional sex role stereotypes. Kahn and his associates (1985) found that dependency clearly represented a part of the female but not the male identity. The identity of women seems intertwined with concerns about intimacy and relationships. Once again, males are primarily concerned about their competence and achievement, while relationships are the primary concern of females.

Not only is there a different emphasis for males and females, based on traditional sex-role stereotypes, but both males and females seem to value masculine attributes most highly. In fact, both men and women incorporate highly valued masculine characteristics such as assertiveness, independence and autonomy into their identities. They devalue feminine charateristics such as understanding and warmth, seeing them as less important than the masculine characteristics. On the other hand, high self-esteem for both males and females is associated with androgyny (high levels of both masculinity and femininity). (See Orlofsky, 1977.) It seems that feminine characteristics are valued, provided they are accompanied by masculine characteristics.

Identity status and close relationships

Identity status also affects young people's relationships. As Erikson argued, those who have a firm sense of their own identity are likely to relate best to others, particularly in intimate relationships. Identity status is related to measures of depth and mutuality in interpersonal relationships. Identity achievements and moratoriums are more likely to be involved in intimate relationships. Foreclosures and diffusions, on the other hand, tend to be involved in stereotyped relationships involving little depth and mutuality. Diffusions are also most likely to be involved in isolated relationships, or relationships which are not embedded in a larger group of friends (Orlofsky *et al.*, 1973).

Some interesting studies have traced the effects of adolescent identity on close relationships. Kahn and his colleagues (1985) provide data about a group of art students. They examined students' identity development during their time in college, as well as collecting information about their personal, family and professional life in the 18 years since leaving college. Marital status 18 years later was related to identity status in college, but in different ways for men and women. For men, there was a strong relationship between identity status and staying single, with most of those scoring low on the identity scale in college reporting that they had never married. For women, there was no

relationship between identity status and whether they had married or not, but there was a clear relationship between identity status and marital stability. Women who scored low on the identity scale were more likely to experience a divorce. Thus, it seems that having a clear sense of identity does have important implications for long-term relationships for both men and women, although the consequences are different for each sex. These findings highlight the importance of establishing a clear sense of identity during adolescence, before becoming involved in long-term close relationships.

Special problems of achieving identity in the late twentieth century

Are changes occurring in society and in the nuclear family making the task of identity formation in adolescence a more difficult one? Wearing (1985) suggests, for example, that Erikson's (1971) concept of identity achievement is really only applicable to white middle-class males, and not to women or to working-class youth. These latter groups do not have the luxury of tertiary education and the consequent long period that provides for working through identity issues. Wearing suggests that the identity of working-class males may be centred, not on a career but rather on 'mateship, sexual prowess and sporting achievement' (p.18). In addition, in a situation of high unemployment, putting the emphasis on work as a crucial aspect of the identity is likely to be counter-productive for many young people. The situation is further complicated by the fact that current economic circumstances also make a high degree of autonomy and independence from the parents difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Moreover, the high level of change in today's society makes flexibility more important than stability. Wearing suggests that the tasks of adolescence may need to be redefined in line with the greater level of diffusion which may be adaptive in the 1980s and beyond.

Others also argue that societal changes are making life more difficult for adolescents and their families. Quinn, Newfield and Protinsky (1985), for example, focus particularly on the lack of 'rites of passage' for adolescents in contemporary culture. There is a related lack of consensus about when adolescence begins and ends and about the appropriate allocation of rights, privileges and responsibilities at different ages. This uncertainty prolongs the struggle for identity, leads to excessive demands to be treated like adults and to disruptions to the emotional development of many adolescents.

Another view (e.g. Newman & Murray, 1983), is that societal changes have made a strong sense of personal identity even more crucial to the adolescent. Because society's expectations about entry into adulthood have become more flexible (e.g. greater tolerance of singleness,

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childlessness, homosexuality, and different patterns of family and career), it becomes even more important for an individual to take responsibility for the course of his or her own life and the fulfilment of personal goals. Assuming such responsibility is easier for those with a strong and well-formed personal identity.

Effects of family environments on adolescent development

As we have already noted, family factors affect the development of autonomy and the adolescents' willingness to explore their identity. Families, however, differ in the extent to which they provide an environment which encourages this. Adolescents have to renegotiate relationships with parents towards more autonomy and freedom and less parental domination. Even this renegotiation of relationships is more difficult in some families than in others.

Writers like Newman and Murray (1983) see the parents' use of power in the family as a crucial determinant of the willingness of adolescents to be involved in identity exploration. The extent to which the parents use coercive power is particularly important (see Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2 Effects of parenting style on adolescents
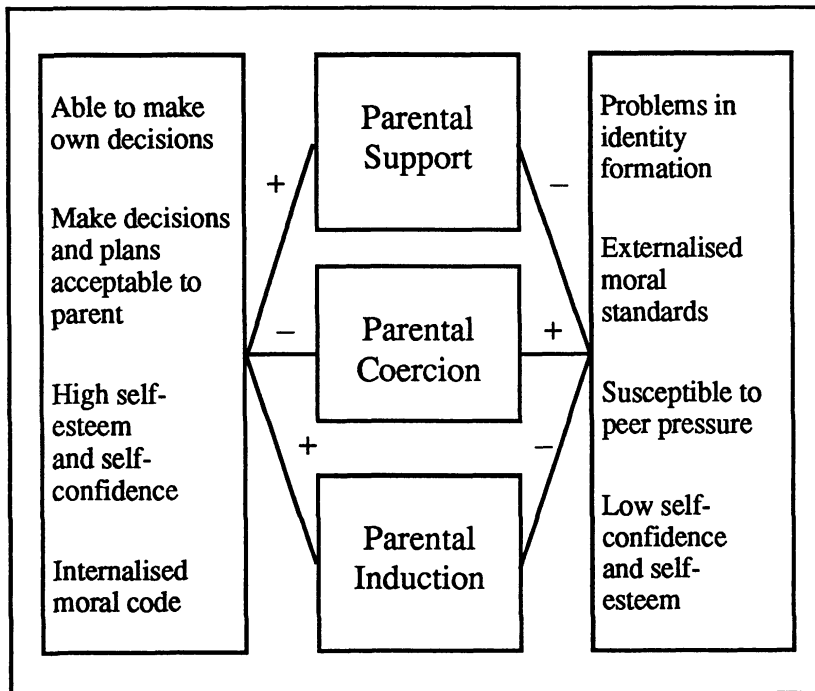
Adolescents whose parents are authoritarian and coercive in their relationships with them are (a) less likely to engage in exploring identity alternatives, (b) more likely to adopt external, rather than internalized moral standards, (c) likely to have lower self-confidence and self-esteem, and (d) likely to have problems in using their own judgment as a guide to behaviour. These adolescents are also likely to have problems with many aspects of autonomy because they will have a less developed sense of their own identity. These adolescents are generally less confident about their competence and more susceptible to peer pressure because they have learned to rely on external sources of approval and guidance.

Adolescents whose parents adopt an inductive, democratic style, on the other hand, are able to make their own decisions and formulate appropriate plans. Curiously though, these adolescents also make decisions and plans which are more satisfactory to their parents. They also seek the help and guidance of their parents. The paradox is that such democratic homes tend to produce adolescents who strongly identify with their parents and, in turn, have internalised their parents' rules and values.

Families influence the identity exploration of their adolescents by emphasising either the importance of autonomy and independence for individuals, or family togetherness, closeness and loyalty. In families where there is an emphasis on independence, there is more possibility of identity exploration, especially for females. (See Grotevant & Cooper, 1985.) Daughters are less likely to engage in identity exploration when they respect their mothers' views and are open and responsive to those views. It seems likely that these young girls would probably settle into the foreclosure status, adopting the views of their parents without exploring other alternatives. Sons explore their identities when they are open and responsive to their fathers' views and know that their fathers respect their opinions and attitudes. (See also Campbell, Adams & Dobson, 1984.)

Adolescents in different identity status groups have different relationships with their parents (Adams & Jones, 1983; Campbell, Adams & Dobson, 1984). Foreclosures seem to differ from identity diffusions in terms of their closeness to their parents. Foreclosures have the closest relationships with parents while those in the identity diffusions status tend to be distant from their families. These young people see their parents as indifferent to them, not understanding them and rejecting them.

Conflict is more characteristic of the families of adolescents in the moratorium and identity achievement groups. These young people tend to criticise their parents. Tensions between the parents and adolescents seem to be mainly about the young person's attempts at individuation.

Parents struggle with letting their adolescents be autonomous and independent. A balance between closeness to parents and a sense of autonomy seems to be important for healthy adolescent development. It also seems clear that achieving a stable identity is likely to involve at least some conflict with parents.

Adolescents who are encouraged to be assertive and to adopt their own points of view (Hauser *et al.*, 1984) also tend to have higher levels of ego development. These adolescents, however, still want the love and support of their parents, even while striving for goals like individuation and autonomy. As adolescents negotiate with parents and the family environment changes, parents come to show greater respect for the opinions of the growing adolescents. Certainly, older adolescents seem to change their relationships with their parents, developing interactions which involve less conflict and more control (Jacob, 1974; Steinberg & Hill, 1978) .

What happens when adolescents fail to negotiate these new relationships? Where these negotiations fail, and parents are highly critical and rejecting, the adolescents involved are likely to adopt a negative identity (Harris & Howard, 1984). They try to get their parents' attention or to punish them through behaving badly. Sadly, beneath the defiance is growing depression caused by their internalising the rejection of their parents.

The message is that families which best promote adolescent identity exploration and adjustment also emphasise both individuality and connectedness. Parents and adolescents work together at redefining the parent–adolescent relationship as a more mutual and equal one. The adolescent does not necessarily have to leave the relationship, or break away from it. It is the balance between closeness in the family, and the encouragement of individuality and autonomy that becomes the crucial factor (Campbell, Adams & Dobson, 1984; Cooper, Grotevant & Condon, 1984).

While some results are strong, any conclusions about the variables that most affect identity formation can only be tentative, on account of a range of methodological and conceptual factors. Even if the family members' reports could be assumed to be accurate, it is unwise to conclude that certain family variables are the cause of adolescents' problems. For example, effects may be attributable to the type of behaviour adolescents elicit from their parents, rather than caused directly by what the parents do to the adolescents. It is far easier to provide a supportive, child-centred environment when children identify strongly with parents and follow family traditions without question. Parents may have difficulty responding to adolescents at particular stages of development. It is clear that many of the studies of adolescents lack both a longitudinal and a bidirectional perspective. That is, they fail

to take into account that children have effects on parents, as well as parents having effects on children.

The effects of family disruption on adolescent development

In this volume we devote a full chapter to the impact of divorce on adolescents. In the general community it is widely accepted that young people from broken homes have more identity-related problems than other children. Research findings, however, are more mixed than is generally realised. Oshman and Manosevitz (1976) found significantly lower scores on a scale measuring identity for those experiencing father absence from about ten years of age onwards. Jordan (1970) found that college males with identity-related problems were more likely to come from broken homes. Others report conflicting findings. As we have already noted, a combination of emotional attachment to parents and the encouragement of independence by parents seems to be associated with healthy identity development in adolescence. Maintaining close emotional attachment and the security associated with it may be more difficult for parents in families which have experienced a divorce or separation. Single parents may also have problems allowing their adolescents the autonomy they need, particularly where they have invested in their child or children the emotional attachment that would normally belong to the spouse.

There is also evidence for increased problems for adolescents in stepfamilies (Garbarino, Sebes & Schellenbach, 1984). There are several explanations for this finding. One possibility is that the adolescent or the family is still suffering damage from the earlier crisis of divorce. For example, they may have felt rejected by the parent who left the family, or be angry with their natural parents for not being able to sort out their differences. Another possibility is that step-parents have a lower genetic investment than parents, and that the adolescent is somehow conscious of this lower investment and reacts to it. However, we will address the consequences of such rejection in other parts of the book.

Family variables and adolescent adjustment

What helps or hinders an adolescent's ability to deal with the stresses associated with this period of their lives? In general, adolescents are better adjusted when the family is seen as cohesive, expressive and organised and independence is encouraged (Moos & Moos, 1981a & b). On the other hand, they tend to be less well adjusted when they see their family as high in conflict and very controlling (Burt, Cohen & Bjorck, 1988).

Some theorists argue that the stresses related to adolescence arise from the adolescents' lack of interpersonal skills to cope with all the changes necessary to move toward greater independence and autonomy (Hartup, 1979; Montemayor, 1983). On the other hand, in supportive families, they are likely to develop better social and coping skills and more positive identities (Cooper *et al.*, 1982). Where parents consistently demonstrate good coping and problem-solving skills, and encourage the adolescents to solve their own problems, adolescents are likely to cope much better, be more confident about their ability to cope and consequently have higher self-esteem. In these circumstances, they are more likely to develop a positive cycle, involving growing confidence, rather than a negative cycle of rebellion or depression.

Methodological issues in studying adolescents

As we shall see, in trying to understand adolescents and their families, researchers have asked a wide range of questions about the experiences of adolescents, about their families, and about the type of communication and relationships in these families. A central finding has been that different types of family environments have different impacts on adolescent development. Our task here is to describe the range of possible measures, highlighting both their advantages and limitations. In our view, there is no best method for studying adolescents. However, we do favour methods that provide a multiple perspective on the family, gaining data from each family member.

Choosing the appropriate method

A large number of methodologies are used in studying adolescents and their families. The choice of an appropriate method depends on the research question. The method should also suit the particular population being studied (e.g. social class). Researchers should also consider who are the appropriate informants (adolescents, parents or both) and whether they are primarily interested in insider or outsider views of the family. The best methods also gain the cooperation of family members, using research tasks that are likely to get all family members involved.

While there is a tendency for observational methods to be preferred to self-report methods, it is difficult to argue that one method is clearly more valid than the other. There is no doubt that self-report methods have problems because of their reliance on the subjects' awareness of emotional reactions and attitudes, and the subjects' willingness to report those reactions accurately. Observational methods, on the other hand, suffer from problems of ecological validity. Can we really be sure that

the behaviours observed in a five- or ten-minute staged interaction are the behaviours we would see if we could be 'flies on the wall' in actual interactions? The problems of observational studies are at least as serious as those of self-report studies. We are not, by any means, arguing that such research is not useful, but researchers have to do the best they can and then recognise the limitations and weaknesses of their methods.

The crucial issue in deciding on a method is the research question. For example, if a researcher is interested in the processes families of adolescents use in making decisions, then an observational study is probably the most appropriate. Families can be videotaped while performing a decision-making task (such as planning a holiday) and these videotapes can then be coded to examine the decision-making processes. Family members are unlikely to be able to report accurately on such processes. On the other hand, if the research question concerns the patterns of communication in the family – for example, who usually talks to whom about what – the answer will not be found in a five-minute videotaped interaction. A self-report questionnaire involving questions about the frequency of conversations between family members on various topics is the way to answer such a question. Alternatively, family members could be asked to keep diaries of their conversations (Dickson-Markman & Markman, 1988) or they could be rung each night and asked to provide a list of the conversations they have had during the previous 24-hour period (e.g. Montemayor & Hanson, 1985). These latter methods are probably less susceptible to distortions of perception and memory than self-report inventories, but it may be necessary to collect data across a fairly large span of time to ensure that they are typical.

Choosing a method suitable for a particular population

One of the problems with many psychological instruments is that they deal with concepts more familiar to the middle class, and use language more applicable to the middle class. Hence, self-report instruments may be quite appropriate for studies involving middle-class adolescents in colleges or universities, but inappropriate for working-class adolescents or for adolescents with learning difficulties or emotional problems. Researchers should ensure that their instruments are appropriate to their population through extensive piloting of instruments, so that concepts not understood can be explained further, words not readily understood can be changed and the length of the instrument can be adjusted to suit.

Researchers can also help subjects who are not fluent readers by sitting with them and by reading the items aloud, if that is needed. Subjects are unlikely to give their best responses if much of their energy is going into reading the items. Telephone methods or interviews may

be more appropriate where reading is likely to be a problem for some subjects.

Who should be the informants?

Researchers also need to consider whose perspective on the family they want. The parents' perspective? The adolescents' perspective? Do they want to compare several perspectives? Some studies have gathered information from various family members and then compared the findings.

Garbarino, Sebes and Schellenbach (1984) compared parents' and adolescents' reports of abuse in the family. They used the Adolescent Abuse Inventory (Sebes, 1983), a 26-item self-report measure designed to assess parental attitudes towards maltreatment. This instrument also assesses the likelihood that parents would act abusively in response to provocative behaviours on the part of their adolescents. Parental behaviours were selected from four categories: 'hands-on' abuse (physical and sexual), 'hands-off' abuse (verbal or psychological), neglect, and 'appropriate parenting behaviours'. Each item contains a vignette of problematic adolescent behaviour and a probable parental response. Parents were then asked three questions: how often their adolescent had behaved similarly in the past year, how they would rate the parent's behaviour (from very bad to very good) and how likely they would be to respond in the same way as the parent in the vignette. Sebes (1983) reports that adolescents classifications of the family as abusive or not, were very strongly related to parents' responses on the Adolescent Abuse Inventory. Garbarino *et al.* (1984) also found that adolescent reports of the family were more valid than parental reports.

In our own research (Callan & Noller, 1986; Noller & Bagi, 1985; Noller & Callan, 1986; 1988) we have also compared reports by various family members as well as other families and objective raters. We have found a general tendency for adolescents to rate the family more negatively than other family members whether responding to a self-report inventory (FACES II) or making ratings of family members from videotaped interactions. We have explained this in terms of the generational stake hypothesis. (See Chapter 2.) Parents, who have a large investment in their children, are likely to have a stake in seeing the family positively. Adolescents, on the other hand, who are beginning to distance themselves from the family, are likely to be more negative in their evaluations. Each generation seems to view family interaction in terms of its own particular bias. In addition, adolescents' ratings of their families are more highly correlated with those of outsiders than are ratings made by their parents (Noller & Callan, 1988).

Insider versus outsider views of the family

Related to the issue of who are the best informants is the question of whether insider or outsider views of the family and family processes should be obtained. This issue is also discussed extensively elsewhere (Huston & Robins, 1982; Noller & Guthrie, in press) and will be dealt with only briefly here. An important point is that the insider and outsider views of the family are highly likely to be different, and do not answer the same questions. If family members are asked to make ratings of their own interactions on a videotape, they will make those ratings in the context of a whole history of relationships with family members. On the other hand, when outsiders make ratings of family members on videotapes, the only context they have for making those ratings is what is happening on the videotape in front of them. How can we expect these two sets of ratings to be similar, and how can we expect to check the validity of family members' reports by using outsiders? If we are interested in family members' views of one another, then those are the data we should collect. If we are interested in outsiders' views of family members, then those are the data we should collect. The relationship between the two sets of ratings is an interesting and important empirical question, but is not a validity question. Both sets of data will give us a more complete picture of the behaviour in which we are interested.

Choosing a task

A final issue concerns the choice of a task in studies of adolescents and their families. Such tasks should encourage adolescent involvement, since the adolescents are likely to be even more anxious and self-conscious than their parents. In addition, the decision to participate is likely to be made by the parents, and the researcher needs to obtain the support of the adolescent. It may be very important for the researcher to show a real interest in the adolescents and their attitudes, opinions and issues, if they want to get the best response from these young people.

Summary

This book is about adolescents and their families. We have argued that adolescents do not break free from their families but rather negotiate new roles and relationships which are more equal and more mutual. How well the adolescent negotiates these new relationships and accomplishes the important tasks of adolescence depends on the characteristics of the family. As family theorists have argued, healthy adolescent development is most likely to occur in families where the encouragement of autonomy is high, control is flexible, and is balanced

by support and acceptance from parents and other family members. While adolescents strive for independence, they also need the love and support of their parents. We have also focused on the four important developmental tasks which the adolescent must accomplish: emancipation from parents, psychosexual differentiation, acquiring the skills necessary for future economic independence and establishing career goals, and identity exploration and achievement. We have seen that for various reasons, these tasks have become more difficult and more complex over time. We have also considered the role of the family in identity formation and looked at the type of family environment which is conducive to identity achievement on the part of adolescents. As would be expected, families which encourage both closeness and individual autonomy seem to be the ones that best provide this environment.

In addition, we have also considered some of the methodologies used in studying the families of adolescents. We have reviewed briefly some important issues, including which methodologies are important for which research questions, who are the appropriate informants, whether outsider or insider ratings are more appropriate and issues to be considered when selecting tasks. Our belief is that all methodologies have various advantages and disadvantages, and one's choice of methodology depends on the research question being explored. Research on adolescents and the family has involved a variety of methodologies which have been used in exploring complex relationships.

The rest of this volume involves taking up some of these issues in more detail. In Chapter 2, we examine the changing relationships between parents and their adolescents, and consider the popular notion of the 'generation gap'. In Chapter 3, we discuss family communication, particularly asking about the style of communication in families which best contributes to healthy adolescent development. In Chapter 4, we will examine, in more detail than here, various aspects of family environments and the impact of different types of environments on the growing adolescent. Autonomy and control, closeness and intimacy, punishment and violence, sex-role socialisation, attitudes to achievement and creativity, marital discord and stability and the family's relationships with the outside world of school and work are all considered. In Chapter 5, we follow the adolescent leaving home, seeking a job or getting married. Our focus is on the range of factors behind leaving home, and the adolescents' relationships with their parents after they have left the family home. In Chapter 6, we consider the special case of family disruption that occurs when parents divorce. For adolescents, there is the shared trauma with their parents, anger and shame and their need to establish new roles and relationships with their own parents and possible step-parents. Finally, in Chapter 7, we

consider the common problems of adolescence such as smoking, drug and alcohol abuse and teenage pregnancy, especially the link between these behaviours and a lack of family support. Once again, we show that adolescents who are less likely to engage in various problem behaviours come from families which encourage autonomy, provide them with love and support and use flexible control. Such adolescents value their parents above their peers. Finally we sketch out some helpful hints for parents struggling with their adolescents over these and other issues.

Chapter two

The generation gap

If you ask parents to explain the cause of many of the problems they are having with their adolescents, quite often they blame 'the generation gap'. While parents probably mean somewhat different things when they refer to the gap, it is often about differences in the attitudes of parents and adolescents. Parents and adolescents either fail to talk to each other about these differences, or the differences come to a head when the adolescent does something that parents are quite unhappy about.

As we can have attitudes about almost anything, there is a strong likelihood that even the closest parent and adolescent will have differences of opinion. The more well-recognised differences are in attitudes about dress, appearance, friendships, responsibilities and money. Many issues may seem trivial, but to many adolescents getting their own way in such areas is very important to them, and reflects their need to be seen as mature and independent.

We feel that it is important to look at the generation gap because it is used so often by parents and adolescents to explain why they are not getting on with each other. We are especially interested in examining the size of the generation gap and the factors that have brought it about, or which have made families immediately fall back on the gap as a seemingly acceptable explanation for unhappy relationships between parents and their children. The problem is that the idea of a gap may become too easy an explanation, so that the real cause of the problem is never dealt with. The generation gap is also often seen as beyond change, with many parents deciding to suffer with these problems until the adolescent becomes older and wiser.

There are other reasons why we need to investigate the generation gap. Towards understanding the relationship between adolescents and their families, many family therapists are increasingly turning their attention to getting the attitudes not only of the adolescents, but also of their parents and others inside or outside the family. In helping disturbed adolescents and their families, family therapists once only focused their

attention on the adolescent. However, the acceptance of more systemic approaches to family therapy now means that professional counselling often involves some contact with most members of the family. Similarly, in an attempt to achieve a better understanding of the families, researchers are also seeking out the perceptions and attitudes of parents, adolescents, siblings and outsiders. Like family therapists, they recognise the need to consider the views of different members of the family.

Within more systemic models of the family, therapists are interested in each family member's perception of the problem, its causes, the nature of family functioning and relationships within the family. A major focus is the ability of the family system to change in order to deal with the problems of the adolescent, their needs and feelings. Generally, it is not too difficult to gain the perceptions of all family members, and important outsiders (e.g. teachers). One result is a wider set of attitudes about the organisation of the family, levels of communication, and the emotional bonds between adolescents, parents and others. Information also emerges about the ability of the family to deal with stresses related to developmental and situational strains upon its members.

A systemic approach, however, typically reveals a range of attitudes about the family. Many attitudes may overlap, but others can diverge quite considerably. For instance, although they belong to the same family, mothers, fathers, adolescents and other children have individual needs, likes and dislikes, and their own insider view of what it is like to be in the family. While the opinions of family members can be quite similar (see Jessop's (1981) review), each individual has views which may be at odds with other members of the family.

These differences are often attributed to a generation gap. Also the common belief is that reducing the gap solves the problem. For the family researcher, the existence of low levels of agreement between family members raises many possible explanations, only one of which is the generation gap. In this chapter we focus especially on the range of theoretical and methodological issues that may explain why the generation gap is presumed to exist. Due to many factors we argue that the gap is not as large as generally believed.

In assessing an adolescent's behavioural or emotional problem, agreement among family members about the problem is one way of checking the nature of the problem. For example, if parents and adolescents agree that the problem is related to the teenager's attitudes towards his stepfather, the family therapist can use this as a starting point, or even accept it as an objective point of view. What if opinions differ, and parents and adolescents blame quite separate issues, or see conflicts and arguments very differently? If opinions differ, you might assume that one family member is more objective than others. If this approach is taken, it probably comes down to a rule of majority-wins or

the views of more powerful figures in the family (fathers and mothers) are believed more than those of the adolescent. Ultimately, as Beavers (1976) argues, most family therapists should expect differences in the opinions of family members, as differences in attitudes and perceptions are expressions of individuality which are characteristic of healthy, normal families. However, often we seem to forget this positive side of family disagreements.

Issues like objectivity, the generation gap and the validity of the reports of different members of the family are old ones in discussions about family life. These issues are taken up here because of our interest in adolescents and their relationships with their families. Very often families blame their problems on the existence of a generation gap. Families may sometimes too readily attribute their problems to some form of generation gap, and its use has probably got a little out of control.

The apparent size of the generation gap poses somewhat of a challenge to the role of parents as primary socialisers of children (see Tedin, 1974; Goodnow, 1985). If parents are the major socialisers, why then do adolescents show such dissimilar attitudes to those of their parents? More similarity in the attitudes of parents and adolescents would suggest some reciprocal flow of influence. Not only do parents influence their children, but adolescents also socialise their parents. They encourage them to adopt new opinions and attitudes. However, the apparent lack of similarity in the attitudes of parents and adolescents implies that they do not influence each other as much as argued in theories of socialisation and social learning.

Explaining the generation gap

Theories of adolescent development provide varying predictions about the extent to which parents and adolescents should have similar attitudes or make similar evaluations of family life. Theories describing adolescence as a period of tremendous turmoil, personal doubt and chaos in the family would predict considerable differences in the attitudes of adolescents and parents (see Chapter 1). It can be argued that these predictions are generally supported. There are low levels of parent–adolescent agreement on a wide variety of topics (see reviews by Niemi, 1968; Jessop, 1981). As would be expected, agreement is especially low on threatening topics and conflict-laden ones (e.g. attitudes to use of alcohol and other drugs, rules in the home). Similarly, within his theoretical writings, Erikson (1959) argues for the existence of differences in what the adolescent sees as his or her attitudes, and their parents' attitudes, because of a need to establish their own sense of ego identity.

Other theorists argue that adolescence involves a period of re-negotiation and a gradual change in the parent–adolescent relationship (see Chapter 1). Rather than completely separating from parents, and being under the total influence of peers, adolescents seek disengagement but still maintain a close working relationship with parents. Rather than adversaries separated from each other by an ever-widening generation gap, parents are still a major source of support. A lot of the evidence for the generation gap comes from studies of the attitudes of parents and adolescents. Several studies of the actual attitudes of parents and adolescents show that parents and adolescents may differ in their attitudes on 50 to 80 per cent of attitude items (e.g. about authority, drugs, work, school, dress, sex, war, politics). However, the most important point is that differences are often minor. Although differences are statistically significant, they are small, and their attitudes are typically side by side on a continuum rather than at opposite ends on various attitude scales (e.g. Lerner, Pendorf & Emery, 1971; Lerner, Karson, Meisels & Knapp, 1975).

Within the more recent theories of adolescence, the differences between parents and adolescents would tend to be explained by changes in the parent–adolescent relationship that allows the maturing adolescent to be more in control, and to be assertively independent (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen & Wilson, 1983). The fact that differences occur is not the critical issue. Rather, within the normal family, discussions of such differences in opinion are necessary for the development of self-esteem and stronger ego development among adolescents. Adolescents with higher levels of ego development come from families where different perspectives are shared, but where they are also challenged by their parents within a supportive family climate that encourages them to be curious (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Powers *et al.*, 1983). It is not the fact that differences exist that is critical to adolescent development, but rather how accepting parents are of these differences. Put another way, it may be that it is parents' willingness to accept, as well as to discuss and analyse the existence of a generation gap, that impacts on the adolescent's level of competence and ego identity.

Our task in the rest of this chapter is to examine various theoretical and methodological reasons that may explain the poor match between the attitudes of parents and their adolescents. It is clear that several factors are at work, but possibly the most widely researched explanation is the existence of different generational stakes.

The generational stake

In early reviews of parents' and adolescents' accounts of family life,

Niemi (1968, 1974) concluded that neither parents nor adolescents provide objectively accurate accounts of the lives of families. He believed that there was a small tendency for parents to overestimate the socially desirable features of families. In fact, Niemi argued that parents were more biased in their perceptions than adolescents, and adolescents were better reporters of what really was happening in the family. Adolescents were believed to be less biased because they have lower levels of emotional investment in their families. In contrast, children and building a happy family are major parts of the lives of parents. By the time children become teenagers, parents have devoted a dozen or more years to nurturing, guiding and caring for them.

Within societies that are pro-family and child-centred, every parent is encouraged to be proud of their children and their family. Being a responsible parent is a major part of the traditional male and female role, while being a good and successful parent is still central to the self-esteem of many adults. Therefore, when asked their attitudes about the amount of conflict in their family, parents may give more positive accounts than do their adolescents because they have a greater emotional investment in their families (Noller & Callan, 1986).

There are, however, other factors at work. Adolescents are attempting to alter their status as family members. Striving for more independence, they want more control and responsibility over decisions that directly affect them. The majority of them report that they feel close to their parents, and while they want to be more independent, they also expect a life-long close relationship with their parents (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Pipp *et al.*, 1985). Indeed, both parents and adolescents judge their families as being close, and their perceptions about the levels of closeness in their families are much more similar than perceptions about most other issues (Callan & Noller, 1986; Richardson *et al.*, 1984). Nevertheless, having an adolescent is a stressful period for parents and families. Marital and family satisfaction, family pride and family cohesion tend to be low, and levels of family stress are high (see Chapter 1). While adolescents and parents do agree about the extent of closeness within the family, adolescents still rate these levels of closeness as being somewhat lower than do parents.

One explanation already offered is that parents have an emotional investment in their families that makes them adopt a more positive, biased view of family life. With adolescents, however, a number of factors may make them more negative about the family than parents. Wanting to be more independent, adolescents become less involved and less interested in the family (see Chapters 1 and 3). In doing so, adolescents also become more like outsiders and see the family from a different perspective. Interestingly, this sense of independence probably shows up in the perceptions that parents and adolescents have about

expressions of power in the family. Parents and adolescents generally disagree on such power-related issues, both tending to perceive themselves as having more influence than the other thinks to be the case (Jessop, 1981).

Even early adolescents who are beginning to seek more independence seem to adopt this outsider perspective (see Callan & Noller, 1986). They are still very much insiders in that their interests and activities centre on the family, but they are also outsiders as they become more involved in activities with friends. As Jones and Nisbett (1971) note, the outside observer who is less involved in a situation can provide more accurate judgments than insider actors involved in the situation. Adolescents are outsiders with lower levels of investment in the family than their parents. From this different perspective, with less stake in the importance of feeling that they must live in a happy family, their perceptions differ from those of parents.

Bengtson and his colleagues (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Bengtson & Troll, 1978) also make similar points. Each generation views family life in terms of its own bias or stake. They argue that adolescents are very involved in the development or creation of their own attitudes and ideologies. They are highly motivated to establish themselves as individuals in their own right, with their own values, lifestyles, needs and expectations. In contrast, at this time parents are very concerned about the investment they have in the validation of their values and strategies for coping with life. They want their adolescents to listen to them, and to accept their attitudes about life, and the strategies for dealing with various challenges and decisions. If adolescents accept their values and opinions, parents can then feel that their own attitudes are well-chosen and worth passing on.

Basic to the interpretation of a developmental or generational stake is that each generation misattributes attitudes to the other, but in quite opposite ways. Late adolescents exaggerate differences between their attitudes and those of their parents, while parents minimise differences. The true picture of the family, according to Bengtson and Troll, lies between the two extreme descriptions. Parents minimise differences because, as argued earlier, they have a large investment in their families. In addition, this minimisation strategy used by parents may be motivated by feelings of having less control over adolescents or by a recognition of their own mortality. That is, ageing parents, towards justifying their own actions, want their adolescents to carry on attitudes that have been important to them during their lives (i.e. 'generativity needs'). Some parents can have a tremendous stake in believing that their attitudes are also valued as much by their children.

As mentioned earlier, the attitudes of parents and adolescents do differ, but the size of the differences is often quite small. Another factor

adding to such differences in attitudes is the openness of parents and adolescents to social influences and new ideas. Arguably, adolescents have a world view which is more in tune with changes that are currently occurring around them (Furstenberg, 1971). Like their parents before them, they love crazes and fads, and they want to keep up with the latest in clothes and expressions. However, even so, social change is slow enough that adolescents' attitudes are still fairly similar to their parents' and those of previous generations. As others have argued, there is a level of 'family continuity' in attitudes so that parents and adolescents, despite social change, still have quite similar attitudes on many topics (Bengtson & Troll, 1978).

Other explanations

There are other factors inherent in the methodologies used to study the generation gap which may have contributed to the size of the dissimilarity in the measured opinions of parents and adolescents. The threat and salience of the topic that researchers put before parents and adolescents seem to influence judgements. Jessop (1981) argues that agreement between parents and adolescents is lower for threatening topics. For example, there is low agreement in the extent to which parents and adolescents believe that family members talk to each other about drugs. As others have noted (e.g. Lerner *et al.*, 1975), it seems reasonable that some adolescents are reluctant to discuss issues like drugs and sexual behaviour with their parents. Levels of agreement in attitudes are lower because opinions about threatening topics like drugs and sex are not shared as much as they should be.

The sense of threat associated with a topic may also depend on how specific we are about the topic. For example, while adolescents and parents did not agree on the general topic of 'drugs' or 'talk about drugs', Jessop found that they did agree more about the existence of a rule about drugs in the family. That is, researchers may be over-estimating the size of the generation gap because they are being too general in their attitude measures. They are not being specific enough about the exact topic that they want parents and adolescents to consider.

Avoiding discussion of some topics may help parents and adolescents maintain low levels of conflict and good parent–adolescent relations (Jessop, 1981). We discuss this issue in more detail elsewhere (see Chapters 3 and 4). Even if a topic is important to them, adolescents may not discuss something with both parents, or one parent in particular, because they believe that the issue is threatening to the parent. The mismatch between parent–adolescent attitudes about what families talk about may arise in part from family members never actually hearing the opinions of others about such threatening topics.

Again, however, this factor is only one of several reasons why parents and adolescents may seem to have different views. Another factor may be the salience of the issue to parents. Cashmore (1983) found that parents and children were more likely to agree on topics that were more important to parents. For such important topics, adolescents were also likely to perceive their parents' opinions more accurately.

Further support for the significance of the salience of a topic is revealed in research into the socialisation of political attitudes. Compared with many other attitudes, there is often quite considerable agreement between parents and adolescents in their political attitudes, perhaps because individuals often feel strongly about political issues and are more likely to voice their opinions (Tedin, 1974). Politics is a major topic of debate almost every day in the mass media. It is quite likely that a parent who feels strongly about some political ideology would try through healthy debate to encourage others to consider his or her views. Ultimately they could influence the attitudes of other family members or at least it is likely that adolescents would learn about their parents' specific political opinions.

The importance of a parent's advocacy about an issue emerges in studies of educational goals and aspirations. Where fathers openly encourage children to pursue goals that are important to them, there is a stronger match between fathers' and childrens' attitudes about education even when mothers and fathers have different attitudes (Smith, 1982). However, as others have found (Bengtson & Troll, 1978), mothers do have more general influence in many areas, possibly due to the larger number of opportunities they have to interact with adolescents. Adolescents of all ages believe that compared with fathers, mothers talk more frequently to them, disclose more, and are more willing to listen to their point of view (see Chapter 3). This closeness to adolescents may explain why many mothers may be better judges than fathers of the attitudes of their adolescents.

Levels of actual and perceived agreement

In looking at the match between parent–adolescent attitudes, we need to distinguish between levels of actual and perceived agreement between parents and adolescents. Lerner and his colleagues (1975), for instance, even suggest that we need to consider generational gaps rather than a single generation gap. There is both a real gap, and secondly, a perceived generation gap.

It seems that both are important in determining the extent to which parents really do influence the attitudes and behaviour of adolescents. The real gap or the actual agreement between parents and adolescents is the match between the views of parents about their position, and the

views of adolescents about their position. The perceived gap or perceived agreement, in contrast, is the match between adolescents' perceptions of their own and their parents' attitudes. The comparison of parents' and adolescents' real attitudes allows a test of the generation gap, as most people would see it. A high degree of similarity would suggest no real generation gap, but a poor match would suggest otherwise. The use of perceptions, however, adds another dimension to this test: does the generation gap only exist in the minds of adolescents and parents?

In addition, besides actual and perceived agreement, there is the accuracy of various perceptions: that is, the match between parents' responses for themselves, and the responses adolescents think their parents would make (Cashmore & Goodnow, 1985). It is possible to compare actual agreement, perceived agreement and the accuracy of perceptions towards better understanding the actual levels of agreement between adolescents and their parents. It is quite possible that different sets of factors influence the actual level of agreement between parents and adolescents (i.e. actual agreement), the match between the responses adolescents give for themselves and their parents (i.e. perceived agreement), and the match between parents' actual responses and what adolescents think their parents would say (i.e. accuracy of perception).

Adolescents' perceptions of the opinions of their parents may be influenced by various informational features in the communication between adolescents and their parents. Factors that may be significant include the importance of the issue to parents, the frequency with which they have expressed their attitudes to their adolescents about various issues, and the extent to which both parents present similar attitudes. For instance, when both parents have the same attitudes, adolescents do seem to be more likely to match their parents' attitudes and to perceive the opinions of their parents more accurately (see Jennings & Niemi, 1974; Cashmore, 1983).

Differences for mothers and fathers

Comparisons of actual attitudes generally support the view that mothers' and adolescents' attitudes about family life are more similar than those of fathers and adolescents. Again, while the match in parent–adolescent attitudes is at best low to moderate for both parents, adolescents and their mothers have more similar attitudes (see Demo, Small & Savin-Williams, 1987). Similarly, in their investigation of the attitudes of parents and adolescents, Campbell, Adams & Dobson (1984) found that the amount of shared variance was greater between adolescents and mothers (ranging from 9 to 24 per cent) than between

the adolescents and fathers (ranging from 1 to 15 per cent). However, it seems that there are differences within attitudes. In the same study, attitudes about the level of affection shown in the family were more similar for mothers and adolescents than fathers and adolescents. But adolescents' perceptions about levels of independence in the family were closer to those of fathers than mothers. In other studies (e.g. Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986) in which parents and adolescents rate the levels of support, control and involvement in family life, again differences also emerge for mothers and fathers. Mothers' reports of their levels of involvement and support are higher than reports by adolescents. Fathers' ratings of their control over adolescents are higher than adolescents' reports. Again, the match between adolescents' and parents' attitudes are at best only low.

There are also differences in the similarity of mother–adolescent and father–adolescent attitudes about alcohol. Male and female adolescents have attitudes about alcohol that are much more similar to the attitudes of their fathers than their mothers (Wilks & Callan, 1984). Probably because males drink more often, fathers are major models for adolescents as they establish their own attitudes to beer, wine and spirits, and develop their own preferences and drinking habits. There is also a generational difference at work here. Compared with their mothers, daughters are more likely to perceive the use of alcohol as an acceptable feature of the female role. Adolescent females, like young males, see alcohol as helping them have more fun, especially with their friends. The attitudes of their mothers are seen by many daughters as too traditional and conservative. The use of alcohol by young women is also another expression of their independence and autonomy, as well as a statement about the changes that are occurring in social norms about what is acceptable behaviour for young women.

The role of communication

It is often claimed that a lack of communication between parents and adolescents is basic to the generation gap. The gap is there because parents and adolescents don't talk enough to each other. There is some support for this view. Poor communication is often the basis of conflict and a lack of closeness in families, especially when parents don't value the opinions of their adolescents. Yet, as we have discussed here and elsewhere (Chapter 3), supportive communication in families is one factor that encourages better social and coping skills among adolescents. Supportive communication leads to more positive identities.

There are also clear differences which show mothers to be more open, understanding and accepting, and more able to negotiate agreements with their adolescents (see Chapter 3). Fathers clearly have a

more limited style of communication. It is likely that this better communicative relationship between mothers and adolescents is the reason that the attitudes of mothers are more related to the attitudes of their adolescents than are those of their fathers (Acock & Bengtson, 1980).

The same may be true of mothers being slightly better at predicting the attitudes of their daughters than are fathers (Thompson, Acock & Clark, 1985). We found that daughters believe that they disclose more to mothers, talk more often to them and they are more satisfied with the nature of their conversations with mothers than fathers (Noller & Callan, in press). However, the mismatch between parent–adolescent attitudes is no less for parents who believe that they have good rather than poor levels of communication with their adolescents (Thompson *et al.*, 1985).

It is quite possible that many of the topics researchers assume are talked about in families are not discussed at all. Furstenberg (1971) raised this issue many years ago when he suggested that we need to consider differences in the socioeconomic status of families, arguing for class differences in the extent to which parents make their opinions known to their children. A wide range of topics may need to be canvassed to gain an understanding of the nature of communication, but in several studies (e.g. Acock & Bengtson, 1980) lists of topics include very unusual ones that were initially canvassed for purposes other than testing the similarity of the attitudes of parents and their adolescents, and the nature of socialisation in families (e.g. attitudes include one's duty to work; whether the USA should be ready to answer any challenge to its power; that the government should not interfere with business). Researchers then argue that the low correspondence between parents and adolescents on these 'important' issues is significant, and highlights a generation gap. Parents and adolescents, however, may be only guessing as the issues are too general, not very important to them, and thus are not often raised in family conversations. While researchers may believe that these topics are important to parents and adolescents, they rarely test this assumption by asking parents and adolescents to rate the importance of the topic or the extent to which it is talked about in the family. This could easily be done in pilot studies.

Some misrepresentation by parents to adolescents of their real opinions could be another explanation for the lack of success that adolescents have in accurately describing the attitudes of parents. For example, most parents want their children to do well at school. They may want their adolescents to think that they believe in the need to study hard all the time so that they will not feel that they have let them down by encouraging poor attitudes to study. They may also present rather conservative attitudes about the value of education, and the importance of religion and institutional power in the hope that their children will not

be influenced by disruptive, radical influences in society. Many parents see themselves as providing a stabilising force that allows adolescents to stay on the straight and narrow. Parents feel that giving information about conventional issues is an area of authority that they should have over adolescents (Smetana, 1988). As Acock and Bengtson (1980) conclude: 'Caution, and the presentation of traditional attitudes, may be the implicit socialisation agenda for many parents . . .' (p.512).

Finally, some adolescents may just continue to fail to get the message about what their parents think. Maybe the problem is in the parents' efforts to communicate their attitudes because of the difficulty in explaining accurately to anyone the beliefs and feelings associated with one's attitudes. Even when they discover, after a fight, what are their parents' attitudes or that their parents' attitudes are not the same as their own, perceptions of similarity in attitudes may be difficult to change. 'One-off' conflicts over some issue may be insufficient to alert adolescents to what their parents really think. It may only be on issues where there is frequent conflict that adolescents finally get the message.

Implications of the generation gap

The family plays a major role in the socialisation of children and adolescents. We believe that parents influence children as role models, while also using their position of authority to shape the attitudes of adolescents. However, if parents are important socialisers of their children, we should expect to find more similarity in the attitudes of parents and adolescents than appears to be the case. The lack of similarity between parent–adolescent attitudes also challenges the arguments about the existence of a type of 'reverse socialisation'. That is, a better match between the attitudes of parents and adolescents would point to the possible influence that adolescents have in shaping the attitudes of their parents.

The general lack of correspondence between parents' and adolescents' attitudes challenges arguments about the role of parents as primary socialisers. However, the higher levels of agreement between adolescents' perceptions of what parents think and parents' attitudes suggests that socialisation influences are at work. It is not what parents think, but what adolescents think they think, that best predicts adolescents' own attitudes. The opinions adolescents attribute to their parents are strong predictors of adolescents' own attitudes. The actual opinions of parents might have little influence on the socialisation of adolescents, when compared with the influence of adolescents' perceptions of what they believe their parents think or do. Thus, socialisation theories may need to consider attributions and perceptions much more than before

towards understanding any intergenerational transmission of values and attitudes.

Nevertheless, we have attempted to consider several factors that could contribute to the apparent mismatch between parents and adolescents in their own positions and attitudes. Table 2.1 presents a typology of these factors in terms of the different needs, perceptions and emotional investments of parents and adolescents. As this suggests, there are many psychological and generational issues, as well as the methodological problems outlined earlier in the existing research, that may have contributed to the fairly low reported correspondence between parents' and adolescents' attitudes on a wide range of topics.

Table 2.1 Factors related to the size of the generation gap

Type of factor	Parents	Adolescents
Needs	Generativity needs	Needs for independence
	Need to see that time put into family has led to positive outcomes	Need to keep up with fads and crazes
Perceptions	Have status and independence	Want status and independence
	Family compares well to other families	Family compares poorly to other families
	Overestimate positive aspects of families	Underestimate positive aspects of families
	Adopt an insider perspective	Adopt an outsider perspective
Emotions	Considerable emotional investment in families	Less emotional investment in families
	Feel less in control of their adolescents	Feel more in control of their lives
Methodological problems	Specificity of attitudes	Specificity of attitudes
	Level of threat	Level of threat
	Real or perceived attitudes	Real of perceived attitudes

In particular, as frequently argued, the generation gap may be largely due to the different experiences and vested interests of parents and

adolescents. Both parents and adolescents may have a 'generational stake'. Parents need to see the family and relationships between family members as better than they really are since they have an emotional investment which may not encourage a hard-nosed objective account of the relationships between family members. It is less of a challenge to the self-esteem of adolescents to be critical of their families. In addition, their needs for independence probably further encourage more negative attitudes about the family.

We have also argued that the size of the generation gap, as evidenced by the low levels of similarity between the attitudes of adolescents and parents, may be caused in part by methodological problems. There are differences in the importance of topics to parents and adolescents, and differences in how much parents may express certain attitudes in front of their adolescents. Also parents are very likely to differ in the importance they place in adolescents adopting their opinions.

There are many issues that need to be examined in future research before we can fully understand the extent to which parents do influence the types of attitudes adopted by adolescents. Longitudinal studies would allow us to better understand any two-way process of social influence between parents and their adolescents. The untangling of these effects is definitely being helped by a greater recognition of the two types of generation gaps – not only at the level of actual agreement between parents and adolescents, but also the perceived level of agreement and the accuracy of perceptions. More research needs to gain actual opinions of adolescents and their perceptions of their parents' attitudes, plus their parents' actual attitudes and their perceptions of their adolescents' attitudes. There is a need for a wider range of specific attitudes to be examined. Parents and adolescents should provide ratings of the frequency that topics are discussed, and the importance of topics to them and their perceptions of their importance to other members of the family. As realised some time ago in studies of the relationship between attitudes and behaviour, greater attention must be given to measuring specific attitudes rather than the very general ones tapped so far. We also need to stop using second-hand data about the general attitudes of parents and adolescents which were obtained by investigators to answer very different research questions.

Rather than global ratings of whether parents and adolescents talk about an issue, we need to obtain more specific evaluations of the quality and levels of affect that are present in parent–adolescent communication. Ratings of the certainty that one's perceptions were accurate would add another dimension, as would more attention to differences between families (e.g. by social class, age and sex of adolescents, marital happiness of parents). We need to use more reliable measures to examine individual differences between family members in

levels of closeness and adaptability. In exploring the impact of these variables, it is also possible that the effects may be dependent on whether we are looking at actual agreement or perceived agreement and on the accuracy of the perceptions of parents and adolescents.

In summary, research into the similarity of parent–adolescent opinions has generally supported the widely-held view of a generation gap. These differences in attitudes are seen to be at the centre of many conflicts between parents and adolescents, and adolescents and other figures of authority in our society. There is some match in the actual attitudes of parents and their adolescents, but as most studies reveal, the match is low to moderate rather than high. Importantly, levels of parent–adolescent concordance are nowhere near the levels that would be predicted if we believe that parents are major socialisers of the attitudes of their children. However, if we are to seriously examine the extent of the so-called generation gap, it is time researchers adopted more care in the methods they use. Also, theoretically they need to recognise two types of generation gaps, and that different factors may be influencing levels of correspondence between parents and adolescents on actual attitudes, perceived attitudes, as well as the accuracy of their perceptions.

Chapter three

Communication in families with adolescents

Communication is a crucial aspect of family life, affecting the quality of the relationship between the parents and the healthy functioning of both individual family members and the family as a whole. In particular, supportive communication in the family encourages the development of more positive identities among adolescents and higher levels of social and coping skills.

As Barnes and Olson (1985) showed, families with better parent–adolescent communication are more close and loving. They have a more flexible approach to solving family problems, and are more satisfied than families where parent–adolescent communication is poor. There is an intriguing paradox, however, in family functioning and adolescent development. Democratic parenting, where parents and children communicate and negotiate, seems to foster a sense of independence in the adolescent, and at the same time increases the bonds of affection and closeness between parents and children. Thus, families where there is positive communication between parents and children are most likely to produce adolescents who can stand on their own feet, and who function very effectively as independent adults.

Communication is important in all aspects of family life, and it is important that family members share their thoughts, feelings and attitudes. For example, disclosure of likes and dislikes about food and clothing, vacation activities and other issues are important. Adolescents who are unable to disclose these thoughts to parents can become frustrated and unhappy.

Too often family members are unwilling to share their true feelings with each other. As a consequence they may feel resentful because their feelings are not being taken into account. Adolescents can be particularly unwilling to share their feelings and parents often don't encourage their disclosures. When adolescents do share, parents may also be unwilling to understand and accept the adolescent's needs and attitudes. The problem is that when adolescents are not consulted or

their wishes are ignored, they find other ways of sabotaging family life and creating problems for the rest of the family.

Sex differences in communication in the family

There are clear differences between adolescent males and females in the nature of their communication with parents. Communication with mothers is also different from that with fathers. Daughters communicate more with parents than sons, and adolescents talk more with their mothers across a wider range of topics than they do with their fathers. There is also evidence that communication with mothers is generally viewed more positively by adolescents, despite the fact that they also report more conflict with their mothers than their fathers.

Youniss and Smollar (1985) studied adolescents aged 15 to 18. They asked about six different areas: school–career, societal views, intra-family issues, friendship, sex and marriage, doubts and fears. They were interested in differences between families in how well they communicate with each other. For example, how open and understanding are parents and adolescents of each other's points of view? To what extent do they tend to be guarded or cautious in what they say to one another? How do they deal with disagreements, and are such disagreements generally settled to the satisfaction of both parents and adolescents? To what extent do parents impose (or try to impose) their solutions on the adolescents?

What emerged is that male and female teenagers have quite different views of their communication with each parent. Daughters, in particular, report stronger relationships with mothers than fathers. Mothers are seen as more open, understanding and accepting. They are interested in the day-to-day problems of their teenagers, and they are better at negotiating agreements with their children. Fathers, on the other hand, are seen as more judgmental, less willing to be involved in important discussions of feelings, self-doubts and problems. In addition, fathers are seen as more likely to try to impose their authority on the adolescents. Adolescents claim that they are more likely, as a result, to limit their communication with fathers, and to become more defensive and guarded towards them. Even males who are identified with their fathers generally believe that their mothers understand them better emotionally (Offer, 1969).

In two studies, we have also followed up these findings, and have expanded them in several areas. In our first study (Noller & Bagi, 1985) we examined differences in communication between parents and adolescents who attended university. Communication was assessed across 14 topic areas (e.g. sex roles, relationships, sexual information, politics, future plans). Since we were also interested in *how* families

communicate, we also assessed communication across six process dimensions. These included the frequency of conversations about the topic, the extent to which the adolescent disclosed their real feelings, the extent to which the parents recognised and accepted the adolescent's disclosures, who initiated the conversations, who tended to dominate and how satisfied the adolescent was with their interactions with each parent. The only dimensions where there were clear differences related to sex of parent and sex of adolescent were the frequency of conversations and the extent to which the adolescents disclosed their real feelings. In Table 3.1 are presented the mean ratings by the adolescents of their communication with mothers and fathers for the topics and dimensions where there were differences in their ratings of each parent.

Table 3.1   Adolescents' perceptions of communication with mothers and fathers

Topic	Mother	Father
Frequency		
Social issues	3.19	2.33
Interests	4.32	2.79
Sex-roles	3.03	2.01
Family sex-roles	2.59	1.98
Relationships	3.15	2.12
Sex attitudes	2.78	1.75
Politics	2.75	3.41
Sex information	1.93	1.36
Sex problems	1.54	1.21
General problems	4.15	3.24
Self-disclosure		
Interests	4.80	4.10
Sex-roles	4.10	3.50
Relationships	3.92	3.27
Sex information	3.42	2.45
Sex problems	3.32	2.32

Note: Ratings were on a 6-point scale from 1 = rarely discuss this to 6 = frequent long discussions; and 1 = have not disclosed any feelings to 6 = have disclosed all aspects of my views and feelings.

Daughters reported more frequent discussions with their mothers about sexual attitudes and relationships and more disclosure to her about

interests, family sex-roles, their relationships with others, sexual information, sexual problems and general problems. Daughters not only disclosed more to their mothers than sons, but also more to their fathers, particularly about their attitudes to the rules in society, general problems and their own plans for the future. Adolescents talked more to mothers than fathers over nine of the fourteen areas. Results confirmed that in most families, mothers are quite active in communicating with their adolescents, but fathers are much less involved. In view of this finding, it was also not surprising that mothers were better than fathers at predicting their adolescents' responses to the questionnaire (Parent–Adolescent Communication Inventory, Noller & Bagi, 1985).

In a follow-up study, Noller & Callan (in press) obtained data using the same instrument from adolescents who ranged in age from 12 to 17 years. These younger adolescents, unlike the older adolescents discussed in the earlier study, saw their mothers as both initiating more discussions with them and recognising and accepting their opinions more than their fathers. In addition, females tended to be more satisfied with their interactions with mothers than fathers. Males were only moderately satisfied with their interactions with both parents. They didn't distinguish between mothers and fathers to the same extent as the females. Age differences were practically nonexistent, except between the younger adolescents and the student sample. These findings again support the view that adolescents, especially daughters, generally have more positive interactions with their mothers than their fathers throughout adolescence.

In other research (e.g. Barnes & Olson, 1985; Olson *et al.*, 1983) adolescents also report more openness in their communication with mothers than fathers. Also, mothers consistently describe their communication with their adolescents as more open than do fathers. Adolescents report few problems in communicating with each of their parents, and have about the same number of problems with mothers as with fathers. Mothers and fathers also report equal levels of problems in their communication with their adolescents. Incidentally, parents tended to report more problems than the adolescents.

There are also differences in the extent to which adolescent sons and daughters disclose to each parent. For example, Davidson and his associates (1980) found that females reveal more general and personal information, while males claim that they tell their parents more about their sexuality. Other work (e.g. Mulcahey, 1973; Sparks, 1976) shows that males disclose more about work and study, and attitudes and opinions; females disclose more about aspects of their personalities. As we also found, adolescents report that they disclose more to their mothers than their fathers (Jourard, 1971; Komarovsky, 1974). These findings fit with the adolescents' perceptions that their mothers understand them

better and are more willing to recognise and accept their differing points of view.

The self-esteem of adolescents also affects their self-disclosure to their parents. Adolescents who are high in self-esteem, and believe that they are valued by other family members, are more likely to self-disclose than are those who feel vulnerable and insecure, having low self-esteem and believing that they are not valued or wanted.

In general, adolescents seem more negative about the communication in the family than do their parents. Adolescents report less openness and, sometimes, more problems than their parents (Barnes & Olson, 1985). Other writers have also found a tendency for adolescents to present a more negative view of the family than do their parents (Cooper & Ayers-Lopez, 1985; Niemi, 1968). These differences in ratings between parents and adolescents are likely to be the result of two kinds of perceptual biases (see Callan & Noller, 1986): the parents' needs to present the family in a good light, and the adolescents' needs to develop a separate identity and to distance themselves from their parents and from the family. (See also Chapter 2.)

Conflict in families with adolescents

As we have already indicated, one of the most frequently debated topics in the adolescent literature is the level of conflict between parents and adolescents. As Jurkovic and Ulrici (1985) note, the truth is likely to be somewhere between the two extreme positions,which either claim that adolescence always involves turmoil and stress or, alternatively, that most adolescents proceed calmly to adulthood with no problems. Some, like Jurkovic and Ulrici (1985), criticise the tendency in early research to assume that the high levels of intergenerational conflict found in clinical populations apply to all adolescents. On the other hand, they do not go as far as some theorists who assert that adolescent rebellion and the generation gap are mythical constructions (Offer, 1969). Rather, they comment:

> While we generally agree that tensions between the generations have clearly been exaggerated, closer inspection of the self-report and observational findings suggests that maturational changes in normal adolescents are coincident with increased familial conflict and rigidity. Difficulties in adaptation, however, are followed by an increasingly pleasant mode of adolescent–parent relating, marked in part by a greater balance of power.
>
> (Jurkovic & Ulrici 1985: 239)

There is evidence that adolescents do have more conflict with mothers than fathers. They also report that mothers understand them

better and that they have more positive interactions with their mothers than with their fathers. Thus, the higher level of conflict with mothers is likely to be related to the fact that the adolescents tend to have more frequent and more meaningful communication with their mothers than with their fathers.

The majority of arguments between parents and adolescents seem to be about day-to-day living and relationships within the family: personal hygiene, disobedience, school work, social activities and friendships, chores around the house and conflicts with siblings (Caplow, Bahr, Chadwick, Hill & Williamson, 1982; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Montemayor, 1982; 1983). Interestingly, Montemayor (1983) even presents data to show that the arguments between parents and adolescents in the 1970s and 1980s are basically about the same topics that parents and adolescents argued about in the 1920s.

Conflicts between parents and their adolescents tend to be about minor matters like dress and social life (see review by Montemayor, 1983). For instance, Ellis-Schwabe and Thornburg (1986) found that the parent with whom the adolescents are most likely to be in conflict depends on the type of conflict. Adolescents argue with mothers about personal manners, choice of friends, and clothes. With fathers, they argue about money, use of leisure time and attitudes to school. Responsibilities within the home tend to be a source of conflict with both parents.

On the other hand, parents and adolescents tend not to argue about some topics of greatest difference between them such as sex, drugs, religion and politics (Bengtson & Starr, 1975). For example, there seems to be a general lack of sex-related communication in families, with mothers being primarily responsible for what communication about sex occurs, even with sons (Fox & Inazu, 1979). A real paradox exists over communication about sex, since so little seems to occur, even though parents want to be seen as active resource agents for sex education with their own children, and adolescents report that they would like to have better sex-related communication with their parents. (See also Chapter 2.) Parents and adolescents want to talk more about sex and human sexuality but do not know how to do it. Given that parents often don't want outside educational services to give sex education to their children, because of fear of the children acquiring different values from those of their parents, it is important that more resources go into helping parents and adolescents to open up to one another on this important topic. In our research, as mentioned earlier, we have also found very little communication about sex between parents and adolescents, although more communication about sex did occur between mothers and daughters than between other dyads.

One of the over-arching conflicts of adolescence concerns the

different perspectives of parents and their offspring about how much control parents should have over various aspects of the lives of their adolescents. Adolescents appear to regard an increasing range of issues, that were once considered as under parental control, to be now under their own control. For example, adolescents have become less accepting of parents' attempts to influence them with regard to social events, dress styles and choice of friends. In fact, even young children resist parents' attempts to control their choice of friends. (See Tisak, 1986.) Children of all ages seem to react strongly to parents' criticisms of friends, and strong reactions by parents may only push children closer towards those particular friends.

Smetana (1988) compared parents' and adolescents' ideas about what areas (moral issues, conventional issues, personal issues) should come under parental control. Families with preadolescents were more likely to see issues as subject to parents' authority than were families with adolescents, suggesting some changes as the children get older. On the other hand, as would be expected, parents perceive issues as more under their authority than children. Moral and conventional issues were seen to be legitimate areas of parental control but parents often wanted to retain control in personal areas as well. Shifts in perceptions about parents' authority during adolescence primarily occur with personal issues, not moral or conventional ones. It is no wonder that so much of the conflict between parents and their adolescents is about these issues. An added problem is that some issues which parents see as moral (e.g. sexual behaviour) are seen by the adolescents as personal ones.

Being criticised by parents

Adolescents have been asked about the extent to which their parents criticise their behaviour and attitudes (e.g. Harris & Howard, 1984). Both girls and boys report being criticised for being disobedient, breaking family rules, being lazy or not ambitious enough, and being messy or sloppy. Girls tend to be criticised more frequently for being foolish, unappreciative, quarrelsome and stubborn. Boys, on the other hand, tend to be criticised for being disobedient, not applying themselves to tasks, being impulsive, being unsociable and having undesirable friends. Apparently, parents of adolescent boys are likely to find not applying oneself and being lazy particularly unacceptable. Yet parents of girls are likely to find being disobedient and hard to get along with particularly unacceptable. As traditional sex roles indicate, males are expected to be hardworking, successful breadwinners, while females ae expected to be submissive, unambitious and nurturant.

Mothers and fathers also differ in the behaviours they see as unacceptable in their children. In Harris and Howard's study, mothers

tended to reject sons who were messy, not appreciative, and not sociable, while fathers were more likely to reject daughters who were not loving and affectionate. Fathers had little tolerance for foolish or silly behaviour, whether sons or daughters were being foolish.

Interestingly, Harris and Howard divided the adolescents into four groups, depending on whether they saw their parents as very accepting or not very accepting, and whether they saw themselves as being frequently or rarely criticised. Adolescents with the most positive self-image had parents who were accepting and not very critical. Those adolescents with the most negative self-image were the ones whose parents were highly critical and not very accepting. In other words, the greater the level of parents' criticism and the less their acceptance, the more negative was the adolescent's self-image. Where parent–adolescent communication consists mainly of criticisms, the adolescent develops a negative self-image which leads to more negative behaviours and more criticism and rejection from the parents. A vicious cycle is likely to be set up which can be very difficult to change.

Value conflicts between parents and adolescents

Research generally suggests that parents and their adolescents hold similar values (Coleman, 1978). Differences that do exist relate to minor issues such as tastes in dress, music and films. On the other hand, these issues may not always be minor. Modern rock music, for example, is often characterised by lyrics about drug use and promiscuous sexual behaviour, however subtly. What can happen is that parents and adolescents fight out deeper value differences in the guise of arguments about trivia.

It seems fairly clear, however, that adolescents tend to see their parents' views as more different from their own than they actually are. We have discussed this issue in more detail in Chapter 2. For instance, Acock and Bengtson (1980) explored the question of whether parents' stated views on social and political issues, or the views attributed to them by their offspring had the greatest impact on adolescents. While adolescents' perceptions of parents' positions were generally good predictors of the adolescents' own opinions, adolescents over-emphasised the similarity of their parents' positions and the extent to which their parents' opinions were different from their own. In addition, adolescents were generally not very accurate in predicting their parents' responses to questions about social and political issues. To these authors, the 'generation gap' is far more apparent in the minds of the adolescents – the responses they attribute to their parents – than it is in the actual responses of parents and their children. Children consistently perceive

their parents' attitudes as more traditional or conservative than they actually are.

Mothers have more impact on their children's beliefs than fathers, irrespective of the gender of the child. With both actual attitudes (Acock & Bengtson, 1978) and perceived attitudes (Acock & Bengtson, 1980), the mother's influence seems to be stronger than the father's. However, fathers do have an impact in some areas. Talk about politics seems to occur mainly between the father and the adolescent (Noller & Bagi, 1985) and it is likely that the father's views play an important role in the development of the adolescent's political beliefs. However, the impact of the mother should not be underestimated.

Parents also seem to play an important role in influencing the attitudes of their adolescents about religious beliefs (Hoge, Petrillo & Smith, 1982). However, whether this influence serves to convince or dissuade the adolescent to follow their parents' belief depends mainly on the quality of the parent–adolescent relationship (Hauser, 1981). Where the parent–adolescent relationship is primarily positive and cooperative, the adolescent is more likely to follow the beliefs of the parents. Harking back to the identity issues discussed in Chapter 1, however, it is important to consider whether the adolescent accepts the parents' views without taking them as their own (that is, forecloses) or is able to achieve a religious identity. Whether the relationship between the parents and the adolescent is such that the adolescent is encouraged to deal openly with doubts and questions, is likely to be important.

Some value discrepancies are related to the differing roles and life stages of parents and adolescents. Feather (1978), for example, found that parents, who tend to be primarily concerned with seeing their offspring embark on a secure future, seem to place a great deal of importance on values like responsibility, family, self-respect and national security. Adolescents, on the other hand, who are more concerned with short-term goals, tend to emphasise excitement, pleasure and the value of close companionship.

Daughters are more likely to follow the value orientations of their parents than are sons. It is worth noting again that daughters are more likely than sons to be in the foreclosure status of identity. (See Chapter 1.) In addition, the foreclosure status seems more adaptive for daughters than for sons. Daughters seem to show greater emotional dependence than do sons and this may be at least one of the reasons why they are more likely to adopt their parents' values.

Conflict with siblings

Conflict between siblings is a little-researched topic but violence between siblings seems fairly pervasive. According to Straus, Gelles and

Steinmetz (1980), 62 per cent of senior high school students admit hitting a sibling in the past year. Sibling aggression is also related to aggression outside the family (Gully *et al.*, 1981). Those who hit their siblings are more likely to be violent outside the family as well.

For highly aggressive boys, it is siblings who play the central role in triggering their aggressive behaviour (see Patterson, 1982). Younger siblings are generally dealt with more aggressively than older ones. Siblings are also more likely than peers to reciprocate negative behaviours such as hitting, thus setting up a coercive cycle of escalation. Each violent behaviour is likely to be followed by an even more violent and aggressive behaviour, until parents intervene or someone is hurt.

Montemayor and Hanson (1985) compared adolescents' reports of conflicts with parents and their reports of conflicts with siblings. To minimise the problems caused by distortions of memory, adolescents were interviewed over the telephone about the conflicts which had occurred the previous day. More than half of all conflicts occurred with siblings. Most arguments were with mothers or same-sex siblings. While the conflicts with parents were mainly about rules, a greater proportion of interpersonal conflicts took place with siblings. According to the adolescents, arguments with parents and siblings were least likely to be resolved through negotiation and were most often resolved by withdrawal. As disagreements with parents and siblings occurred equally frequently, Montemayor and Hanson maintain that the close living conditions, competition, and personal characteristics of family members interacting with each other are possibly the primary causes of most of the problems between adolescents, parents and siblings.

Disagreements with parents and siblings are largely about interpersonal issues, and are resolved in similar ways. These findings challenge claims that adolescents' arguments with their parents are about the need for independence, especially given the high levels of similarity between arguments with parents and those with siblings. One might expect, nevertheless that if most of the arguments with parents are about rules, presumably adolescents are wanting to exert their independence by flouting those rules, or, at least, trying to have them changed.

Relationships with peers

Another important issue is the adolescent's orientation to parents versus peers. Discussion of this issue involves extreme positions. Some theorists present the situation as 'a power battle between the influence of parents and peers' (Cooper & Ayers-Lopez, 1985, p.10). Adolescents are seen as either rebelling against the values and standards of their parents and being totally concerned with the opinions of their peers, or

submitting totally to the demands of their parents and not progressing towards independence. This question of peer versus parental influence, however, reflects a false dichotomy to us and others (e.g. Mussen, Conger & Kagan, 1974). A more moderate position seems closer to the truth. Adolescents do seem to become more peer-oriented, but they are also concerned with maintaining the love and support of their parents and value their parents' opinions across a number of areas.

As Jurkovic and Ulrici (1985) suggest, the role of the family is not replaced by peers, but rather most adolescents move comfortably between these two generational groups and members of each are probably more similar than different in basic values and attitudes. Maintaining good relationships with parents seems important since positive and supportive relationships with parents do override the effects of poor peer relationships. Bronfenbrenner (1986) also argues against the segregation of parents and children which often happens in our society, since adolescents then have to face societal pressures without the support and guidance of their parents.

It seems clear that children disclose increasingly more to peers during adolescence. Self-disclosure to parents and peers changes as a function of pubertal status, especially for boys. In an early study, Rivenbark (1971) found that for boys, the least amount of disclosure to parents occurred at eighth grade which coincides with the average peak rate of growth. A slight decrease for girls in disclosure to parents occurs at the same time as the average peak rate of growth which is at 12 years of age (sixth grade). Assertiveness towards parents on the part of boys depends on their physical maturity, with boys interrupting their parents more as they proceed through puberty (Steinberg & Hill, 1978). As well, the peak period of pubertal change is associated with high levels of conflict between mothers and sons, and little involvement by sons in family activities (Hill *et al.*, 1985). Mothers are especially dissatisfied with their relationships with their adolescents at this stage. These changes in parent–adolescent relationships could be because the adolescents feel differently about themselves, or because the parents change their perception of the adolescent following this growth spurt. If adolescents become more confident and parents become more anxious at this stage, more conflict is likely to ensue.

Although peers become more important for adolescents and they spend a lot of their time talking with peers, there is little evidence that the peer group actually becomes more important than the family during adolescence. Fasick (1984) argues for a more comprehensive model of youth socialisation that recognizes the joint influences of parents and peers, particularly in the middle classes. Even the most peer-oriented of adolescent girls perceive their parents as more loving than friends, and generally like their families. In addition, teenagers orient more towards

parents than peers when parents are perceived as having expertise in particular areas (Floyd & South, 1972).

Biddle and his colleagues (Biddle, Bank & Marlin, 1980) maintain that the impact of parents comes from expressing normative standards, while the impact of peers is through the modelling of behaviour. In other words, parents remind the adolescent about the standards generally accepted by the community as a whole, while their peers may model quite different behaviours. The adolescents may sometimes have to make choices between accepting the standards espoused by their parents and joining in with their friends. For example, parents may see demonstrations and street marches as inappropriate, while their peers may want to be involved and 'where the action is'. What the adolescent decides to do may depend on the strength of their feelings about the particular political issue (e.g. conservation, farm subsidies, nuclear power), as well as their relationships with their parents and their peers.

Some researchers have examined the types of interactions that occur between adolescents and their parents versus their peers. Hunter (1984; 1985), for example, was particularly interested in the occurrence of unilateral (directive or didactic) versus mutual interactions with parents and peers. A further question of interest was the relationship between the way an adolescent interacts with parents and the way they interact with peers. Both mothers and fathers are more directive and didactic with adolescents than are friends. In fact, parents spend more time explaining their own positions than listening to their adolescents and trying to understand their positions. Interactions with friends are generally more mutual than those with parents, with friends doing just what their parents failed to do, listening and trying to understand. Adolescents' interactions with parents seem to have little impact on their interactions with friends, especially for females. Adolescents with directive parents are as likely as those with nondirective parents to have mutual interactions with their friends.

It is also important to keep in mind that not all adolescents have highly mutual and intimate relationships with peers. In fact, there are large individual differences between adolescents in their ability to establish and maintain friendships (Coie & Dodge, 1983) and these differences are related to their level of social skills (Gottman, 1983). Much more work needs to be done to explore the variables affecting individual adolescents' problems and their satisfactions in both their peer and family relationships.

There are also differences between males and females in the relationships they have with their peers. The friendships of females tend to be one to one. They involve the self-disclosure of intimate material. The peer relationships of boys, on the other hand, are more likely to involve groups and shared activities, with little emphasis on self-disclosure

(Hunter & Youniss, 1982; Johnson & Aries, 1983). The interests of male adolescents are often focused on status and achievement, while those of females involve people and relationships, again following our traditional societal expectations.

These sex differences in friendships seem to persist way beyond adolescence and to impact on relationships such as marriage (Balswick, 1988; McGill, 1986). Males, especially those whose marriages are not particularly happy, tend to disclose little to their wives, and also disclose little to their same-sex friends. Females, on the other hand, disclose more to their spouses as well as to their same-sex friends. (See Gottman & Levenson, 1988 for a discussion of this issue.)

Table 3.2 Teenagers seeking parental advice over two decades

Issues	1976		1982	
	Males	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
	%	%	%	%
On what to spend money	31	55	54	60
Whom to date	4	17	14	13
Personal problems	37	35	49	18
Courses to take	33	44	59	64
Future occupation	43	64	65	56
Social events	4	10	8	11
College or not?	51	70	65	64
Books to read	8	8	14	7
Magazines to buy	4	6	8	2
How often to date	12	57	14	27
Drinking parties	18	26	19	18
Future spouse	27	42	35	24
Going steady?	14	32	15	16
How intimate on date	8	17	11	9
Info about sex	24	43	38	40

Source: Sebald (1986)

While it is generally assumed that adolescents of every generation are more oriented to their peers than their parents, and that the situation is relatively stable and unaffected by environmental factors, this does not seem to be the case. In an interesting comparison, Sebald (1986) examined the peer versus parent orientation of male and female

adolescents across three decades, the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. In the 1960s, girls were highly parent-oriented and boys were highly peer-oriented, while in the 1980s, the two sexes were much more similar. In addition, over the period there was a noticeable move back towards parents from the strong peer orientation generally evident in the 1960s. Thus, cultural norms prevailing at a particular time are likely to affect the extent to which adolescents focus on their peers versus their parents. In Table 3.2 we present some of Sebald's data about the extent to which adolescents consulted their parents for advice across two cohorts, the seventies and the eighties.

Variables affecting communication and conflict in the family

Variables linked with communication and conflict in families include structural variables such as social class and ethnicity, religiosity and the age of the adolescent. Middle-class families have more constructive communication and less conflict between parents and adolescents. Families from minority backgrounds tend to be more cohesive and to place less emphasis on autonomy and individuation. Religious families tend to have more positive and constructive communication than non church-related families. Families with early and late adolescents tend to have fewer communication problems than families of middle adolescents.

Social class and ethnicity

Studies of middle-class families indicate less overall discord than in working-class families (Jacob, 1974). Middle-class parents also use a more inductive parenting style with their children and emphasise independence in their socialisation (Baumrind, 1980; Kohn, 1969). There also seem to be stronger parental alliances and less disagreement between middle-class parents. Most of those in Offer and Sabshin's (1984) sample who experienced a tumultuous adolescence were from the group in the lowest social class represented in their study.

On the other hand, Henggeler and Tavormina (1980) found that working-class mothers claim they are more affectionate than do middle-class mothers, although raters judged the middle-class mothers to engage in more affectionate behaviour in a sample of interaction. Perhaps the two groups of mothers express their affection in different ways, and the coding system reflects the middle-class definitions more closely. The fact that researchers are generally middle class can create problems in designing and interpreting research, as we noted in Chapter 1.

One's ethnic background also affects the nature of parent–child interaction. Family ties for many ethnic groups tend to be stronger

and families are generally more cohesive (Burns & Goodnow, 1979; Goodnow, 1981). Where adolescents seek greater autonomy than cultural practices allow, conflict is likely to ensue. Adolescents frequently report conflicts about having friends outside the ethnic group, being allowed to go out, being allowed to date and having to spend time visiting family when they would prefer to be with their peers. The issue of ethnic background will be taken up again in discussions of decision-making in families with adolescents.

Religiosity

Several studies have linked the level of religiosity in the family (frequency of church attendance, Bible-reading, saying grace etc.) with the type of communication occurring among family members. Bagi (1983) found differences in communication between religious and non-religious families in the frequency and extent of self-disclosure across a number of topic areas. Adolescents in religious families were more likely than other adolescents to talk to their mothers about issues related to philosophy of life, social issues, relationships and sexual attitudes. Similarly, adolescents in the religious families were more likely than other adolescents to talk to their fathers about social issues, philosophy of life, relationships and general problems but the extent to which they disclosed their real feelings and attitudes to their fathers was no different from other adolescents. Discussions with both parents were more frequent for the high religious group and covered a broader range of topics and higher levels of self-disclosure. It seems that religiosity facilitates parent–adolescent communication, at least for some topics of discussion.

Age

Conflict with parents tends to increase in early adolescence and then to decline over time. Relationships generally improve between middle and late adolescence. During this period, adolescents gain more influence in the family, while the influence of the parents declines.

Parents are more directive with mid-adolescents than with younger or older adolescents (Hunter, 1985). Parents of these 14- and 15-year-olds may be more strongly motivated to impress their views and values on the adolescents before they get any older. It is also possible that these adolescents are objecting more to the parents' control attempts and thus eliciting more directives. Other researchers have found this age group of adolescents to be a major problem for parents (Baranowski, 1981; Lapsley *et al.*, 1984; Noller & Callan, 1986; Steinberg, 1981).

A further interesting but not much researched aspect of communication in the family is the impact of the presence of the spouse on parents' interactions with their offspring. Some researchers have investigated these differences in parent–child interactions and demonstrated the interconnectedness of parent–child and spousal relationships.

Change in parental behaviour in the presence of the spouse depends on the quality of marital communication, especially for the father. In a recent study, Gjerde (1986) compared parent–adolescent interaction in the presence of the spouse (triad) and without the spouse present (dyad). Fathers of sons were less involved, less egalitarian, more critical and more antagonistic when the mother was present than when they talked alone with their sons. In contrast, mothers' interactions with sons were more positive when the spouse was present Mothers were more responsive, secure, affective and consistent when their spouses were present than when they were not. The presence of the spouse, therefore, seems to enhance mother's interactions with sons, but spoils father's interactions with sons. The presence of the spouse had little effect on interactions with daughters. Given that observations were taken in all conditions, the effect of the presence of the spouse in interactions with sons is different from the effect of the presence of just any observer.

It is not clear why adolescent males should elicit more positive behaviour from mothers when the father is present and more negative behaviour from fathers in the presence of mothers. One explanation is that the fathers may be trying to present themselves in front of the mothers as more strict with the son than they actually like to be. In doing so, they preserve the traditional patriarchal image. Mothers, on the other hand, may feel more comfortable in expressing love and affection to their sons when someone else is present and there is less risk of the positivity being interpreted sexually. Unfortunately, adolescent behaviour was not assessed in this study, so it was not possible to see whether the adolescents were also behaving differently and thus eliciting different behaviours, depending on whether one or both parents were present.

Decision-making in families with adolescents

Decision-making is a problem in adolescence for two related reasons. Firstly, adolescents are generally wanting to have more control over their lives and to make most of the decisions that directly affect them. At the same time, adolescent decisions can have far-reaching consequences for both themselves and their families. There are major decisions about whether to continue education, what kind of career to pursue, which peer group to spend most time with, whom to date and/or marry, whether to be involved in sexual activity and with whom, and

whether to continue to live at home or to move out. Parents get anxious about the young person's ability to make decisions such as these. They try to have more influence than the adolescent sees as reasonable. Parents may also have more realistic ideas about the likely consequences of such decisions than do their adolescents. Ironically, parents who try to make decisions for their adolescents or who try to have too strong an influence may lose what influence they have, and may even alienate their offspring. The problem is further exacerbated by the adolescents' lack of communication about their activities, since without any information, parents are likely to get even more anxious. Again, this anxiety may only serve to increase the chances that the adolescent will make the decisions the parent fears most.

Poole & Gelder (1985) explored the perceptions of family decision-making of fifteen-year-olds. These adolescents generally saw themselves as making most of the decisions affecting their lives, although the influences of the family were still evident, depending on sex, social class and ethnic background. Female adolescents considered the mother's opinion as more important than did adolescent boys while the boys tended to be more influenced by their fathers' opinions than were girls. Females made more decisions for themselves than boys, despite the evidence that girls tend to be dominated by boys in mixed-sex decision-making tasks with peers. Perhaps parents trust the girls more, especially given that the girls are more likely to have values similar to those of their parents.

There are also class differences in attitudes about the decision-making of adolescents. Forming one's own opinions and taking note of the opinions of other family members, including both parents, were considered more important by high socioeconomic groups than by low socioeconomic groups. Families from ethnic backgrounds are more cohesive than Australian families. They are less willing to encourage autonomy in their adolescents and set less store by the opinions of outsiders. In addition, native-born Australian adolescents, particularly boys, claimed a larger network of friends than adolescents of immigrant background. Having a larger network probably gives these adolescents access to a wider range of opinions about various issues. This exposure may add to their level of cognitive development and increase their confidence in forming and expressing opinions different from those of their parents.

Whether parents or peers are thought to be the most important influence on decision-making for adolescents, depends on the relationship a young person has with both their parents and their peers, and the particular type of decision being made. Wilks (1986) found that university students considered their parents as the most important influences in their lives, but that parents tended to be more important in

future-oriented decisions such as educational and vocational choices (see also Sebald & White, 1980). Peers were more important in current decisions such as social activities, hobbies and reading material.

Both parents and peers tend to agree that parents' opinions are more important when considering educational and vocational choices, as well as decisions about money. Of course, parents' involvement may be important in these areas because they are also likely to be important sources of financial support. Parents are also considered important in decisions about choosing a spouse, although many subjects were not sure whose opinion should count the most here. While most young people would want their parents to approve of their choice of partner, whether they would actually give up a partner that the parents didn't like is another question altogether.

Friends were the clearly preferred reference group for decisions about social events, books to read, clubs to join, hobbies to pursue and clothes to wear, and parents supported the use of the peer group as a reference for most of these decisions. There are still many areas of potential conflict, however, since fathers thought that they should be consulted about dress and both parents thought that they should be used as guides about alcohol use, dating and sex. The adolescents, on the other hand, considered that their friends were more important sources of advice in these areas. In addition, when problems arose these tended to be discussed more with their closest friend than with their parents.

Effects of parent–adolescent communication

Self-esteem

In considering communication between parents and adolescents, it is important to ask what type of communication promotes or inhibits the development of positive attitudes towards the self. While this issue will be taken up in greater detail later (Chapter 4), it is worth considering some studies briefly here. A number of studies have shown positive relationships between parental support or nurturance and self-esteem (Buri, Kirchner & Walsh, 1987; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986; Hoelter & Harper, 1987; see also Rollins & Thomas, 1979 for a review of early research). Self-esteem is positively related to the use of support and induction techniques by parents and negatively related to their use of coercion.

Where parents coerce their children into doing what they want, they are likely to have negative effects on their children's self-esteem. The primary messages coming from coercive techniques are that the adolescent is not competent, cannot be trusted, is motivated by negative

goals and does not know what is good for him or her. The adolescent cannot cope without the parent. In contrast, the main messages coming from the parent's use of supportive and inductive techniques are quite the opposite: that the adolescent is competent and able to decide, that with encouragement he or she will behave appropriately and wisely. In addition these adolescents are likely to get the message they can be trusted and seek to do what is best. No wonder these different styles of parenting have very different effects on self-esteem.

Openshaw, Thomas and Rollins (1984) investigated whether symbolic interactionist theory or social learning theory offers the most useful explanation of parental effects on adolescent self-esteem. To Symbolic Interactionists, adolescent self-esteem is related to the reflected appraisals adolescents receive from their parents; that is, the extent to which their parents' behaviour toward them confirms them as worthwhile and lovable individuals. Social learning theorists, on the other hand, would claim that adolescents model the self-esteem of their parents. That is, adolescents who have parents who behave confidently will also behave confidently, while those who have parents who lack confidence and doubt their own abilities will show the same self-doubt in their own behaviour. The research suggests that the self-esteem of adolescents is more strongly related to their perceptions of the support they received from their parents than it was to the self-esteem of their parents. Support for the symbolic interactionist model is stronger than for the social learning model.

Adolescent self-esteem is more closely related to the actual support adolescents receive from their parents (as coded by outsiders) than to the adolescents' perceptions of support (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986). Adolescents' perceptions of the support and nurturance they receive from their parents are more highly correlated with adolescent self-esteem than are parents' reports of their parenting behaviours. It seems likely that adolescents' self-esteem reflects what they believe their parents think of them. Those who believe their parents think highly of them will tend to have high self-esteem, while those who believe their parents view them negatively will tend to have low self-esteem. Also, perceptions of fathers' support and nurturance are more strongly related to self-esteem in adolescents than are perceptions of mothers' nurturance, particularly for boys. Perhaps the father is still seen as the most powerful figure in the family and thus his perceptions of the adolescent are seen as more important. A further possibility is that mothers are generally supportive and nurturant of their children, and there is little discrimination between them. Differences between fathers in the level of support and nurturance would then be more salient.

There are differences in self-esteem in adolescents related to the sex of the adolescent. The self-esteem of males is most strongly affected by

the balance between the amount of control exerted by the parent and the extent to which the adolescent is encouraged to be autonomous and independent (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986; Openshaw *et al.*, 1984). Boys high in self-esteem are encouraged to be independent and their parents do not exert a lot of control. Those low in self-esteem are strongly controlled by parents, and are not encouraged to be independent.

The self-esteem of girls, on the other hand, is most affected by the parents' support and nurturance. It is hardly affected at all by control or autonomy. Girls whose parents are supportive are high in self-esteem whereas when parents are rejecting and unsupportive, adolescent girls are low in self-esteem.

As might be expected, there is evidence (e.g. Eskilson, Wiley, Muehlbauer & Dodder, 1986) that high levels of pressure to succeed from parents negatively affect adolescents' self-esteem. Given that parental pressure doesn't seem to improve academic performance, it seems likely that most adolescents would be better without it. Feeling able to meet the goals set by parents, on the other hand, contributes positively to self-esteem. Thus, pressure from parents can have more positive effects if it is related to realistic goals that are clearly attainable by the adolescent. A further negative effect of considerable pressure from parents was found by Eskilson and her colleagues. They showed that adolescents under high pressure from their parents to achieve were more likely to get involved in deviant behaviours such as alcohol abuse, drug-taking and vandalism. The relationship between problem behaviours of adolescents and family interaction patterns is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

Discipline and control

Extremes of discipline tend to have negative effects on adolescents. Both physical punishment and discipline which is lax, neglectful and inconsistent have negative effects on adolescent functioning. Boys who are physically punished experience such negative consequences as poor internalization of control, low self-confidence, social isolation and covert resentment or rebellion (Douvan & Adelson, 1966). Healthy families, on the other hand, are characterised by a quasi-democratic approach (Jurkovic & Ulrici, 1985).

The use of power assertion techniques also hinders the development of higher moral reasoning in adolescents and leads to a moral code based on fear of detection and punishment. On the other hand, effective family communication facilitates the development of higher moral reasoning in adolescents (Hollstein, 1972; Stanley, 1978). The use of inductive disciplinary techniques by parents, combined with the expression of

affection, is highly correlated with an internalised moral code (Hoffman, 1980) where adolescents behave morally because they want to. Adolescents with an externalised moral code are likely to be more influenced by their peer group and more concerned about getting caught than about behaving appropriately.

Observations of family discussions about moral dilemmas (Jurkovic & Prentice, 1974) have also shown that moral maturity in adolescents depends on the way their parents interact with them. Where parents are hostile and dominating, teenagers are likely to develop an immature, externalised approach to moral situations. Where parents use inductive techniques and encourage the adolescent to think through the likely impact of their behaviour on themselves and others, the adolescents are more likely to develop a mature, internalised moral code.

Conflict between parents

Another difficult situation for adolescents is where they become involved in triangulated relationships and drawn into the conflicts between their parents. Such involvement has a negative effect on adolescent development, at least for 15- and 17-year-old girls (Bell & Bell, 1982). These relationships can take a number of different forms. Adolescents may become involved in mediating between their parents, or even in taking sides with one parent against the other. They may also become involved in distracting their parents from fighting by engaging in bad behaviour, such as fighting with siblings, whenever their parents get involved in conflict. They may even be blamed for the conflict between their parents and seen as the prime cause. Obviously these situations are much worse for adolescents where the parents' marriage is clearly unhappy, and arguments between them occur regularly. Kleiman (1981), for instance, found better psychosocial adjustment in families where there are clear boundaries between the parental and child subsystems, with no inappropriate intergenerational alliances such as alliance between an adolescent child and one of their parents.

Summary

In this chapter we have focused on communication in families with adolescents. Positive, effective communication in the family is clearly a crucial determinant of healthy family functioning and the well-being of adolescents. Parent–adolescent communication is affected by sex of parent and adolescent, age of adolescent, social class, ethnic background and religiosity. There are also differences in patterns of communication with mothers and fathers. Adolescents report more

communication and higher levels of self-disclosure to their mothers, as well as more conflict with them.

Most parent–adolescent conflict tends to be about relatively trivial issues like their dress, manners, and music. Adolescents see themselves as making most of the important decisions affecting their lives. Parents and adolescents avoid conflicts about issues such as sex and drugs, and tend to discuss such issues very little.

A crucial issue is who should control various aspects of the adolescents' lives. Conflict occurs because adolescents come to regard an increasing number of areas that were once considered as under parental control, as under personal control. In general, adolescents continue to see moral and conventional issues as legitimate areas of parental control although there is not always agreement about which issues are the moral ones. Adolescents who receive high levels of acceptance and low levels of criticism from their parents have higher self-esteem. Those receiving low levels of parental acceptance and high levels of criticism tend to be low in self-esteem. Similarly, the use of physical punishment, rather than induction and reasoning, tends to lead to lower levels of self-esteem in adolescents.

In general, we lean towards a moderate view about adolescence. Relationships between adolescents and their families are not always stressful, and most adolescents do not completely break away from their families. Rather, parent–adolescent relationships do become strained, at least for a time, as adolescents work toward the development of more equal and more positive relationships. These relationships, then, generally last for the rest of their lives. In addition, adolescents tend to become more peer-oriented, although most continue to value their relationships with their parents highly. The research into communication during adolescence that we have discussed generally supports the view that most parent–adolescent relationships are happy, but there are some inevitable tensions as adolescents establish their own identities.

Chapter four

Family environments and adolescent development

Given the close nature of relationships in families, the amount of time individuals spend with each other in their families and the undoubted impact that the family has on preparing individuals for adult life, it is clear that the family is a very important aspect of the environment in which individuals grow. Studies comparing the impact of the family environment with the impact of other environments on adolescents (e.g. school and peers) tend to indicate the central importance of the family environment (Greenberg, Siegel & Leitch, 1983; Hunter & Youniss, 1982; Siddique & D'Arcy, 1984). In addition, different types of families provide different types of environments which may have positive or negative effects on individual family members. These family members may 'flourish, struggle or wither' depending, at least in part, on the type of family environment in which they find themselves.

Today much more emphasis is placed on the type of environment in which children are socialised and much less emphasis is given to the precepts or rules taught to children (see Berg, 1985). One important reason for this change is that in the late twentieth century we are much more aware of the subtle or implicit messages that children can receive in their families, and which may have a much greater impact than the rules taught to them. For example, a child's self-esteem can be badly affected if he or she is continually receiving messages suggesting incompetence, stupidity or 'badness'. Adolescence may be a time when parents are especially likely to put more pressure on their offspring because they begin to see more clearly their 'finished product'. As they look at how their adolescent copes with independence and exposure to the community, they also evaluate their success as parents.

How stable are family environments anyway – do parents provide similar environments for children over time, or are there large variations according to the age of the children? Roberts and his associates (1984) obtained information about parents' child-rearing methods when their child was three years of age and again when the same child was twelve.

Over time, parents were remarkably consistent in their child-rearing goals and practices. The main differences seemed to be that older children were given more independence and opportunities for achievement, and less affection and physical punishment.

Family environments are studied across a range of dimensions, some of which will be examined in this chapter. Firstly, we will concentrate on parenting style and family functioning which affect the relationships between parents and adolescents. Variables such as family cohesion and adaptability, family organisation, family control, family conflict and violence and family socialisation practices are discussed. While some of these variables have already been considered briefly in terms of their relationship to identity formation in adolescence (Chapter 1) and to family communication and self-esteem (Chapter 3), they will be considered here more in terms of their impact on the overall family environment. We will also examine the effects on relationships between adolescents and their parents of structural variables such as the sex of adolescent, size of the family, and the spacing of children. The impact of father or mother absence because of separation or divorce is discussed in Chapter 6.

Secondly, we will examine the implications for the growing adolescent of sex-role attitudes in the family, particularly in terms of attitudes to changing sex-roles, expectations about relationships and attitudes to achievement, education and careers. Thirdly, we will examine the effects of other family system variables such as marital discord, maternal employment or study, and parents' attitudes to children's work around the home. Finally, the family's attitudes to the outside world will be reviewed. Here we include attitudes to the wider society in general, to the local community, to authority figures such as teachers and police, and to the world of work.

Parenting style and family functioning

Family cohesion or closeness

According to the large study carried out by Olson and his colleagues, families are most cohesive in the early stages of the family life-cycle, and least cohesive in the adolescent and launching stages. While levels of cohesion increase again at the 'empty nest' and retirement stages, families are never again quite as close as in the early stages.

Not only is family cohesion lower in adolescence, but adolescents report less family cohesion than do their parents. Some theorists, including Olson, would argue that family closeness at adolescence can be problematic since close families may have difficulty in allowing adolescents the autonomy they need. On the other hand, adolescents do

see family closeness as important. When we asked young people about the level of closeness they wanted in their families, most wanted the family to be quite close, although not as close as their parents did (Noller & Callan, 1986). As we have emphasised before, adolescents may be distancing themselves from their families, but they still want the love and support of their parents. In Table 4.1 we present the mean levels of actual and desired cohesion and adaptability for mothers, fathers and adolescents.

Table 4.1 Ratings by parents and adolescents of real and ideal adaptability and cohesion

	Mother	*Father*	*Adolescent*
Real adaptability			
13-year-olds	44.5	45.0	42.1
14-year-olds	46.0	44.6	41.4
15-year-olds	44.9	45.2	40.9
16-year-olds	44.9	45.2	40.9
17-year-olds	43.3	43.7	39.3
Ideal adaptability			
13-year-olds	54.1	52.9	56.6
14-year-olds	54.7	52.3	53.4
15-year-olds	54.2	53.1	54.3
16-year-olds	53.7	52.7	55.1
17-year-olds	53.2	50.3	52.3
Real cohesion			
13-year-olds	61.5	61.8	59.4
14-year-olds	63.9	60.5	58.6
15-year-olds	59.6	59.5	52.9
16-year-olds	59.3	58.9	53.9
17-year-olds	55.6	54.4	49.8
Ideal cohesion			
13-year-olds	66.9	67.8	65.1
14-year-olds	68.7	67.8	61.0
15-year-olds	67.3	67.8	61.0
16-year-olds	68.4	67.1	63.1
17-year-olds	65.5	63.8	59.5

Note: The highest possible score for adaptability is 60.
The highest possible score for cohesion is 90.

Using the Moos Family Environment Scales, Burt, Cohen and Bjorck (1988) examined the relationship between measures of family environment and adolescents' anxiety, self-esteem and depression. Where the family was perceived as cohesive, organized and allowing members to express their feelings openly, family members tended to be less depressed and anxious, and to have higher self-esteem. Again, cohesion is an important aspect of family relationships, even for adolescents.

As we shall see later, the balance between closeness and control, rather than just the level of closeness, may be one of the more important aspects of the family environment during adolescence. Families that can provide a close, supportive environment to the adolescent, while at the same time encouraging autonomy and independence, seem to produce adolescents who can cope best with the transition to adulthood.

Adaptability, autonomy and control

In the study by Olson and his colleagues (1983), the tendency to see the family as more or less adaptable depending on the life-cycle stage was not clear. Adaptability decreased from the newly married group and reached a low during the adolescent stage. It is obviously much easier for families to be adaptable when there is just a young couple or a young couple and small children. Routines and rules become more important as children get older, and the family may become quite rigid. Adolescents are likely to demand change in these rules and routines, and the family system, rather than becoming more flexible, seems to resist change and become more rigid. It is interesting to note that the adolescents in Olson's study tended to view their families as less flexible than did their parents. One would expect that adolescents who are pushing for change in the system and finding resistance, would rate the family as more rigid than parents afraid of losing control of their teenagers.

Burt and his colleagues (1988) found that perceptions of the family as conflictual and controlling were related to lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of depression in adolescents. They also checked, using a longitudinal study over six months, to see whether they could establish clearly that the parenting style was the cause of the low self-esteem and depression. They found little evidence that perceptions of conflict and control at the earlier time were related to anxiety, depression and self-esteem at the later time. Given the short time-frame used, however, the findings are hardly conclusive. Studies with much longer time-frames are clearly needed to answer such crucial questions.

As we noted earlier (see Chapter 1), the extent to which adolescents are encouraged to be autonomous and have parents who are not highly controlling seems to be strongly related to identity achievement, particularly for females (Adams & Jones, 1983). Adolescent females

high in identity status report that their mothers encourage independence and autonomy. 'Diffused females' rate mothers high on control and regulation, as well as very high on encouragement of independence. These latter mothers seem to want their adolescent daughters to be independent, but also want to control the process by which they achieve such independence. It is no wonder that these adolescents generally struggle to achieve an independent identity.

Normal adolescent girls who score high on measures of psychological and social functioning tend to come from families that are lower in control and organization and higher in cohesiveness, expressiveness and independence (Bell & Bell, 1982). The evidence seems fairly clear that the best environment for adolescents involves limited control combined with encouragement to be independent and autonomous. The ability of the family to adjust to the adolescent's needs rather than to be rigid and inflexible is also important.

Figure 4.1 Factors associated with adolescent rebellion
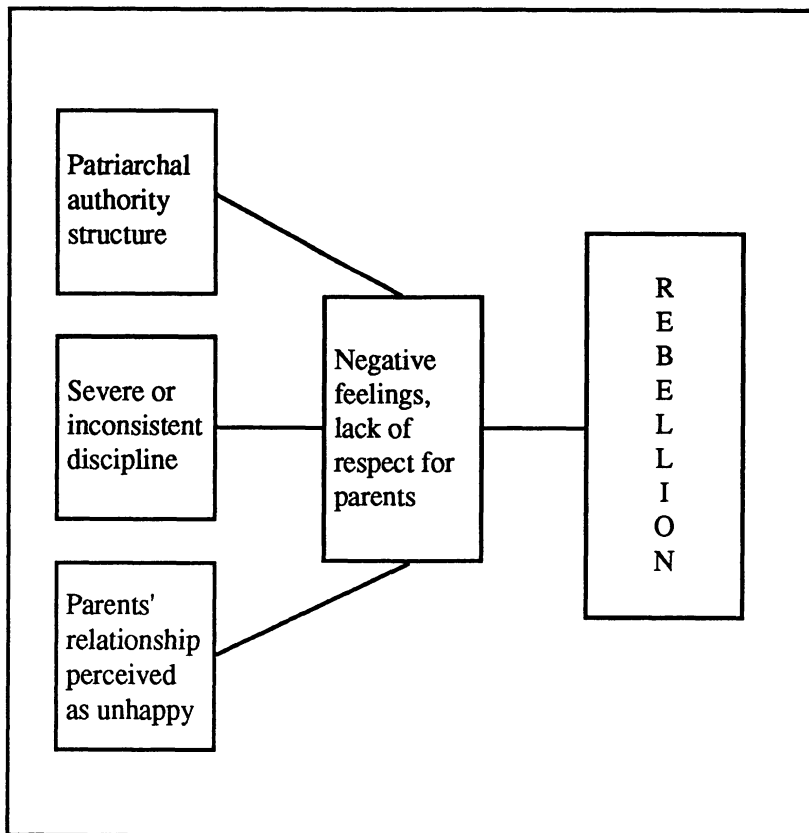
Punishment and violence

Rebellion is most likely to occur when the authority structure of the family is patriarchal and unequal, discipline is severe or inconsistent and the parents' marriage is perceived as unhappy (Balswick & Macrides, 1975). These relationships are presented graphically in Figure 4.1. When adolescents see discipline in the family as extreme (strict or permissive), they regard their parents less positively and have less respect for them (Balswick & Macrides, 1975; Middleton & Putney, 1963). Severe punishment by the parents is especially likely to have these negative effects on the quality of the parent–adolescent relationship.

There is considerable support for the negative relationship between punishment and feelings towards parents. For example, Baumrind (1971) contends that high levels of discipline, with its accompanying unjust, arbitrary, and restrictive parental demands generates rebelliousness and hostility, and even fear, towards parents. Ironically, Smith (1970) has shown that parents' power and influence over children is primarily based on the children's positive feelings towards their parents. Children who admire and respect their parents are much more likely to cooperate with them. Thus parents who overuse discipline and punishment are likely to minimise, rather than increase, their influence over their children.

The degree of punishment and perceived parental control seems to lower self-esteem and generate hostility in the adolescents (Amoroso & Ware, 1986). It seems clear that close supervision and other manifestations of parental control provoke negative attitudes and behaviour in adolescents. Martin and his colleagues (1987) found, when they examined the relationship between family violence, adolescents' perceptions of the outcomes of family conflict and their satisfaction with family relationships after a conflict episode, that nonviolent families seemed to resolve conflicts more effectively than violent families. In addition, as the level of family violence increased, so did the adolescent's anger towards their parents, while their satisfaction with family relationships decreased. These adolescents are likely to harbour resentment against their parents and look for ways to get revenge (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964).

Being physically abused has a number of consequences for adolescents, apart from the actual physical damage. The effects of high levels of physical abuse are presented in Figure 4.2. High levels of abuse are part of a downward spiral for adolescents involving low self-esteem, poor social relationships, lack of empathy, drug or alcohol abuse, suicide, delinquency and homicide (Garbarino & Gilliam, 1980). Other researchers also point to acting-out behaviours, depression, generalised

anxiety, extreme adjustment problems, emotional and thought disturbances, helplessness and dependency; poor school performance, aggression and lack of empathy for others; and less pleasure in life (Farber & Joseph, 1985; Galambos & Dixon, 1984; Herrenkohl, 1977).

Figure 4.2 Effects of physical abuse on adolescents
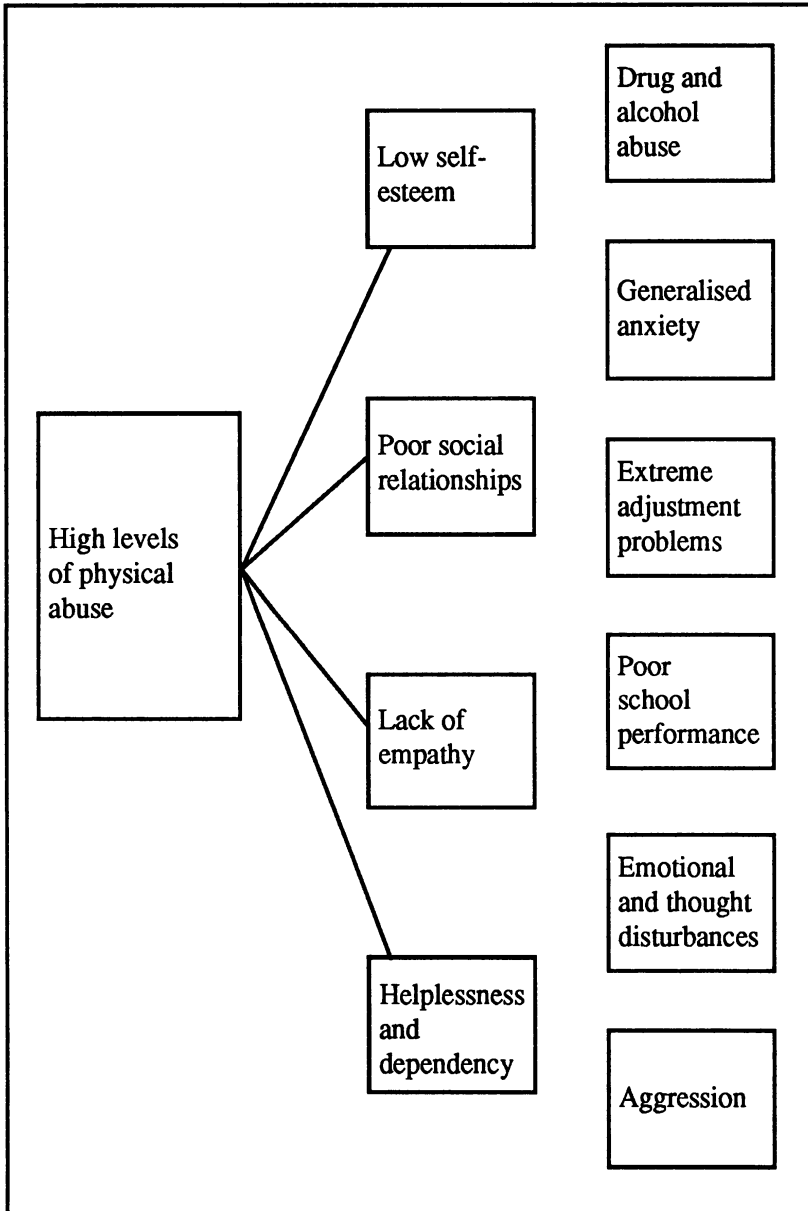
Are there any ways that we as a society can protect our kids from these kinds of abuses and their long-term consequences? The techniques used so far tend to involve media campaigns to increase community awareness of the problem. While arousing public awareness is important, there are problems with such campaigns. They may give the impression that abuse of children is even more common than it is, and therefore make it seem more justifiable in the eyes of some abusers. A better strategy may be the provision of programmes to increase parents' skills and to provide them with alternative solutions for dealing with the 'misbehaviour' of their adolescents.

The balance between cohesion and adaptability

In the study reported by Olson and his colleagues, adolescents were more likely to rate their families as extreme on both cohesion and adaptability, while parents were more likely to rate their families as balanced or moderate on both cohesion and adaptability. The fact that families balanced on cohesion and adaptability were most likely to be low in stress and high in coping skills, suggests that being a balanced family is particularly effective for families with adolescents. Thus the more extreme ratings by the adolescents reflect the more negative view of the family (see Chapter 2.) According to the adolescents, the families were too close and too rigid. We should remember, however, that adolescents tend to want their families to be extremely flexible. In other words, as might be expected, they want to be able to do as they please, with the support of their parents, of course.

As well as dealing best with family problems, balanced families have higher levels of family pride than other adolescent families. They also tend to have better parent–adolescent communication. Balanced families are more religious, but not as involved as extreme families in church activities. These families are also lower in stress and tend to deal directly, rather than passively, with their problems. These findings again point to the positive effects of a family environment which is warm and supportive for the adolescents, but only moderate in control.

We have used the dimensions of cohesion and adaptability to explore the kinds of families adolescents prefer. These Australian youngsters wanted their families to be highly adaptable (even chaotic) and quite cohesive, and more adaptable and less cohesive than did their parents (see Noller & Callan, 1986). (See Table 4.1.) Differences between parents and adolescents, however, were generally small. Adolescents want independence and autonomy, but within the context of supportive and cohesive family relationships. As Grotevant and Cooper (1986) also argue, the appropriate balance between connectedness and autonomy in the family best promotes psychological health in adolescents.

On the other hand, our findings also point to possible reasons for tension in these families. Adolescents are wanting very high levels of freedom and flexibility, and at the same time, wanting their parents to love and support them as they try out new ideas and new ways of behaving. Many parents must find this a tall order!

Effects of family environment on creativity

Family environments can even have an effect on the creativity of family members. Carl Rogers (1954) maintained that individuals whose pre-school environments provided both psychological safety and psychological freedom would show the highest levels of potential for creativity. Psychological safety involves receiving unconditional love and empathy without external evaluation. Psychological freedom is the permission to express oneself through art and other symbolic forms without restraint. As Harrington and his colleagues (1987) point out, these formulations are not all that different from those of other theorists (e.g. Erik Erikson, 1963) who emphasise the need for the child to develop basic trust in others and the world.

Harrington, Block & Block (1987) tested Rogers' (1954) theory of creativity-fostering environments, in an interesting longitudinal study. They found relationships between the kinds of preschool parenting practices suggested by Rogers and creative potential at both the preschool stage and in the early adolescent years (about seven years later). There were also clear relationships between preschool parenting practices and creative potential in adolescence, even after controling for the potentially confounding effects of sex, preschool intelligence and preschool creative potential. Those children who were most likely to be creative came from families which provided high levels of acceptance and support. These families also encouraged children to experiment with ways of expressing themselves through various forms of art.

Effects of structural variables on family environments

An interesting study of middle-class families by Richardson and her associates (1986) examined the effects of the sex of the adolescent, family size and the spacing of siblings on the quantity and quality of parent–adolescent contact and the parents' use of discipline. Daughters reported spending more time with their parents than did sons, particularly with their mothers. This greater amount of time with mothers was especially true for daughters in larger families. Perhaps daughters in large families spend more time helping their mothers. Time spent with fathers, on the other hand, was not related to any of the variables considered in the study, except for spacing of children. Adolescents,

either much older or younger than siblings, reported spending more time with their fathers. Quality of contact with parents was not affected by sex, family size or spacing, with adolescents generally reporting spending time that was perceived as satisfying with both parents.

Adolescents' perceptions of the discipline used by parents seems to be more affected by spacing than by the actual size of families (see Kidwell, 1981). Adolescents with an average spacing of fewer than three and a half years from their siblings describe their fathers as more strict, while those with wider spacings see the use of discipline in the family as fairer. Parents may believe that they need to be more strict when there are several children closer together in age all competing for the attention of parents and likely to get into mischief. Rules can be more relaxed when there is only one child, or children are at very different stages in the life-cycle.

Sex-role socialisation in the family

Recent developments in Western society have called for changes in the sex-role socialisation of both males and females. Females are being encouraged to consider careers outside the traditional female roles of caring and nurturing, and to combine a career with family re-sponsibilities. Males are being challenged to be more involved in close relationships, especially marriage and parenting and to be more expres-sive of their feelings (Balswick, 1988; McGill, 1986). An interesting question involves the extent to which sex-role socialisation in the family is changing to prepare adolescents for the new expectations.

The evidence from some studies, however, shows that sex-roles are difficult to change. For example, Emihovich, Gaier and Cronin (1984) found that, while females are generally expected to be more like men, males are not being encouraged to adopt more feminine behaviours. Arguments in the press about the on-field antics (e.g. kissing and hugging) of cricketers and soccer players after getting wickets or scoring goals illustrates this point. In the family, even younger males are unwilling to give up expectations about being the primary bread-winner, in order to assume greater responsibility for children. As Emihovich *et al.* (1984) put it, men have difficulty surrendering the 'ideal of violence'.

General sex-role attitudes

Emihovich and her associates also explored two other questions in their study: do fathers' general sex-role beliefs influence their attitudes about the sex-roles they would like their sons to adopt; and do the wishes of

fathers' about the sex-role attitudes they hope their sons will hold influence the attitudes their sons actually hold? Results showed that fathers' beliefs and expectations clearly influenced their sons' beliefs. Most of these middle-class, well-educated men held very traditional views about sex-roles. Fewer than 20 per cent advocated greater involvement by men in child care, and some expressed fears that 'boys were becoming too feminized', and that they were in danger of forgetting what it means to 'act like a man' (p.867). Given the strong relationships between fathers' and sons' attitudes, the prospects for change are not good.

What about the extent to which mothers and daughters agree in their sex-role attitudes? Notar and McDaniel (1986) measured young women's attitudes about domestic roles, employment, childrearing, marriage, sexual behaviour, dating and women's rights. These 19–20-year-old daughters believed there was strong agreement between themselves and their mothers about freedom of employment for women, marriage as an option rather than a priority for women, and shared parenting. There was less perceived agreement about economic and social freedom for women, the sharing of dating expenses and what sexual behaviour is appropriate. Mothers were generally seen as opposed to men taking over child-care and housework. If mothers are continuing to bring up both their sons and daughters to traditional sex-roles, change is not likely to accelerate. It is no wonder that working women do most of the chores around the home as well as holding down full-time jobs (Glezer, 1984; Scanzoni & Fox, 1980).

Most of the young women in Notar and McDaniel's study claimed to have good relationships with their mothers, including good communication, being close, and being able to confide in them. Most also reported discussing women's issues with their mothers, irrespective of whether they regarded themselves or their mothers as feminists. While some of the young women claimed that feminism had a negative impact on their relationship with their mothers, most reported that the women's movement had little or no effect. These discussions between mothers and their daughters seem to be keeping the daughters' views more traditional, rather than liberalising the views of the mothers and causing them to rethink their sex-role socialisation practices. As we mentioned earlier (see Chapter 2), parents and adolescents do differ in their atitudes, but at the same time, although significant, the differences are often small. They are rarely at opposite poles of attitude scales, although at different points. Also, as we argued earlier, the effects of social change are really quite slow, and although they may have somewhat different attitudes from their mothers, daughters' attitudes are generally still quite traditional.

Interpersonal conflicts

Sex-role socialisation also affects the way males and females approach interpersonal conflicts. Stereotyped views about sex-roles can lead to difficulties in problem-solving. For both males and females, there are sex differences in children's expectations of parents' responses to sons and daughters. In their study, Dino, Barnett & Howard (1984) had children from 4th to 8th grade rate a set of responses to hypothetical situations in which a child had described an interpersonal problem to his or her parent. Ratings involved how likely it was that the parent would make a particular response, and how helpful that response would be. Irrespective of age, children expected fathers to respond to sons with instrumental responses and mothers to respond to daughters with expressive responses. That is fathers of sons are expected to suggest ways of resolving the problem rather than try to understand the son's perspective. Mothers of daughters, on the other hand, are expected to try to understand the daughter's feelings and perspective rather than to suggest ways of solving the problem. Expectations based on sex-role stereotypes are clearly evident even with these primary school children. These very different styles of problem-solving are likely to affect later problem-solving in close relationships, like their own marriages. Males who model their fathers are less likely to understand their wives' needs to talk about problems in the relationship and to work through such issues. (See Noller & Fitzpatrick (1988) for a discussion of differences in the approaches of husbands and wives to solving problems in marriages.)

Attitudes to achievement

Attitudes to achievement are also affected by sex-role socialisation. A good example is mathematics which is seen as stereotypically male, despite the fact that males and females do equally well in maths courses. Because there are fewer female role models in mathematics, women can become caught up in a mathematical mystique (Fox, Brody & Tobin, 1980). They believe that they cannot possibly do well in mathematics. Unfortunately, such beliefs are likely to become self-fulfilling prophecies and may lead to females performing less well at maths.

Where female students are exposed to female models who are competent in mathematics, they take more courses in mathematics and are more likely to do well in those courses (Brody & Fox, 1980; Tobin & Fox, 1980). Females may do better in mathematics in single-sex schools because they have more exposure to competent female role models (such as female teachers and senior students) in these girls' schools.

Do parents have different attitudes about the maths performance of sons and daughters, and how do these attitudes affect their children's performance in mathematics and their interest in the area? Parsons, Adler and Kaczala (1982) examined how parents influenced their children's expectations about their success in maths and their perceptions of their mathematical ability. Fathers and mothers had very different attitudes. Fathers were more positive than mothers towards maths and their own ability at maths, although there was no relationship between these differences and their children's self-concepts for maths or their expectations about how well they would perform.

While parents of sons and daughters gave similar ratings of their children's ability in maths, parents of daughters believed that maths was more difficult and hence they had to work harder to do well. These findings fit with those of other studies showing that females generally believe they have to make more effort to do well across a range of areas (Frieze *et al.*, 1978). This study of parents' beliefs about maths ability indicates that mothers and fathers probably both reinforce this view in their children. In addition, children's beliefs about how good they are at maths are more strongly related to their parents' beliefs than to their own past performance. Even females who are performing well at maths can lack confidence because of sex-role stereotypes.

Children's household work

Sex-role beliefs are also expressed through the expectations about household work. There tends to be clear segregation of tasks by sex (see White & Brinkerhoff, 1981; Zill & Peterson, 1982). Girls generally spend more time than boys on household tasks. They do much more general housework in the kitchen, bathroom and laundry. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to be involved in lawn-mowing, snow-shovelling, dealing with garbage and farm work. Both sexes are expected to keep their rooms clean, to tidy up after themselves and to care for pets. Table 4.2 is adapted from data presented by Amato (1987a). It is clear from that these data that females of high school age are more likely than males to be expected to keep their rooms clean and tidy and to take responsibility for housework. On the other hand males are more likely to take responsibility for taking out garbage, mowing the lawn and washing the car. Sex stereotyping of tasks increases with age although, as Goodnow (1988) points out, it is not clear whether parents or adolescents push for this change.

Another intriguing trend noted by Goodnow is that males are more likely to earn money by doing jobs around the house such as cleaning the car, and by doing tasks such as mowing the lawn for other households. There seems to be an implicit message that while men may

work for money, women should work for love. It looks as though females are being prepared for the role of full-time housekeeper without monetary rewards.

Table 4.2 Percentage of secondary school children reporting responsibility for 10 household tasks

Task	Males	Females
Tidying up bedroom	68	87
Cleaning bedroom	63	75
Changing sheets	30	60
Washing or drying dishes	16	47
Sweeping or vacuuming	6	23
Taking out garbage	44	8
Mowing the lawn	65	14
Washing car	44	18
Cooking	9	19
Making bed	65	91

There is some evidence that socioeconomic variables such as class and education affect the household tasks of males and females. Where parents are well-educated, both boys and girls are likely to engage in activities such as cooking cakes and pies, and girls are more likely to be involved in 'masculine' activities such as woodwork (Zill & Peterson, 1982). On the other hand, children from lower-class families are likely to carry out more basic and essential tasks such as ironing or changing beds. These effects could be partly due to the impact of education, but may also reflect the differing economic situations of the two types of families.

On the other hand, there is also evidence that lower-class parents generally expect less from their children than do middle-class parents. Sex-roles are also relevant, however, since Newson and Newson (1976) found that 'working class boys seem especially able to escape responsibility if they want to' (p.249). Such effects may be related to the belief that mothers and daughters should be responsible for tasks around the home, or that males don't need to learn such tasks because they will eventually have wives to run their homes for them. Whatever, the reasons centre on the different beliefs held by middle- and working-class parents about what males and females should do in and around the home.

The effects of conflict and unhappy marriages on the family environment

As might be expected, the environment of a family is affected by how happy the parents are with their relationship, and even by whether the mother stays at home or is in full- or part-time employment. Olson's research shows that marital and family satisfaction are at their lowest during the adolescent stage. The satisfaction of both parents seems to decline as the oldest child becomes an adolescent. While the husband's satisfaction begins to increase again as the oldest child leaves home, satisfaction does not really increase for the wife until all the children have left home. The difference in reactions of husbands and wives may be related to wives having more problems in adjusting to the departure of children. Alternatively, it may be related to the strains wives experience in having adult children at home.

How much marital unhappiness and conflict do adolescents report? Amato (1987b) interviewed 200 children aged between eight and nine years and 200 adolescents aged between 15 and 16 years. Adolescents were more likely to report frequent fighting between their parents (19 per cent) than were younger children (8 per cent) although almost half reported that their parents never or hardly ever fought. Adolescents were also more likely to report that they didn't care about their parents' fighting (16 per cent) or that they believed fighting to be normal (14 per cent). They were also less worried about the possibility of their parents separating than were the younger children. (See also Chapter 6.) Some adolescents were worried, angry or generally upset about the conflict between their parents, and particularly disliked being dragged into arguments between their parents as allies or protectors.

A close, satisfying relationship between parents is generally reflected in a warm and supportive family climate. Conflict between the parents is likely to result in a generally unsatisfactory home environment. Fighting between parents is clearly unpleasant for children, and in the long term, the consequences can be serious for them. Conflict between parents is related to behaviour problems in children and adolescents. There is evidence of low self-esteem, poor school performance and emotional problems in children from families high in conflict (Emery & O'Leary, 1984; Ochiltree & Amato, 1983; Porter & O'Leary, 1980).

Conflict between parents may have negative effects on their children for two reasons (Amato, 1987a): (a) the arguments between the parents create a stressful family environment, and (b) the unhappy marriage often 'spills over' into the parent–adolescent relationship, producing deterioration in that relationship as well. Conflict between the parents may also be over how to rear children. One parent may be too restrictive or too permissive. What often happens is that the permissive parent

becomes even more permissive to try and counteract the effects of the restrictive parent, while the restrictive parent becomes even more restrictive to counteract the effects of the permissive parent. Poor relationships between the parent and the adolescent may have negative effects on the marital relationship which, in turn, may have even more negative effects on the parent–child relationship. The evidence certainly points to lower marital satisfaction during the child-bearing years, a factor which could be related to disagreements about child-rearing.

While it is generally clear that there is a relationship between unhappy marriages and children having more behaviour problems, it is not clear whether marital conflict is a direct cause of behaviour problems or whether it acts in combination with other developmental stressors (O'Leary & Emery, 1984; Smith & Forehand, 1986). In the latter study, marital discord was related to perceived parent–adolescent conflict, but only for mothers and daughters. These researchers suggest that marital problems may make it difficult for a mother to accept her adolescent daughter's strivings toward independence. Mothers may fear the prospect of being left alone in their unhappiness. Mother–daughter conflict may be generated by the unhappy mother putting increasing demands on the daughter and trying to control the daughter's behaviour.

Satisfaction with financial management is also lowest at the adolescent stage, reflecting the strain that adolescent children can place on the resources of a family (Olson *et al.*, 1983). Adolescents are likely to cost more because they eat more and their clothes are more expensive. They are also likely to be fussier about clothes. Finding clothes that are 'in' but also in a reasonable price range can be quite a challenge for any parent. Many adolescents also want to be involved in a range of activities: sporting teams, coaching, music lessons, magazine subscriptions, movies, musical gigs and so on, all of which cost money. All of these costs are additional to the high costs involved in obtaining a basic education.

There is some evidence of problems in the communication of husbands and wives who have adolescents. In Olson's study (Olson *et al.*, 1983), husbands were generally more satisfied with the communication in the marriage than wives. It is likely, as these writers suggest, that wives are wanting more communication from their husbands at this time and they are dissatisfied with their husbands' responses to these demands. Adolescents are also very demanding of their parents' time, particularly demanding attention from their mothers. These demands may interfere with the communication between their parents. Certainly, some parents find that they have more trouble communicating with each other when their children are up as late as they are in the evening, or even later. These conditions can also put a strain on the parents' sexual relationship.

Stresses in families with adolescents

Families with adolescents report that the greatest stresses come from the increase in the number of outside activities with which children are involved. There are also financial problems related to basics such as food, clothing and power, to purchases such as cars, and to increases in the number of chores left undone. Finally, when adolescents leave high school, there are even more financial demands including the costs of education, and the costs of supporting adolescents as they move in and out of the home to go to college, or to change jobs. (See Chapter 5.)

Effects of maternal employment on adolescents

As Montemayor (Montemayor, 1984a; Montemayor & Clayton, 1983) has shown, adolescents with working mothers spend less time with their parents and more time with peers than those whose mothers do not work outside the home. Male adolescents with working mothers also tend to spend more time alone than other adolescent males. In addition, maternal employment also affects the level of conflict between mothers and their adolescent sons, perhaps because mothers provide less supervision but expect more cooperation in family chores. There is increasing evidence that maternal employment outside the home has negative effects on sons (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1982; Hoffman, 1980).

Steinberg (1986) identifies the lack of parental monitoring as a crucial variable in the susceptibility of 'latch-key' children to undesirable influences from peers. Children whose parents know where they are and keep track of them are much less likely to become involved in antisocial activities. Again, males are more susceptible to these undesirable influences than females, and are also less likely to take notice of their parents' attempts to keep up with their movements.

The family and the outside world

As Bronfenbrenner (1986) notes in his review of research about the effects of external conditions on intrafamilial processes, the family is affected by a number of external factors. Included among these factors are the daily environment of the child (e.g. day care, school and peer group), the environment of the parents (e.g. work and recreation), and characteristics of the general community like community values, and the actual physical environment in which the community is situated. Further effects for families can come from economic pressures (unemployment, recession, depression), from natural disasters such as flood, fire and famine, from epidemics such as the poliomyelitis epidemic of the early

1940s or the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s, as well as many other factors.

External factors affect the family environment through making it less stable. The stability of the family environment is important to psychological adjustment. Pulkkinen (1984) examined the effects of the stability vs instability of the family on the development of 8- to 14-year-olds. Instability was measured by the number of moves the family had made, parents' absences from the family, changes in arrangements about day care and schooling, changes in family structure and changes in the employment of the mother. Instability was associated with anxiety, aggressiveness and submissiveness in children and adolescents. Of course, one problem with interpreting studies of this type is the possibility that personality factors in the parents contribute to both the instability of the family environment and the negative effects on the family. Alternatively, both personality and environmental factors may contribute to the unsatisfactory parenting. Genetic factors may also be implicated although work in this area is highly controversial and there are numerous of methodological problems.

There is evidence that the age of the child at the time of any upheaval in the family is an important predictor of the effects of that upheaval. This effect is best illustrated by the findings of Elder's (1974) study of the children of the Great Depression. Those who were already adolescents at the time of the onset of the Depression were positively affected by the period of deprivation and difficulty, while those who were preschoolers were adversely affected. Adolescent boys, particularly those from the middle class, who suffered serious deprivation during the Great Depression had higher levels of achievement motivation and a clearer sense of career goals. Both boys and girls from the deprived group were also generally more satisfied with their lives. Elder explains these results in terms of the mobilization of family resources which had to occur, and the fact that these teenagers had to take on added responsibilities both inside and outside of the home. These experiences effectively trained the adolescents in initiative, responsibility and co-operation, all important attributes for success in personal and work contexts.

While a number of studies have examined the effect of family environment on school performance, few studies have examined the linkages between home and school in a more reciprocal way. Smith (1968) manipulated the strength of home–school linkages and found evidence for increases in academic achievement when these links were stronger. Since her studies involved only low-income families, predominantly black, there is clearly need for the work to be replicated with other samples.

In another noteworthy study, Epstein (1983) examined the transition

to high school of a large group of 8th graders, particularly looking at the effect of opportunities for communication and decision-making in both home and school settings. Students who had participated in the decision-making processes that affected them, coped most effectively with the move to high school. They not only displayed more initiative and independence, but the effects were also seen in their academic performance. While the effects of family experiences were more important than school activities, the latter helped to counteract a lack of home experience.

The settings in which parents work can also affect their child-rearing values. Adults in highly supervised jobs (more characteristic of the working class) value conformity in their children They are more likely to use physical punishment to get obedience. On the other hand, parents with a high degree of freedom and little supervision in their jobs (more characteristic of the middle classes) are more likely to value autonomy and independence in children, and to value conformity and compliance much less (Miller *et al.*, 1979; Petersen, Lee & Ellis, 1982).

Some studies have looked at the effects of 'work absorption' by fathers on the family. Heath (1977), for example, found that the more absorbed fathers were in their work, the more irritable and impatient they were with their children. Job satisfaction tends to have the opposite effect. It increases the use of induction or reasoning in dealing with the children, and decreases the use of coercion by fathers (Kemper & Reichler, 1976).

The father's unemployment can also have negative effects on the family (Elder, Caspi & Van Nguyen, 1986; Elder, Van Nguyen & Caspi, 1985). If the father reacts to the situation with irritability, or the child responds to the situation by behaving in irritating ways, then the chances of long-term negative consequences for the child are higher. If there are also high levels of marital conflict following the unemployment, then long-term consequences are even more likely. Other negative family outcomes of prolonged unemployment include increased child mal-treatment and abuse as well as increased susceptibility to disease (Farran & Margolis, 1983; Steinberg, Catalano & Dooley, 1981). Possible reasons for the increased susceptibility to disease include reduced use of health prevention services and increased stress (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). A further possibility is reduced resistance to infection because of a less nutritious diet. Thus a whole range of variables which are external to the family can have important indirect effects on the family environment through their effects on one or other of the parents, on the parents' attitudes and goals in child-rearing, or on the economic state of the family.

Bronfenbrenner (1986) also argues that the early work experiences of adolescents are very important in the development of positive attitudes

to work and employment. Studies by Steinberg and his colleagues have shown the quite negative effects of being involved in paid employment during the high school years (Greenberger, Steinberg & Vaux, 1981; Steinberg *et al.*, 1982). Such job involvement was related to less involvement with the family, greater use of tobacco and marijuana, and poor work attitudes. There is mixed evidence about whether adolescents learn to be more responsible through engaging in employment at this early stage. (See Chapter 5.)

A further important question concerns the effects on the family of the community in which they live. A carefully controlled series of studies by Rutter and his colleagues (Quinton, 1980; Rutter, 1981; Rutter *et al.*, 1975; Rutter & Madge, 1976; Rutter & Quinton, 1977) have shown that in some areas, particularly in the city, families are much more vulnerable to mental disorder than are families from other areas. However, the effects seem strongly related to the high levels of disruption to city families living in the 'vulnerable' areas. Why particular areas have such effects on families is not clear but the negative effect of city living on families has been shown quite conclusively for delinquency rates to decline once the family moved out of London (see Rutter & Giller, 1983).

Community effects on the family also come through the media. There is considerable concern about the effects of television on consumerism and materialism, on aggression and violence, on sexual attitudes and behaviour, and on behaviours such as smoking and drinking. Some writers like Strouse and Fabes (1985) discuss the impact of informal sources of sexual learning, such as television, on adolescents' attitudes to sex and sexual behaviour. They conclude that most brief sex education programmes 'cannot, in isolation, counteract the barrage of sexual messages from negative sexual models' (1985, p.261).

While pressure from the anti-smoking groups and the recognition of the negative effects of smoking on health has minimised adolescents' exposure to cigarette advertising, there is not nearly the same pressure to limit alcohol advertising. Adolescents are continually subjected to alcohol advertisements, usually endorsed by very famous cricket and rugby league heroes, on television, in glossy magazines, around sporting fields and on billboards. Nor is advertising the only problem. Alcohol is consumed on most television shows and movies, and very often in the context of release from stress. To drink alcohol whenever you feel stressed is not a healthy message for adolescents to receive.

In the next section, we will take up a related issue of the extent to which family themes prepare an individual for a role in society, and what happens when the family and the society are out of step with one another. Our special focus is the family theme.

Family themes

Family themes have important implications for participation in society. As we have noted earlier, while families used to be expected to teach rules to children, today much more emphasis is placed on the nature of the socialisation environment (see Berg, 1985). The argument is, that on the basis of the attitudes to self and others that have predominated in the family, each person develops a world view which provides the framework from which they interpret everything that happens. Berger and Kellner (1964) described the family as a 'reality-constructing institution' while Berg goes a step further in claiming that each family has its own unique view of the world.

Berg argues that these family themes (e.g. the rest of the world is wrong and we are right) are not subject to question when the child is young but are merely accepted as truths. They can be all-pervasive in their impact on the child. These family themes act as filters through which the world is viewed and which affect the child's interpretation of other people, events and ideas. A crucial issue is the extent to which the family themes correspond with societal meanings, and the degree to which these themes prepare the adolescent to take his place in the outside world.

In Berg's view, there are three types of families in terms of their attitudes to the outside world: opaque (or closed) families, transparent families and translucent families. Opaque families, who in systems theory terms have a closed boundary, attempt to maintain their belief systems by censoring information and ideas and preventing them from entering the family system. The world tends to be polarised into 'we' and 'they', with 'they' being undesirable because they are lower class, less well educated or have different political or religious beliefs, or different ethnic origins. Transparent families, on the other hand, take a very relativistic view of the world. They have no values and do not filter the input from the world. Any behaviour is appropriate, depending on the circumstances.

The translucent family seeks to maintain its views and to pass them on to the offspring through defending the reasonableness of their views and the compatability of those views with those of others. Not all views are accepted. Some are clearly rejected, but they are explained, rather than explained away. As Berg (1985) goes on to say, 'The translucent family is sufficiently meaning circumscribed so as to be said to have it own values, yet with standards which are amenable to defense without the need to "write off" the outside world.' (p.614). The translucent family is the most effective, and the most able to prepare young people to be satisfactory and successful members of society. The problem with the opaque family is that when the adolescent detects any flaw in the

family's world view, he or she is likely to reject it totally, and family members with it. The transparent family, on the other hand, does not provide its members with the skills to evaluate the world as they find it and to work out a realistic belief position for themselves.

Attitudes to authority figures

Related to the family theme are attitudes to authority figures. Amoroso and Ware (1986) conducted a study relating home environment variables to adolescents' perceptions of themselves and authority figures such as teachers and police. Five factors of family environment emerged: extent of punishment, amount of chores at home, perceived parental control, absence of parents and parents' own attitudes toward authority figures. While all five family environment variables were related to adolescent attitudes, by far the most important effect was for adolescents' perceptions of the amount of punishment they received, and their perceptions of their parents' attitudes to authority. As we have already noted, a negative relationship exists between the use of punishment by parents and how positively their children feel towards them. Both extent of punishment and perceived parental control are related to the adolescents' negative views of themselves, suggesting once again, that negative parenting style may affect adolescent behaviour through its effects on self-esteem.

These same researchers also found positive relationships between parents' expectations that adolescents take responsibility for work around the home and their positive evaluations of both teachers and police. Perhaps those who have learned to take responsibility at home are more likely to evaluate positively those who are taking responsibility in the community. In addition, the parents' attitudes to external authority figures were highly correlated with those of their adolescents, although the direction of the effect is unclear. While it is likely that these relationships reflect the effects of parents on their children through teaching and modelling, it is also possible that the adolescents project their own views onto their parents. Given the data discussed earlier about the ways adolescents assume that their parents' views are more different from their own than they actually are, the projection explanation seems unlikely.

Summary

In this chapter we have considered the various factors which affect the environment in which adolescents grow up. The stability of the family environment is very important. Healthy adolescents come from family environments which provide a balance between closeness and

intimacy on the one hand, and the autonomy of family members on the other. While flexible sex-role attitudes seem necessary to allow adolescents the maximum number of choices about how they spend their lives, many family environments are still very traditional. While females are offered more educational opportunities than in the past, they are still socialised to participate in very traditional kinds of families. It is expected that the husband will be the primary breadwinner, and the wife will be the one that provides services for the rest of the family. While women are generally encouraged to be more like men, men are not encouraged to adopt more traditionally feminine traits.

Relationships between the family and the school, the family and the parents' work environments and the family and the community are also very important. Adolescents tend to be more successful academically when the links between the family and the school are strong. The environment in which the parents work affects their child-rearing goals, particularly the extent to which they emphasise obedience and conformity versus initiative and independence. In addition, parents with high job satisfaction are likely to be more effective than those who are absorbed in their work and have little time for family activities. Unemployment also has negative effects on the family through the marital conflict which often ensues, and the economic stresses on the family.

Finally, community attitudes also have an impact on the family. At least some of this impact is negative as family standards and values are often undermined by the media and other aspects of society. Families need to help their adolescents to deal with differences between the family and society in more constructive ways. The family environment should prepare the adolescent to take his or her place as a useful and productive member of society.

Chapter five

Leaving the family

For adolescents who leave school, quite often the next step is also to get a job and possibly to move out of home. Most look forward to the chance to leave home, but it is increasingly the case that leaving home does not mean forever. Rather, young people leave home and return home as there are changes in their jobs, friends and financial situation. Other adolescents have little choice about leaving as they must go to another town or city to further their education and training or to take up a job. There are also other adolescents who have no choice about leaving in that they must leave to escape family conflict, and intolerable family situations that may have degenerated to violence and emotional abuse.

The theme of 'breaking away' is a common one in plays and movies about growing-up. Often set in some small country town, we see the maturing teenager and their friends deciding to leave family, friends and familiar surroundings to get jobs or to study in some large city. There is the conflict about leaving their boyfriends and girlfriends and school friends to move to the city. 'Breaking away' is also a time when those close to adolescents feel that they can be most helpful to them. At the same time, while parents, teachers and those concerned about the adolescent feel that their own experiences have given them a good grounding in the necessary survival skills, adolescents can be very reluctant to follow, or even listen to, the advice of their elders. 'It's my life, and I'll do what I want to' is a difficult message for parents to accept from their teenagers, especially as they feel that decisions about how to spend one's life – good jobs, where to live, how to spend and save money – are things that they really know about. As we have mentioned elsewhere, parents may not feel very competent at telling their adolescents about sex and contraception, but they do feel equipped to help their children with decisions about the right job, the best place to do further study, the best car to buy and what they should save their money for.

Leaving the family home to study, work or even to marry obviously further establishes the adolescent's sense of independence and separate-

ness from the family. Physically and psychologically through their career choices the adolescent can choose to further distance themselves from their parents, siblings and school and other friends. At the same time, it is wrong to assume that adolescents no longer love or need their parents and families (see Chapter 1). We have repeatedly made this point. Rather, as they show by regular visits, telephone calls, the occasional letter, and the times when they come home to visit or even to live, most children want the lifelong support of parents especially as they make important decisions about their own lives.

Moving away from the family to get a job, to study or to be more independent means a lot of different things to adolescents. There can be more economic independence, more personal freedom, more control over their own lives and less control by their parents. There is less supervision and contact with parents. Significantly, adolescents are forced to live with the consequences of their own good and bad decisions.

Adolescents from happy families undoubtedly continue to feel close emotional ties with their families. They miss home, the attention of parents, and the sense that someone is close by if a problem comes up. The relationship between feeling close to one's parents, but also wanting to be less under their influence is a complex one. For instance, adolescents who adjust better to life away from home have more secure, supportive relationships with their parents (Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980). Feeling close to parents is important to adolescent adjustment. However, better adjustment is also predicted by the extent to which adolescents feel that they, rather than others, are in control of their lives (Anderson & Fleming, 1986). Adolescents need to know that they have the support and love of their parents, but also they need to feel that they are in control of their own lives.

Some adolescents have little choice about leaving home because of long-running conflict with their families. For them, leaving home is much less planned and is often under very unhappy and stressful circumstances. They can move in with friends, and get jobs to support themselves. Others become streetkids. The streets give them freedom, fun, and a lot of companionship and support from other teenagers who are very much like them. As streetkids with little or no income, however, they are at risk of being recruited for petty and more serious crime.

At night these runaways look for accommodation wherever it is available – at refuges, hostels, in industrial garbage bins, in abandoned warehouses or local parks. Most live on unemployment benefits, and to support drug habits their crimes can escalate from shop-lifting and purse snatching, to more serious crimes like breaking and entering, assault with a deadly weapon, to prostitution and drug running. In our major cities everywhere the number of streetkids is obviously on the increase.

As family researchers we see the community response in the number of seminars and large number of conferences arranged in the last few years to direct and coordinate better welfare and other resources towards meeting the needs of streetkids. The media have played an important role in alerting communities to the despair, alienation, poverty and ruthlessness often typical of this lifestyle. As again demonstrated by one recent programme on streetkids by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Australian public is still not aware of the level of physical and sexual abuse that drives children and adolescents onto the streets.

Table 5.1 Factors behind leaving home

Factor	*Positive outcome*
Independence	Positive identity development and self-esteem
Family conflict	Escape family violence, financial independence
To marry	Intimate loving relationship, more independence
To get a job or to be educated/trained	Independence, financial security

In this section we first consider some of the major reasons for adolescents' leaving home. As Table 5.1 indicates, a major factor is the need to establish lives more independent of their families. If adolescents can do this successfully, they will have stronger personal identities and better self-esteem than adolescents who fail to deal with the demands of living independently (see Chapter 1). Other factors associated with leaving home include family conflict, getting jobs or wanting to live with or marry their partner. The good outcomes, in terms of adolescent identity development and increased independence, are when adolescents leave home to go on to further study, and to do jobs and meet people who satisfy various social–psychological and other needs, and who help them establish lives which allow them to grow as individuals. The bad outcomes seem to be more likely for adolescents who run away from family conflict, sexual abuse, incest and violence. For them, there are much greater risks in being unemployed, being isolated and lonely, and of living in poverty. Their lives may also be at considerable risk as a result of heroin and other addictions, alcoholism, violent crime or AIDS, if they become the victims of child prostitution.

Wanting to be more independent

Most adolescents want to be independent and free to make their own decisions. These needs are well recognised in theoretical discussions of adolescents (see Coleman, 1980), and are mentioned by adolescents themselves in many studies (Callan & Noller, 1987; Youniss & Smollar, 1985).

The push for independence, however, is often associated with increased levels of conflict between parents and adolescents. Among 18- and 19-year-old adolescent males who leave home, independence is cited ahead of the need to continue study elsewhere, to want to live with friends or with a boyfriend or girlfriend. The need to be independent is as important as conflict as a reason for leaving home, although not as important as job opportunities (Young, 1987). For 18- and 19-year-old females, to be more independent is fourth in importance to them, being behind leaving due to family conflict, to get married or to cohabit, or to get a job. In addition, as Young's analysis of reasons for leaving also reveals, in comparison with young people of the 1970s, leaving home to be independent has increased in importance more than any of these factors.

The adolescent's need for more independence can mean family arguments and conflicts. The vast majority of parents nevertheless do seem to want their teenagers to be more mature and independent, and they are happy for this sense of autonomy to develop while teenagers are at home. Indeed, most parents would agree that they would rather be nearby to monitor, as it were, the growth of this independence. They accept the increased involvement of the adolescent with peers, sports and activities outside the family. New roles, tasks and demands do add to adolescents' sense of competence and self-esteem (Amato, 1987a; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). In turn, adolescents who try out these new roles have higher social skills, more social confidence and like themselves more.

Family conflict

In national opinion polls, adolescents cite family problems, only after having to go to school, as the worst thing in life. In these same polls, however, family relationships are rated as among the best things in life (Australian National Opinion Polls [ANOP], 1984). Although most adolescents deal quite well with the demands of living in families, going to school, and in meeting the expectations of teachers, parents and friends, there are times when all adolescents will disagree with their parents and will have family fights.

Family conflict is increasing as a major reason for leaving home. In the 1970s, surveys revealed conflict with parents to be a a minor factor for leaving home. For adolescent males family conflict is now the third most often cited reason, behind getting jobs and the need for independence (Maas, 1986). It is also third in importance among adolescent females as the reason for leaving home. At the same time, young people who leave home because of fights and conflict with their family stay away for the shortest amounts of time, an average of about a year (Young, 1987).

One reason for the frequent early returns is that the adolescents' departure is often unplanned. It is more in response to rather explosive arguments or even violence, rather than due to a series of minor issues that become more significant over time. Parents and adolescents use the time to 'cool down'. Often there is the understanding that the adolescent is welcome back home whenever they want to come back. Adolescents return when arguments are settled or forgotten, or even if they are not, to satisfy the wishes of one parent who wants the family to be reunited.

There is some evidence that adolescents who leave home because of fights and conflict with parents and siblings do not cope as well with life outside the family as those who leave for other reasons (e.g. work, independence, marriage). There could be several explanations for this. Possibly the family environment has not prepared them as well as adolescents who leave because of other factors. These adolescents may not be as self-confident and socially-skilled, while those who leave with the blessings and support of their parents tend to have their support if major problems occur that might affect their continued independence.

Levels of conflict in families do increase during adolescence, being highest during the adolescence of the eldest offspring (Olson *et al.*, 1983). However, as we have pointed out elsewhere, this does not imply that families with adolescents are always in conflict or that adolescents are always hot-headed and totally impulsive (see also reviews by Coleman, 1978; Hall, 1987; Montemayor, 1983). Adolescents do fight with their parents, but they often have as many or more fights with their siblings. At best they may only have a few arguments in an average week with various family members, and almost always these fights are short-lived. Importantly, the majority of disputes are about mundane, trivial issues, which can be fairly easily resolved.

As Table 5.2 shows, arguments occur about a wide range of issues, and they are very similar for adolescents of both sexes. There are disputes about taking more responsibility, appearance, spending more time with the family and in turn, arguments about what they prefer to do with their friends. Adolescents tend to fight more with some members of the family than with others. Arguments generally occur more often with mothers than fathers (see Papini & Sebby, 1988; Smith &

Forehand, 1986). Adolescents have more disputes with their mothers, but they also report that their most meaningful communication is also with them (see Chapter 3 for more detail). Next come arguments with same-sexed siblings. Fathers are very much less involved in conflict, probably as they are not present or just not interested in the day-to-day issues that are the source of arguments with the adolescent.

Table 5.2   Most common arguments with parents according to adolescents (1960s–1980s)

Focus of Arguments

Males	*Females*
Responsibilities, especially completion of jobs and chores	Responsibilities, especially completion of jobs and chores
Eating dinner with the family	Being home enough
Cleanliness	Clothing and appearance
Using the family car	Using the family car
Arguing	Arguing
The spending of money	Types of friends
Number of times I go out on school nights	Following family rules
The time I get in at night	The time I get in at night

Source: Adapted from Montemayor (1983)

Adolescents are experiencing new and different feelings that they need to accept and cope with, and like all people, they have their self-doubts. There are a large number of issues that can be a cause of stress and self-doubt to adolescents – biological changes, their physical appearance, moodiness, needs for independence, freedom and autonomy, attitudes and priorities that differ from parents, and their emerging opinions about the right way to express their own sexuality. We know from adolescents that many arguments with parents are about rules, the use of time (study, school, help at home, going out) and cars, alcohol, and spending money (Caplow *et al.*, 1982; Ellis-Schwabe & Thornburg, 1986; Papini & Sebby, 1988). Whoever is their adversary, in the vast majority of families arguments don't end with adolescents leaving home or being thrown out by their parents. Families become flexible and adjust to the developmental challenges facing their various members. Parents are not isolated from these developmental changes. For example, they are also experiencing their 'middlescence', as they adjust to ageing, various financial demands and changes in their expectations. In some families it is probably the parents' difficulties in

adjusting to these demands that are more the source of their impatience with adolescents than the actual behaviour or attitudes of their children.

Research studies generally indicate that being in conflict with parents does stress adolescents. Family conflict is linked with adolescents' moving away from home, the higher chances of adolescents' becoming juvenile delinquents, failing at school, joining religious cults, committing suicide, and indulging in a wide variety of problem behaviours (see reviews by Hall, 1987; Montemayor, 1983, 1986). However, there are somewhat disparate reports of the levels of conflict within families with adolescents, probably as a result of the methods used by researchers.

It is well accepted that high levels of conflict, to the extent of adolescents being physically or sexually abused, is predictive of a variety of emotional and behavioural problems. In most non-clinical families this high level of conflict does not occur often. The self-reports of parents and adolescents show that there is conflict (Rutter *et al.*, 1976), but at the same time, conflict is seen as a normal consequence of different personalities living together in the same family. In such normal families, puberty is linked with increased levels of conflict in families, especially between adolescents and their mothers (Steinberg, 1981; 1986). It may be that adolescents find it easier to try out their autonomy with mothers rather than fathers. As mentioned earlier, it is clear that mothers are more likely to listen to the opinions of their adolescents than are fathers. They also become the disciplinarians for these minor problems (Montemayor, 1986). This happens because fathers are just not present or when they are, they are not very good communicators with adolescents of all ages. They self-disclose less than do mothers, and even sons prefer to talk to mothers than fathers about what generally are traditional father–son topics of conversation (Noller & Callan, in press). As others have labelled it, the adolescent–father relationship is quite 'emotionally neutral' (Youniss & Smollar, 1985).

A number of different methods are used to determine the real level of conflict in families with adolescents. Some investigators have contacted adolescents by telephone two or three times during the week to ask about conflict-laden events that may have occurred the previous day (Montemayor, 1982; 1983). Adolescents report that arguments occur about twice a week, rating arguments as being moderately upsetting, and as lasting an average of 11 minutes. Others have observed families to learn about the nature of parent–adolescent conflict. Videotaped interactions (Inoff-Germain *et al.*, 1988) of families discussing problem situations reveal marked differences between male and female adolescents in their levels of aggressive behaviours. Among male adolescents who have greater adjustment problems, there is more inflexibility, defiance towards both parents and anger especially directed at mothers.

The more parents try to exercise control, the more adolescent sons direct their anger at parents.

Interestingly, this apparent modelling of parents' verbal aggression by adolescents to resolve conflict is cited in other fields as a risk factor in the etiology and maintenance of adolescent psychopathology (e.g. Kashini, Burbach & Rosenberg, 1988). For female adolescents in the same study, those with behavioural problems and more concern about their self-image were more likely to respond rather inflexibly. They did not concentrate on the family interaction and replied angrily to any efforts by their mothers to use controlling behaviours. This was not the case, however, when fathers used similar behaviours.

Recently, some theorists have argued that not all family fights and conflicts adversely affect the development of healthy adolescents. At the right level, disputes between parents and adolescents can even assist adolescent development. In particular, there is some evidence that arguments among family members assist adolescent identity development. Healthy debate and involved, but controlled, disagreements with parents encourage adolescents to explore their sense of separateness and identity (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986) and lead to healthy ego development (Hauser *et al.*, 1984). It is possible that normal levels of disagreement may actually challenge and assist adolescents in the development of healthy personal identities.

While a little bit of disagreement is normal, and almost expected to occur in families with adolescents, families obviously need help with conflict that is extreme enough to create an unbearable, stressful environment for members of the family. In particular, families where relations are angry, rejecting and violent are often those unable to appropriately manage new episodes of intrafamilial conflict.

Leaving home to get married

Traditionally, marriage has been the major reason for young people leaving home. Today, marriage is still the major factor for young adults in their twenties leaving home (Young, 1987), and although not the major reason, to cohabit or marry are still important factors for young people. However, the majority of 15–19-year-olds live with their parents rather than marry or cohabit. Only about 10 to 20 per cent of this age group choose to live independently of their parents, either alone, with a partner or with friends.

Leaving home is a major transition for the adolescent and their family. Leaving home to live with friends allows adolescents more opportunities to go out, to date, and to establish intimate, meaningful relationships with opposite-sexed partners. At the same time, many parents are upset by the decision of their adolescent to move out in order

to cohabit or to get married. Essentially, they are seen by parents as too young to make such major decisions about their lives. Because of the conflict that can be caused between adolescents and their parents about adolescents' personal relationships, it is important to consider what adolescents actually think about love, dating, cohabitation and marriage.

Dating and establishing close relationships with the opposite sex are challenges being confronted by adolescents, whether living at home or not. In terms of social exchange theory, it is clear that early in a dating relationship adolescents are exploring various behavioural options towards achieving a rewarding exchange. In particular, each person brings into the relationship various rewards and costs, and over time there is an exchange of behaviours between partners that can be both rewarding and costly (see Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

An important rule determining their dating relationships is equity (Walster, Walster & Berscheid, 1978) – the more a person contributes to the relationship, the more that person should get out of it. Models of partner selection like the one outlined in Figure 5.1 point to relationships continuing if there is a good match in the features that initially bring partners together (e.g. similarity in values, physical attractiveness, levels of self-disclosure). Especially critical is the similarity in the amount of importance each partner attributes to certain characteristics (e.g. religion, ethnic group, social class, level of education, sex-role beliefs). Relationships don't normally continue if a partner is very concerned about the other partner's religion, socioeconomic status or ethnicity. Peers also influence the progress of the relationship, especially if they like the adolescent's choice of partner (e.g. 'she's really cute!'; 'what a nice guy!'). Parents' opinions are important, mothers in particular having more influence on their adolescent's choice of partner than fathers (Jedlicka, 1984).

When dating relationships end, many adolescents choose to scale-down the romance rather than make a complete break (see Duck, 1982). Nevertheless, adolescents seem to be no better or worse than married couples in ending relationships. Like the end of many marriages, breaking-up can be uncontrolled, stressful and painful (Baxter, 1984; Duck & Miell, 1984). Often young people choose less emotionally-laden indirect strategies (e.g. avoidance, scaling-down) rather than directly telling their partner that it's over. Helping the breakup of many teenage romances is the opportunity to avoid the partner because of school holidays or doing different subjects when school resumes (see Hill, Rubin & Peplau, 1979; Huston *et al.*, 1981).

As shown in our earlier reviews of adolescents and personal relationships (Callan, 1985; Callan & Noller, 1987), even though the overwhelming majority of adolescents expect to marry, some are still somewhat cynical and suspicious of marriage. Adolescents still anticipate

Figure 5.1 Stages in selecting a partner

Barriers to Breakup

'The Best I Can Get' philosophy
Working together on relationship
Identities linked with relationship

Push from Deeper Attraction

Role compatability
Empathy

Deeper Attraction

Value compatability
Similar physical attractiveness
Similar personalities
Shared and salient categories
(race, social class)

Push from Early Attraction

Favourable reaction of others
Positive self-disclosure
Rapport

Early Attraction

Physical attraction
Valued behaviours
Similar interests

Marriage

Pre-marriage

Alternative Partner or Attraction

Barriers to Continuation

Important differences in race, social class etc.
Unfavourable reaction of parents

Deeper Attraction

Reducer from Early Attraction

Negative self-disclosure

Original Attraction

Barrier to Beginning

No Contact

Source: Adapted from Callan & Noller (1987)

being married someday, and judge marriage as life-long and important to their personal development and happiness (Carmichael, 1984; Krupinski, 1981; Poole, 1983). Young (1980) found that the majority of young men and women believed that being married was more important than achievement. However, marriage during adoles- cence or in one's early twenties is seen as risky, and early marriage is regarded by adolescents as a barrier to expressing their individuality and personal development.

More and more young couples are choosing to leave home and cohabit prior to marriage. Cohabitation is cited by couples in most societies as a preparation rather than permanent alternative to marriage. In many Western societies, like Great Britain, Australia and the United States, about 4 to 8 per cent of couples are living together, the level being some 3 to 4 times higher than the 1970s (Spanier, 1983). There are at least 5 types of cohabiting relationships (Macklin, 1983), varying from one extreme of a friendly temporary relationship based on needs for companionship, to cohabitation as a permanent alternative to marriage. In some countries, like Sweden and Denmark, cohabitation is no longer considered as a 'trial marriage', but rather a distinct alternative to marriage (van de Kaa, 1987). About 40 to 50 per cent of adolescents in many Northern and Western European countries may never marry, choosing singlehood or non-marital cohabitation. It is interesting to note, however, that despite the trend to cohabit prior to marriage, as several reviews reveal (see Freeman & Lyon, 1983; Macklin, 1983), there are very few differences in the problems and satisfactions of cohabiting and married couples. Cohabitation does not make it any more likely that the marriages will be happier and more successful.

Choosing a career

As several studies reveal (e.g. Evans & Poole, 1987; Prediger & Sawyer, 1986), both adolescents and their parents are very concerned about future job opportunities and the importance of adolescents making good choices about careers. Adolescents have to deal with a complex and important decision that is based on their abilities, interests and personalities. Unfortunately, many students are not prepared to make these career-related decisions. In addition, in many countries career guidance programmes in secondary schools do not exist.

There are several theories basic to career guidance that consider the development of career interests by adolescents (see Osipow, 1983 for more detail). Donald Super (1953, 1980) in a life-span developmental theory of career development proposes that the individual not only develops a self-concept, but also a vocational concept of the self. The

young person begins to favour some jobs or vocations ahead of others. Within Super's model of the development of a vocational self-concept, there are four stages: crystallisation (14–18 years), specification (18–21 years), implementation (21–24 years) and stabilisation (25–35 years of age). During the crystallisation phase, the adolescent makes decisions about their education and training that match their preferences. These decisions allow them to test the match between abilities and vocational preferences.

Other theories, like the one by Ginzberg and his colleagues (1951), also highlight adolescence as an important developmental stage in the establishment of career preferences. In this three-stage theory, the individual moves from a fantasy period (up to age 11), to a tentative period (11 to 18 years) during adolescence. From childhood, through adolescence to adulthood there is a change from a play to a work orientation in which more attention is given by the growing adolescent to whether their abilities and values suit particular careers.

A lot of attention is given to the factors that encourage adolescents, whether in a crystallisation stage or tentative period, to seek information and to explore certain careers. It is clear that parents, teachers and career counsellors play a major role. While many of these figures give advice and information, and act as role models, we have much to learn about their importance to adolescents as they make career choices.

As a number of writers point out, career exploration is a type of problem-solving behaviour which provides adolescents with information about themselves and the work environment they have to choose, then enter and adjust to. Grotevant and Cooper (1986), for example, argue that exploring a wide range of possible careers helps adolescents learn about occupations that are more congruent with their personalities. This argument combines features of various developmental theories noted earlier, focusing especially on the interaction between the individual and contextual factors. For instance, Holland (1973; 1985) argues that vocational outcomes are predicted from a person's knowledge about their personality type (e.g. realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, conventional) and the experiences, challenges and opportunities provided by various occupational encounters. He suggests that people search for environments that allow them to exercise their skills and abilities, to express their attitudes and values, and to take up appealing problems and challenges.

In a test of the developmental origins of congruence in adolescence, Grotevant and his associates (1986) examined whether adolescents who explore a wider range of career options made choices about careers that were actually more congruent with their interests and personalities. While results supported their prediction, other factors like the prestige of jobs, their complexity, and whether positions were

currently dominated by a particular sex were also relevant. Others, like Krau (1987), have found evidence from middle to late adolescence of a shift in value preferences related to jobs and careers. These changes in the adolescents' value hierarchy occur as they move away from the influence of their school environment, to being more under the influence of the work environment. These changing values are in turn a push towards further exploring the match between their personalities and values, and the type of career they wish to follow.

Two issues mentioned briefly so far – the gender composition of jobs and values – are also cited among the major factors determining the different career paths after leaving school of male and female adolescents (see Poole, 1984). There is still a widespread belief among adolescents, and employers as well, that because of their different personality orientations (instrumental versus expressive), one sex is better suited than the other for certain jobs and types of work. Many occupations are strongly sex-role stereotyped, while the lack of appropriate female role models in traditional male occupations helps to maintain the attitude that there are male and female occupations. In addition, there is a conventional wisdom, somewhat supported by research, that males and females have different value systems. For example, adolescent females feel that being able to 'make a contribution' or the 'challenge of a job' are more important to their career choices than the income or status of jobs (Barnett, 1975). Adolescent males, in contrast, prefer jobs associated with power, profit, money and prestige, compared with adolescent females' interests in positions that are person-oriented.

Such sex-typed attitudes about careers are difficult to change. Generally, career intervention programmes with high school females show negligible effects, even when interventions involve the use of women in nontraditional careers as role models (see Wilson, 1981; Brooks & Holahan, 1985). Adolescent males and females have very fixed ideas about the occupations which are most appropriate for them to follow after leaving school.

The role of parents in helping adolescents choose a career cannot be underestimated. The behaviour and performance of adolescents at school is related to the quality of the parent–adolescent relationship (see Forehand *et al.*, 1986). Career choice is also an extension of the direct and indirect influence parents have over their adolescents. There is considerable evidence that adolescents prefer occupations related to the occupational status of their father's job (Connell *et al.*, 1983; Poole & Cooney, 1985). Adolescents from higher socioeconomic status groups are more likely to see themselves in upper income occupations. Overall, adolescents often have unrealistic expectations, in that regardless of their parents' occupations or their own abilities, they aspire to professional more than other careers (see Poole, 1983).

In an interesting study of British adolescents and their families, Breakwell and her colleagues (1988) examined various direct and indirect forms of parental influence on adolescents' motivation to train for careers in the areas of the new technology. The majority of school-aged adolescents believed that parents made some overt attempts to influence their choice of jobs. However, many (about 40 per cent) felt that parents had not significantly tried to influence them. Adolescents' wish to train for technological positions, however, was in part associated with the degree to which their own parents had some contact, especially through their own jobs, with the current technology. These parents may transfer to adolescents a value for technology or through the presence of computers and other forms of new technology in the home, may indirectly encourage more favourable attitudes towards technological occupations.

Various professionals in the area of career guidance point to pressures exerted on adolescents, especially by parents who have minimal secondary school education. It is clear that some parents truly struggle in their attempts to understand a world of careers and educational opportunities that is very foreign to them. Often from their own childhood they still harbour some distaste of the value of education. As a result, students can resist considering careers that are outside the experience of parents, especially careers that involve some innovation or change. The worst scenario is that adolescents make career choices that suggest randomness, peer pressure and a tendency to choose subjects at the tertiary level that are less demanding.

Being unemployed

One of the major reasons for adolescents leaving home is to get a job. Having a job represents psychologically and economically a further step towards autonomy and independence. Often to take up a job, the adolescent may have to leave home, and move away from the supports of close friends and family.

From the mid-1970s, economic recessions and high rates of unemployment unfortunately have meant that many adolescents never gain full-time employment or else there are long periods of unemployment between jobs. From large-scale surveys (e.g. Ochiltree & Amato, 1985) we know that up to 61 per cent of adolescents fear being unemployed after they leave school. It is clear that adolescents, like adults, have self-concepts that are influenced by the levels of success they experience in their day-to-day lives. Self-concepts and levels of self-esteem are affected by how people react towards them, and by how much success they have in what they do. Having a job is a major

criterion used in our society to differentiate between those who are a success or a failure, and who are accepted or not in society. Importantly, adolescents also believe this to be the case (see Watson, 1985).

Being unemployed has a significant negative effect on the self-esteem of young people (see reviews by Feather, 1985; Furnham, 1985; O'Brien, 1986). Unemployed youth are more depressed than other youth, they have poor self-reported health and less personal control over their lives. Long-term unemployed youth, compared with teenagers whose unemployment is more short-term, report heavier smoking, reduced involvement in sport, and to some extent, more use of illegal drugs. Males in particular show evidence of losing social contact, while females respond to lengthy unemployment with a greater use of alcohol and more need for medical help.

Most probably because of the experiences related to unemployment, adolescents develop lower levels of self-esteem, and feel less in control of the direction of their lives. Often associated with long periods of unemployment is the rejection associated with failed job applications, and the criticisms of parents, friends and the mass media. While employed friends live rather independent lives, unemployed adolescents are financially limited in what they can do and spend by the level of their unemployment benefits. Unemployment may prevent adolescents from developing a sense of competence and belief in themselves. Long periods of unemployment lead to conflict with parents who, frustrated by their adolescent's lack of success, further challenge their child's competence. Alternatively, the relationship between low self-esteem and youth unemployment can be discussed from another direction: adolescents low in self-esteem and high in depression probably do not present very well in their job applications and interviews. Having generally low expectations about their own abilities and chances of success, they compare unfavourably with adolescents who are happier about themselves and more in control of the direction of their lives.

Some evidence for the former explanation – that unemployment causes lower self-esteem and more external locus of control – is provided in research by the first author. In a longitudinal study (Patton & Noller, 1984), adolescents who left high school, but stayed un-employed, were compared with those who either returned to school the next year or who left school and were successfully employed. Being unemployed altered the way adolescents perceived themselves. When all at school, the three groups of adolescents did not differ in their levels of self-esteem, depression or locus of control. On a second testing in the following year, compared with other youth, the unemployed group had lower levels of self-esteem, higher depression and they believed that they were less in control of their lives. Other longitudinal research (Feather & O'Brien, 1986) supports these findings for the period after

adolescents had left school. Unemployed school leavers were more stressed and depressed than those who got jobs. They also saw themselves as less competent, active and pleasant. However, Feather and O'Brien also found these differences prior to the adolescents leaving school.

There are at least two major explanations for the relationship between unemployment and psychological problems. The phase or stage explanation suggests that the unemployed, over time, experience a number of reactions. Initially there is shock at losing the job; then pessimism and anxiety as their efforts to find another position fail; and finally there is an attitude of fatalism as the individual adjusts to being unemployed for the long-term (see Fryer & Payne, 1986). Despite little empirical support, this stage view is still widely held by professionals and members of the community because of its common-sense appeal.

An alternative explanation, with more empirical support, is the deprivation approach. In this approach, the negative effects of unemployment are due to the loss of the functions of employment. A job provides income, but also many latent consequences (see Jahoda, 1981) that include some routine and structure in an adolescent's day, contacts and experiences with people outside of their families, exposure to goals and purposes, a definition of their status and worth, and the benefits of being active. According to Jahoda (1981), for instance, unemployed adolescents suffer both because they are not as free as their peers to plan their lives, but more importantly, because there is an absence of interpersonal contacts, routine, activity and role definition that harms the adolescent's psychological well-being.

Studies into the impact of unemployment have to consider a large number of conceptual and methodological issues. There are a large number of variables at work that could affect the well-being of young people who experience either short- or long-term unemployment after they leave school. Among these factors are the emotional reactions of adolescents, their levels of self-esteem and depression prior to unemployment, their job expectations, the need to be employed, and the attributions they make about their periods of unemployment. These factors need to be measured both prior to, during and after unemployment with samples of adolescents representative of a wide range of socioeconomic groups and cultural backgrounds.

Adolescents are not a homogeneous group, and it is likely that sub-groups of school leavers will respond differently to unemployment because of a wide range of individual, situational and cultural factors, and whether unemployment is short- or long-term. At the same time it is unlikely that the employed are a homogeneous group of adolescents. They may differ in their levels of self-esteem and depression due to factors independent of the work environment. In addition, not all jobs

are fulfilling or enhance one's psychological well-being. Thus we need to consider differences even among employed school leavers due to the nature of their jobs, levels of pay, opportunities to develop new skills, work conditions and levels of job satisfaction.

Part-time work

Unable to find full-time employment, many adolescents gain some form of part-time position which supplements the dole, the tertiary allowance for students or financial support from parents. While still at high school or college, they work at pizza restaurants, McDonalds or large shopping centres on weekends or evenings. Some two-thirds of 17–18-year-old adolescents in the USA work part-time in such jobs, while in other countries (e.g. Australia, Great Britain, Canada) about 20–40 percent of 16–18-year-olds get part-time wages. Proponents of part-time employment point to the opportunities for adolescents to gain further independence through having their own money, learning about work roles, improving interpersonal and vocational skills and developing more mature attitudes about work (see Hamilton & Crouter, 1980; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986).

For instance, Schill and his associates (1985) found that high school students who did part-time work had higher grades, were from higher socioeconomic groups, and had a parent in a professional job. However, as in many such studies, the direction of these effects is unclear. For example, does part-time employment encourage students to learn skills that help them gain better grades? Or do employers use adolescents' academic performance as a screening device in deciding whom they should employ?

Critics of part-time employment for adolescents still at school cite many examples of the exploitation by employers of adolescents. There is the meaninglessness of the tasks given to them, with the majority of jobs not providing opportunities for developing vocational skills. There is little input by employers into the formal training of adolescent workers, and little recognition is given of the skills, academic ability or social maturity of the young worker (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1981; Greenberger, Steinberg & Ruggiero, 1982). There are even undesirable outcomes such as work stress, cynicism about work and the abuse of drugs in the form of cigarettes, alcohol and marihuana. In short, while part-time work provides many benefits, general life experiences outside of part-time employment may be perceived as providing similar or even better opportunities.

Critics of the movement towards greater part-time employment for adolescents also argue that adolescents who do not work have more

opportunities to interact with their families and peers, developing important social skills. At the same time, they have fewer experiences that could damage their health and well-being.

What really seems to be critical is the type of learning context employers are willing to provide for adolescent workers. Dead-end jobs and tasks that do not challenge adolescents or encourage them to develop more mature work-related attitudes are unfortunately more the norm than the exception. Rather, governments and employers need to consider the long-term benefits of providing part-time work that at least encourages adolescents to use their talents and abilities, and which may involve some career training. We don't know nearly enough about the most suitable match between the needs of adolescents still at school, and the type of part-time jobs that will encourage better personal and job-related skills.

Homeless youth

Family problems are among the major reasons for homelessness among adolescents. In several surveys (Wilson & Arnold, 1986; Hancock & Burke, 1983), large proportions of young people cite family problems and family breakdown as one of the factors behind leaving home. Often the basis of conflict between older adolescents and parents is the frustration they and their parents feel about adolescents being unemployed for long periods. Homelessness is also associated with being in lower socioeconomic status families, drug and alcohol abuse, feelings of isolation, low self-esteem and criminal activity (Burke, Hancock & Newton, 1984; Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare, 1982).

There is a lot of debate about who these runaways are. There is some evidence that these adolescents are insecure, unhappy, impulsive and unable to confront the normal difficulties in growing-up (Brennan, Huiziner & Elliott, 1978). At the same time, runaway behaviour is often unplanned but necessary in order to avoid violent or very stressful family environments (Young, 1987). Compared with adolescents living at home, for instance, homeless youth perceive their parents as being more controlling, punitive and less supportive (Turley, 1988).

There are two terms most often applied to runaways living away from home in search of somewhere to live – homeless youth and streetkids. While the terms are often used interchangeably, especially by the media, important differences do exist. Both groups are similar in living itinerant lives, and seeking temporary or emergency accommodation. Both groups are usually influenced in decisions to run away by family problems and conflict, and financial difficulties associated with living in the city. They face similar problems due to poor education and limited

survival skills. Also a minority in both groups continue to attend school without any contact with their families.

Among the differences between the two groups are their ages. Homeless youth tend to be aged 16–25 years, but streetkids are more likely adolescents between 13 and 18 years of age. Streetkids do have a home that they can go back to, and often they return home to leave again at another time. Homeless youth are a larger group who always need somewhere to live. As a result the latter need emergency shelter for as long as possible. Streetkids, however, usually return home after a brief stay in shelters or refuges.

There is obviously a great need for welfare workers, parents, educators and politicians to get together about this issue of homelessness. There need to be large community efforts to help these young people with a wider variety of accommodation (e.g. refuges, hostels, board with volunteer families), training to help their chances of getting jobs, counselling support towards dealing with alcohol and drug abuse, and towards developing improved coping skills. In many countries (e.g. Australia, United Kingdom) government-supported inquiries have pointed to the needs of these homeless adolescents, and many services are being provided for them. Unfortunately, the risk with such minorities is that in times of economic hardship for all, it is these fringe groups that are the first to suffer when governments cut back funding support.

Conclusion

Only a minority of young people leave home while still teenagers. We have little real understanding of the life of those young adolescents who live independently of their parents, whether by choice or as a result of family conflict or violence. Strivings for independence and autonomy are seen as major needs for all adolescents, but the expression of these needs is almost always discussed in terms of a stable parent–adolescent relationship with adolescents still being at home. What about adolescents who leave school early, and seek outside employment or marry, and others who leave because of unbearable levels of tension and conflict at home?

The unemployed and the homeless obviously face many challenges. Often without the support of their families they don't fare too well. They suffer isolation, low self-esteem, depression and are more at risk of alcohol and drug-related problems. On the other hand, adolescents who leave home with the support of parents do considerably better. Not only can they fall back on their parents, but the maintenance of close relationships assists their ability to cope.

The problem of homelessness focuses the need to help adolescents and parents more in dealing appropriately with the tension and conflict that occurs in families. As research into divorce reveals (see Chapter 6), adolescents seem to have a tremendous capacity to cope, if they have the support of at least one parent, siblings or peers. Homeless youth and streetkids, however, are not under the same roof as any parent. Relationships with parents are not good, and when they do return home, they tend to leave again at another time. Evidence of family support and involvement producing higher levels of competence, better coping skills and independence should alert us to the need to help families deal more successfully with conflict, either between parents or with their adolescents. The result of such efforts should be less isolated youth, fewer teenagers living in poverty, and more adolescents making a successful transition to adulthood.

Chapter six

Separation, divorce and re-marriage

Many changes have occurred in how people perceive the family, marriage, divorce and remarriage. Getting a divorce is now seen as a reasonable alternative to continuing an unhappy marriage. Despite the increase in divorce, however, we know relatively little about how a breakup affects adolescents. How do children and adolescents cope with the end of the family as they know it, and the separation and divorce? Do they believe that their parents don't love them or care about them any more? And do they adjust to having new fathers or mothers if their parents ultimately remarry?

Once few marriages ended in divorce as couples believed that, despite their differences, they should stay together for the sake of their children. It was felt that young children in particular were harmed for ever if the family broke-up. Divorcees were seen as immoral, sexually promiscuous and a threat to happy families. Divorce laws made getting a divorce expensive, lengthy and highly public. As a result of these and other factors, divorces were quite infrequent.

From the 1970s, general reforms in the divorce laws allowed couples to end unhappy marriages more easily than before. 'No-fault' or 'mutual-consent' divorce was adopted in many contexts. For countries like Great Britain, Europe, the United States and Australia, between 30 and 45 per cent of couples married from the 1960s to the present are likely to divorce. In larger countries like the United States, over one million children a year experience the divorce or separation of their parents. In smaller countries like Australia, about 50,000 children annually are involved in the separation or divorce of their parents. These figures in themselves highlight the significance of high divorce rates to most communities. The sense of urgency associated with researching the impact of divorce on children has been linked both to the rising rates of divorce, and to our lack of understanding about the psychological consequences to children of the separation and remarriage of their parents.

Rates of divorce in the 1980s are quite high across most modern urbanised societies. The Swedes and Danes are most likely to divorce (45 per cent); in England, Wales and the United States, rates are about 40 per cent; and in Australia about 35 per cent of couples split up (McDonald, 1980; van de Kaa, 1987). Couples now put forward their case for divorce on the basis of irretrievable breakdown, generally shown by at least a 12-month separation. For most couples the process through family law courts or similar bodies is less legalised and briefer. Decisions are more strongly guided by the welfare of children, and the need for negotiation between the parents. The judge, however, is often still a central figure, especially in disputes about property, custody and maintenance. Nevertheless, in many countries the system of counselling and negotiation is still far from ideal, especially in terms of the women's share of property and the requirements upon husbands to meet maintenance arrangements (see Scutt & Graham, 1984).

Adolescents and divorce

Divorces can be economically disastrous for families. The changes in income are most marked for wives. More women than men report significantly lower incomes after divorce (Albrecht, 1980). Related to lower standards of living is the strong likelihood that they have custody for dependent children and economic responsibility for raising them. The economic demands on women are often more considerable than they should be, because many ex-husbands fail to provide the level of maintenance agreed upon in the courts. It is clear that divorce also has large emotional costs. There are changes to the lives of both partners, and the stress caused by the separation and divorce can present itself later in symptoms of psychological disturbance, alcoholism and even suicide (e.g. Bloom, Asher & White, 1978; Yoder & Nichols, 1980).

Adolescents are not oblivious to the problems of their parents. Many separations occur after years of the parents and adolescents coping with problems that have stressed each of them physically and emotionally. Adolescents see fights, verbal and physical abuse, and maybe the excessive drinking of parents. They live in homes where parents have over several years been leading emotionally and physically quite separate lives. Quite often they are so caught up in the drama of accusation and blame that they are forced to take sides. 'Can I be on both sides at once?' The frequent answer is 'no'.

For most adolescents, their parents' divorce results in one parent becoming primarily responsible for their health and welfare. The other parent, most often the father, is seen only every few weeks, monthly or not at all. If the custodial parent remarries, adolescents find themselves being raised by adults who are not their biological parents. They may

gain new brothers and sisters who are complete strangers to them. In addition, divorce can alter the status of children, especially young adolescents. They are expected to assume the responsibility of household roles and the care of young children. Patterns of interaction with the custodial parent change (Montemayor, 1984b), and some parents seem to expect more maturity (Weiss, 1979). There is some evidence, at least from family interactions (e.g. Anderson, Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1986), that after the divorce adolescents demonstrate relationships with the sole parent more characterised by sharing and the acceptance of additional responsibilities.

Divorce as an additional challenge

It is clear that for most adolescents the adolescent–parent relationship is not dominated by major disputes with parents about their behaviour or needs (see Petersen, 1988). Earlier we have described what many theorists have proposed, and some researchers have investigated, as the major challenges of adolescence, and the reasons why some teenagers are less successful in coping than others (see Chapter 1). Young people can be stressed by the divorce of parents, and these stresses occur on top of existing problems at school, with friends or in their acceptance of themselves. The separation may also take away from adolescents the parent they love the most. Alternatively, the separation can reduce tension in the family, and bring the adolescent into a relationship with one parent that is more supportive and loving than in the past. That is, separation and divorce have many different outcomes which may aid or hinder the adolescents' success in dealing with the developmental tasks that they will naturally experience. There is no single scenario, and there is obviously considerable variability in how adolescents respond to divorce. There are both short- and more long-term effects, gender and age differences, while pre-existing factors (e.g. existing psycho-pathology in a divorcing parent) do seem to influence the post-divorce adjustment of children.

The effects of the divorce of parents also reveal themselves in other interesting ways. A fairly consistent finding is that adolescents after the divorce of parents are more concerned about the success of their future marriages (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). 'What makes a good marriage, and is marriage for me?' may be among the questions they ask themselves. Compared with adolescents whose parents do not separate, they have more negative opinions about the value of marriage (Booth, Brinkerhoff & White, 1984; Long, 1987). In addition, there is some evidence that adolescents of divorced parents, especially female adolescents, have less satisfactory relationships with the opposite sex (Hetherington, 1972; Long, 1987).

There are several explanations for these findings. One reason is that adolescents who are in unhappy marriages are more suspicious of personal relationships, and about marriage in particular. Their concerns are possibly justified in that adolescents from divorced marriages are more at risk of a first marriage ending in separation or divorce compared with adolescents of never-divorced parents (Mueller & Pope, 1977). At the same time, young people are generally more suspicious of marriage than ever before.

Adolescents' adjustment to divorce

Each adolescent can be expected to react differently to the divorce of their parents. Adjustment to a parent's separation may depend upon the adolescent's personality, their coping capacities, levels of socio-emotional maturity, and the nature of the post-divorce relationship between parents. It is also fairly clear that adolescents respond some-what differently than younger children to the separation of parents. For instance, in the 'Children and Divorce' project (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1978; 1980), preschool children ($3^1/_2$ to 6 years) were confused about what had happened. They were afraid of being abandoned by parents, while many hoped that their parents would eventually get together again. They would think, for example, that dad will come back, and everything will be normal again. Younger children also show higher levels of self-blame, believing that they caused mum or dad to leave the family. In contrast, this egocentric type of thinking is less typical of older children. In the same study, 13- to 18-years-olds reported being angry, ashamed and embarrassed about the breakup of their families. At the same time, many had decided about who was responsible for the divorce, and it was not them, but one or both of their parents who were to blame. Many avoided getting into conflicts of loyalty, and looked to peers and teachers for support during the separation.

Compared with younger children, Wallerstein and Kelly found that adolescents' attitudes about the breakup of the family are more realistic and objective (see also Reinhard, 1977). Indeed, their objectivity prob-ably assists their adjustment to the divorce. At the same time, as with older children, adolescents face several other challenges associated with the separation. The maturity of older children makes them more aware of their own emotions and those of their parents. They can feel pressured to get involved, and are more directly exposed to the turmoil being experienced by parents. For instance, in a follow-up of her sample, Wallerstein (1985) found that even 10 years after the separation, child-ren who were now young adults (19–20 years of age) were still burdened by memories of their parents' divorce. In addition, they were apprehen-sive about repeating their parents' unhappiness in their own marriages.

Important to an adolescent's level of adjustment are their perceptions of the amount of conflict between parents after the separation. Adolescents who judge the family to be happier and less conflictual since the separation tend to be more psychologically well-adjusted than adolescents who believe that the family situation is worse or where levels of conflict are still quite high (Dunlop & Burns, 1988).

All age groups, from 2-year-olds to 18-year-olds, show substantial negative effects from the divorce. As several writers point out, these negative outcomes for all age groups are really more significant than the subtle effects at different ages (see Clingempeel & Reppucci, 1982; Emery, 1982). As five year follow-ups of children reveal, no age group stands out as having significantly more problems in adjusting to the breakup of their parents' marriage than other age groups (Hetherington, 1979; Hodges & Bloom 1984). There are different responses to separation and divorce, in that younger children show more acting-out behaviours. Adolescents are more likely to report being depressed. With all ages, however, these reactions are short-term, and seem to decline within a year. Whether preschoolers or adolescents, children feel sad, unhappy and upset by the unhappy marriages and subsequent divorce of their parents. Even young adults (Burns, 1980; Farber, Primavera & Felner, 1984) are upset and disturbed about the divorce of their parents.

Table 6.1   Adolescents' feelings about the separation, and mothers' perceptions of their feelings

	Time since the separation			
	2 years or less	*3–5*	*6 or more*	*Total*
Adolescents' feelings				
negative	69	69	23	43
neutral	31	25	10	18
positive	23	12	3	9
don't know	8	6	72	44
Mothers' perceptions of adolescents' feelings				
negative	54	75	32	41
neutral	15	50	72	56
positive	46	19	3	15
don't know	8	0	5	4

Source: Adapted from Amato (1987a)

It seems that mothers at least are fairly good judges of the impact of the breakup upon their adolescents. As Table 6.1 indicates, in Amato's study mothers were fairly accurate in perceiving how their adolescents felt when the father left the family. When it was six or more years since his departure, mothers tended to believe that their adolescents had adopted quite a neutral attitude, but adolescents themselves were more likely to respond that they did not know how they now felt about the breakup.

Few adolescents believe that their parents offer them a good explanation of the reasons for the breakup of the marriage (see Johnstone & Campbell, 1988). Adolescents often talk about being angry at being 'kept in the dark' about the possibility that parents might separate (Dunlop & Burns, 1988). When it finally happens they are surprised, hurt and embarrassed about not being told about what was happening. Indeed, adolescents claim that, rather than being protected by their parents, they would have liked them to have confided in their children. On the other hand, parents may not confide in their older children because they don't feel they can do it very well, or because they feel that they will only upset them. They may not want adolescents to get caught up in the fights between parents. However, parents who do talk to older children about the tensions in the marriage believe that such opportunities do allow them to reassure adolescents that they do still care deeply about them (Johnstone & Campbell, 1988).

Many writers argue that many of the long-term emotional and behavioural problems among children and adolescents are a result of continued high levels of conflict between parents after the divorce. Children and adolescents involved in a divorce which is high in conflict do have more behavioural problems than children who experience the death of a parent (Dunlop & Burns, 1988; Emery, 1982). Also these children have more problems than those of parents who have less conflict-laden divorces. However, it is clear that many of these effects need to be investigated with larger samples of adolescents of different ages and both sexes.

Small samples sizes hinder any interpretations about the relationship between the age and sex of children, and their adjustment to divorce. More sex than age differences do emerge when we consider levels of adjustment. Boys do seem to be more vulnerable to post-divorce problems than are girls (see Block, Block & Gjerde, 1986; Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1978). Boys from divorced homes present as more dependent, less masculine in their preferences, they have more school-related problems, and higher levels of impulsiveness and aggression. The strength of these sex differences varies from clinical to more representative samples, being weaker in the latter type of study (see

Emery, 1982). In addition, there is some evidence that although females seem to adjust better in the short-term to the divorce than boys, they may suffer more long-term problems. Hetherington (1972) points to the more troubled relationships adolescent females from broken homes have with the opposite sex, while others note their higher chances of emotional problems (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1978). Adolescent females also seek more counselling about their parents' divorce than do males (Farber *et al.*, 1984). However, in the general population females are more likely to seek counselling, and are more willing to admit that they need professional advice. It is quite likely that males are just more reluctant to seek counselling about a parent's divorce or any other personal problem.

There are many methodological problems in studies dealing with the impact of divorce on the adjustment of children and adolescents. There is biased sampling, in that most children are from clinic populations. In addition, many measures lack reliability and validity (see Emery, 1982). There is little use of control groups of non-divorced children, who are matched by age, sex, socioeconomic status and cultural background with children who are experiencing a divorce. Most studies have very small samples, being not even large enough to consider age or sex differences. Indeed, it may be the case that many methodological issues like these have resulted in researchers over-estimating the negative effects of divorce on children and adolescents. When researchers have used non-clinic samples (e.g. Dunlop & Burns, 1988), they have not found differences in the adjustment of adolescents from intact and separated families. However, even such samples obtained outside of clinics are far from representative of the general population of divorced children. They do not represent the wide range of ages, social classes and ethnic differences that exist among children.

There are few longitudinal studies with large samples that have considered the influence of the age and sex of the child on post-divorce outcome. Even larger retrospective clinical studies have not considered the impact of age of the child on post-divorce adjustment. Significantly, retrospective data, besides being prone to memories biased against discussing painful events, do not allow researchers to link a cause with an outcome. There is a real need for more research into the long-term adjustment of adolescents to the separation and divorce of parents, and the factors that assist adolescents in adjusting better to the breakdown of their families.

Visits by the non-custodial parent

The extent which fathers visit children after the divorce depends upon the father's attitudes towards the divorce, the age of the children and the

children's attitudes to his visits. Children of all ages are generally dissatisfied about the arrangement made through the courts concerning their fathers' visits. Typically, fathers are allowed frequent short visits, which usually involve every second weekend. The courts seem unwilling to increase fathers' levels of contact, despite evidence from longitudinal studies that frequent contact between the non-custodial parent (typically the father) and children improves the post-divorce adjustment of children of all ages (Hetherington, *et al.*, 1978; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976). Pre-adolescent boys, in particular, seem to gain from frequent contact with their fathers after the divorce. The positive effects of fathers' visits do not apply, however, in cases where the level of post-divorce conflict between parents is still quite high.

Young children generally want to see their fathers, and they seem to have higher levels of adjustment if they have frequent contact with them after the divorce. However, fathers' visits are perceived quite differently by adolescents. Many fathers also see these visits as being more of a problem. As might be expected, visits sometimes conflict with other activities adolescents have organised with their friends. In addition, the nature of visits can be somewhat challenging. As fathers may only see their teenagers on occasional weekends or over school vacations, the contact is often intense, involving many activities in a fairly short period of time. The high level of personal contact, especially over a weekend or single day, can be quite an interpersonal challenge to both the parent and the adolescent. For example, adolescent females report feeling uneasy visiting their fathers because of expectations about closeness and intimacy arising from the short time they have with them. They would not be expected to be so affectionate if dad still lived at home with them (Springer & Wallerstein, 1983). Under normal circumstances, having a full day alone with their fathers would be a rather exceptional occasion.

A frequent solution to weekends of intense personal contact between adolescents and the non-custodial parent is the longer visit over the school holidays. Arrangements may be such that adolescents take friends with them. Also, as a parent may be working during the day, the level of contact is not as intense.

While such solutions are tried by parents, little is known about the best arrangements for adolescents of different ages, personalities and needs. There is very likely a complex interaction between the adolescent's age, personality and self-image, and their coping mechanisms and psychosocial needs that determine the best post-divorce arrangement. Joint custody, in which both parents have equal authority for the children's care and welfare, is one option (see Clingempeel & Reppucci, 1982; Schwartz, 1987). However, while supporters point to its benefits in maintaining the children's relationships with both parents, critics

argue that joint custody adds to the likelihood of adolescents having conflicts of loyalty.

Relationships with siblings

It is important to mention the supportive role that siblings play in helping each other cope with the divorce. Rarely are siblings separated from one another, and if any relationship stays fairly stable, it is the relationship between the children of the divorced parents. The supportive role played by brothers and sisters during the breakup is emerging in some longitudinal studies (e.g. Wallerstein, 1985). The shared experience of the divorce creates an enduring relationship between siblings that can survive throughout adolescence and into young adulthood. Often adolescents believe that it is a brother or sister that has helped them the most in coping with the breakup of the family, especially when parents themselves are not coping well with the loss of a partner.

The post-divorce relationship with the custodial parent

In about 9 out of 10 cases, mothers are the custodial parent. Reports now emerging from longitudinal studies reveal that the mother–daughter relationship often stays warm, loving and egalitarian after the divorce. The mother–son relationship, however, is sometimes quite troublesome. Some researchers even suggest that, in many cases, fathers should be given custody over adolescent sons, and mothers custody over daughters. Alternatively, if possible, joint custody should be allowed in order to introduce some of the authority and control that sons seem to expect from fathers. Such arrangements, of course, separate siblings from each other, an outcome not favourably regarded by the courts or the community. However, often such arrangements do emerge after a divorce in a rather informal way, especially with older children. It is not always the case that adolescents want to live with the same-sex parent, so that for a variety of personal reasons, they choose to be mostly with the other parent.

Some reviews describe the family atmosphere after a divorce as 'chaotic' (e.g. Montemayor, 1984b). Divorced mothers and their adolescents have less time together, in a household that is more disorganised than prior to the separation. There are take-away rather than home-cooked meals as mothers work outside the home and adjust to additional role demands. Rather than chaos, others point to a general level of disorganisation. There are role changes of the parent and adolescents, problems in doing routine tasks (preparing meals, eating together, being taken to school on time), and difficulties in meeting outside schedules. The immediate period after the divorce is obviously a difficult time for

adolescents and parents. Yet this situation, while less satisfactory in some aspects, is still preferred to the tense situation between parents or parents and adolescents before the divorce. In some studies (e.g. Dunlop & Burns, 1988), up to 89 per cent of adolescents believe that their parents' decision to split was the correct one.

After the divorce, some parents complain about poor relationships with their adolescents. There are poor levels of communication, less time with them, and problems often about discipline. Mothers report being nagged by adolescents, especially their sons. In some studies, mothers in divorced families are described by adolescent sons as competitive, and not having any influence over them (Block *et al.*, 1986). In contrast, adolescent girls describe mothers as warm, protective, egalitarian and nonevaluative.

At the heart of some of these problems is that mothers are not supported by the noncustodial parent. Mothers and their adolescents have to adjust to a lower standard of living, and, in many cases without maintenance, a standard below the poverty line. Living independent single lives, a majority of noncustodial fathers do not have regular contact with their children (Weir, Silvesto & Bennington, 1984). When partners do meet, they discuss issues about their children that tend not to be loaded with conflict, like birthdays, vacations and holiday arrangements and the achievements of the children (Goldsmith, 1980). They avoid issues like school fees, medical or dental bills or the behavioural problems of a particular child. Fathers believe that they visit more often, but mothers report many fewer visits by fathers. Again, this can be another source of conflict between parents.

After the divorce, many parents begin a series of negotiations with adolescents about suitable arrangements for the efficient running of the household. With the separation and the divorce, Weiss (1979) suggests that adolescents actually benefit in assuming more responsibility, and being free of the tension associated with fights between parents. In time, many develop a more egalitarian relationship with the custodial parent.

Investigations into the allocation of roles in various households reveal that adolescents shoulder some of the physical burden of housework and the care of young children. There are different expectations, however, in mother-headed and father-headed families. In lone-father families, adolescents are more likely to take responsibility for housework, shopping and general tasks (English & King, 1983).

It is often asserted, more on the basis of anecdotal than empirical evidence, that adolescents become more mature as a result of their parents' separation and divorce. To keep some normal level of functioning in the family, parents push for changes in the parent–adolescent relationship that give adolescents more authority and control. Changes like these in the parent–adolescent relationship normally occur with

puberty (Steinberg, 1981; 1986; see also Chapter 1). In other research (e.g. Dunlop & Burns, 1988), however, teenagers of divorced and intact families are found to be basically similar on various measures of maturity. Rather, the age of adolescents is a better predictor of maturity than whether the family has one or both parents living at home. At the same time, as Dunlop and Burns show in various case studies, some adolescents believe that their parents' divorce caused them to grow up more quickly, and to accept more independence and responsibility for their own welfare (see also Reinhard, 1977; McLoughlin & Whitfield, 1985). This issue of an increased level of maturity among adolescents needs to be further explored. A major task is the need for better measures of the concept of maturity. It is also important to recognise differences within divorced families themselves that may cause adolescents to be more mature or even to play down their maturity in order to get some sympathetic response from their parents.

In many communities there is a lot of concern about the effects of the absence of fathers on families. Fathers are believed to provide role models for adolescents of both sexes, especially for sons. In two-parent families Lueptow (1980), for instance, argues that fathers are more important than mothers as models of sex appropriate behaviour, for both sons and daughters. Also fathers are perceived by parents to be a major source of authority and control over teenage boys, as well as being supporters of a mother's actions towards rebellious adolescents. When fathers are absent, divorced women report a greater use of restrictive and more power-oriented strategies (Santrock, 1975; Hetherington, 1981).

Many divorced mothers and their sons do seem to have rather unsatisfactory relationships with each other. The absence of fathers increases levels of deviance and acting-out behaviours of some adolescent boys (Dornbusch *et al.*, 1985). In contrast, mother–daughter relationships are more similar in single-parent and two-parent families (Fox & Inazu, 1982).

It is wrong, however, to claim that the noncustodial parent, outside of much of the chaos of this post-divorce phase of family life, maintains a steady happy relationship with the children. In a five year follow-up, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found that father–daughter relationships were fairly stable over time. Warm and close relationships continued, while poor relationships remained poor. Father–son relationships, however, were twice as likely to change. Good relationships improved, but poorer relationships deteriorated.

There were also some interesting age effects. There was more deterioration in the father–adolescent relationship among boys and girls who were 9 to 12 years of age at the time of the divorce. During the five years after the separation, fathers had many problems in relating to adolescents. Fathers complained that adolescents needed to be almost

continuously entertained. While demanding their time, they set about challenging the status of the father as parent and disciplinarian. Fathers and adolescents had differing opinions about the role of the non-custodial parent. The result was that fathers were often frustrated and angry about their lack of authority. Afraid of being rejected, they would not challenge attitudes or behaviours that they found unacceptable when their adolescents were staying with them. In addition, mothers who were upset about fathers' visiting rights, or who held grudges about various post-divorce arrangements, were more likely to complain in front of adolescents than younger children.

Living in a blended family

Especially among the younger divorced, the chances of getting married again are quite high. The young, the less educated and the childless are most likely to re-marry (Spanier & Glick, 1980). For most divorced partners, however, re-marriage is not immediate. In the 1960s, about 70 to 80 per cent of divorced adults in their twenties and thirties re-married within six years of the divorce. In the mid 1980s, on the other hand, only about 20 per cent did so. More suspicious of marriage, the divorced either live single lives or cohabit with one or several partners. As various longitudinal studies of the divorced reveal (e.g. Spanier & Furstenberg, 1982), time heals the emotional scars left by a divorce. Time, rather than a second marriage, is also the better predictor of higher psychological adjustment among the divorced.

For the divorced parent and their adolescents, another marriage means the establishment of several new relationships. Most often it is the divorced mother who takes her adolescents into this new family. There are four times the number of children living with a stepfather than a stepmother (see Bachrach, 1983). Children and younger adolescents are more likely to become part of another family in which there is a new father, and possibly stepbrothers and stepsisters. If the stepfather also had a previous marriage, they must accept sharing him, their mother and the household with his children during weekends or holidays. In short, a wide range of complex family structures can emerge with re-marriages, depending upon the number of previous marriages for each partner, the presence of children from these marriages, and the ages and location of children. In the majority of households where partners have re-married, at least one spouse has children from a previous marriage (Cherlin & McCarthy, 1985). According to some estimates, about one in every six children under 18 years of age is a stepchild (Mills, 1984).

There is considerable diversity and complexity in blended or reconstituted family arrangements. An individual may be a parent to their own children from another marriage, a step-parent to their

partner's children, as well as the biological parent of children born to the new marriage. Older children may come and go, moving between two households, college and their own friends. Step-parents are not the biological parents, but through marriage they do accept the legal status of parents and the responsibility for children. Some people become parents for the first time through re-marriage. If they do not have biological children, just like any new parent, they must confront the 'trial and error' learning that is often an integral feature of first parenthood. Even if they are parents to children from another marriage, they may not have experienced the responsibilities and demands of rearing adolescent children.

Table 6.2 Challenges confronting step-parents

Competition with ex-spouse in relationship with adolescents

Criticism from spouse and relatives about performance as a parent

Problem of how to discipline but also maintain love of stepchildren

Financial strain of raising adolescents in possibly two separate families

Negative stereotypes about step-parents

Developing trusting, intimate relationships with a stepchild

Dealing with the complex structure of blended families, and its impact on communication channels, stress and interpersonal relationships

A lack of institutionalised guidelines about normative behaviour in stepfamilies

A lack of research and reading material available on the similar but also different challenges for parents and step-parents

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A number of issues can make the lives of step-parents and step-children somewhat more difficult than those of intact families. We have outlined some of the challenges in particular facing step-parents in Table 6.2. Step-parents and stepchildren often complain that their role is poorly defined, especially on issues like their authority and the use of discipline. Does a step-parent have the same authority over a stepchild as they do over any natural children? Who should the adolescent believe about the appropriateness of an attitude or behaviour, the natural father or the stepfather? Adolescents can find themselves bargaining for independence and autonomy with two sets of fathers and mothers, with differences emerging across households in parents' expectations about the adolescent's status and role in the family. Any negotiations between parents and adolescents might also be coloured by unresolved feelings of anger, guilt or grief about the divorce. Unfortunately, the need to deal with these issues can increase the potential for conflict in families (see Cherlin, 1981; Chilman, 1983).

Traditionally, the image of stepchildren and step-parents has not been a good one. Community-based stereotypes portray both as having a number of personality problems. Unfortunately, early research tended to support these stereotypes. More recently, however, several findings have been challenged on the basis of both methodological and theoretical grounds (see Ganong & Coleman, 1984; Chilman, 1983). For example, research has not examined the range of variables that influence adjustment in stepfamilies (e.g. age and sex of children, marital quality, contact with the biological parent, prior experience of the step-parent), nor have researchers generally used the control group of single-marriage families. Rather, clinical writers have been more astute in presenting the complex personal, structural and interpersonal environments which are typical of stepfamilies. In particular, clinicians have given more attention to differences between stepmother and step-father households, adolescent stepchildren who do and do not have stepsiblings, and adolescents who live permanently in one household, and those in more than one home.

Studies which have compared adolescents in stepfamilies and first-marriage families have found that mothers, fathers and adolescents have similar scores on levels of cohesion and adaptability (see Pink & Wampler, 1985). However, members of stepfamilies describe family life as less cohesive and less adaptable, although these levels of cohesion and adaptability still place families midway between normal and clinical families on measures of family functioning. In the stepfamilies, adolescents had less regard for their stepfathers. These perceptions are shared by stepfathers, who have less regard for the adolescents they care for as stepchildren.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that many stepfathers, rather than stepmothers, achieve better relationships more quickly with step-children of all ages. Stepmothers have more difficulty with adolescent stepchildren, but fewer problems with younger stepchildren. One explanation might be evidence that stepfathers play an important supportive role to the mother rather than a directive one on their own. Thus they are less likely to be directly involved in demanding certain behaviours from the adolescents or in being in open conflict with them.

Partly in an attempt to demonstrate their commitment and love for their stepchildren, there is an emerging trend in some countries for up to a half of step-parents to officially adopt stepchildren (Harper, 1983; 1984). Supporters of this movement point to adoption as a further way in which stepfathers show their love for their stepchildren. Undoubtedly, especially for many adolescents who may rarely see their biological fathers, adoption may strengthen their attachment to new fathers. Critics of this movement, however, question the need to make adolescents sever important ties with biological fathers. Adoption gives

the child the surname of the stepfather, and as a result, many biological relatives (e.g. father, grandparents) no longer have any legal obligation for the welfare of the adolescent. In addition, there is the risk that some stepfathers are using adoption as a coping strategy when they can no longer cope with regular reminders about the biological father.

As mentioned earlier, there are various methodological problems that challenge the validity of many findings about the adjustment of step-children. To date, many studies of adolescents and college-age students do not show any differences between stepchildren and children in intact families on a variety of measures of psychological adjustment (Bernard, 1956; Oshman & Manosevitz, 1976; Parish & Dostal, 1980; Lutz, 1983). Although there is some evidence to the contrary, most studies fail to find differences in the self-image or psychological characteristics of adolescents in stepfamilies and other family structures. Unfortunately, many studies fail to accept that intact, divorced and step-parent families do differ in income, family size, the workforce involvement of mothers and in socioeconomic status. Significantly, it appears that many differences between these various family structures do diminish once demographic and socioeconomic factors are controlled (e.g. Guidubaldi & Perry, 1985). Similarly, when such controls are introduced in studies of adolescents in two-parent, step-parent and divorced families (Kurdek & Sinclair, 1988), no differences emerge in adolescents' self-reports of psychological symptoms, and school problems. In sum, while there are unique problems in adjusting to the loss of one parent and the arrival of another in the household, for most adolescents these problems are not serious enough to make them any less adjusted than adolescents in non-divorced households. But as individual case studies do reveal, we cannot forget that some adolescents are very negatively affected by the loss of a parent through a divorce, never adjusting to the demands of dealing with a new father or mother in their lives.

Conclusions

There are many serious methodological shortcomings in almost all of the research so far into adolescent adjustment to divorce and remarriage. At their worst, studies have not compared divorced families with control groups of intact families nor differentiated between adolescents in single-parent families because of the divorce or death of a parent. Even the better longitudinal studies have small samples, providing highly qualitative data from adolescents located through clinic referrals. There is a desperate need for more longitudinal research using large samples of children of both sexes and all ages from both divorced and non-divorced families.

Previous studies using clinical samples are often not comparable, because of differences in the socioeconomic status of families and different measures of adjustment and well-being. A wide variety of measures of adolescent adjustment are also employed, and many measures are not high on reliability or validity. Also adolescents are interviewed at different phases of the process of their parents' separation and divorce. As a result, studies are comparing adolescents at different stages of adjustment after the divorce.

Despite evidence that a parent's divorce stresses many adolescents, within a year or so after the divorce the majority of adolescents show good levels of adjustment. Indeed, compared with their parents, adolescents seem to bounce back more quickly. The post-divorce period, nevertheless, is still very challenging, especially with the emergence of a different type of relationship with their custodial mothers. Mothers carry the burden of caring for younger children and running the household. But there is evidence of many adolescents being mature, responsible and supportive of mothers. Many adolescents feel that the divorce of their parents has made them grow up a little quicker, but there are also cases where adolescents have reacted to the divorce with feelings of helplessness and insecurity. Adolescent males, in particular, seem to have a more difficult post-divorce transition, missing fathers and challenging the authority of their mothers.

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that most children and adolescents adjust well to the divorce of their parents. The degree of conflict between parents, not the divorce, is what can really affect adolescents' levels of adjustment. What we need to know more about are the developmental strengths, coping strategies and personality characteristics that help adolescents cope with the breakups of families. It is also obvious from research findings on adolescent adjustment to divorce that those using more objective, quantitative measures, and those employing in-depth interviews, gain somewhat different, even contradictory findings about the divorce experience for adolescents. Quantitative measures do play down how divorce is subjectively experienced by adolescents. More qualitative methods, however, are somewhat more open to bias and distortion (see Chapter 1). It is clear, as some researchers have shown (e.g. Dunlop & Burns, 1988), that both methods can be used to capture the impact of divorce. Especially when there are no differences between adolescents from divorced and intact families on various scales of personality and adjustment, case reports still remind us of individual cases where children have been seriously upset and disturbed by the breakup of the family. A minority of adolescents are distressed about the divorce for some time, but we know very little about the characteristics of adolescents who are more at risk of problems in adjusting to changes in their family life. Besides the need

to use multiple research methods, there is also a need to gain corroborative information from the variety of other people who see the adolescent, including teachers, friends, natural and step-parents.

The majority of stepchildren have good levels of adjustment. Most report having a satisfactory relationship with the new step-parent, who very often is the stepfather. There are challenges for both the stepchild, the step-parent and the biological parents, and not surprisingly, there is some evidence of less closeness and adaptability between adolescents and parents in reconstituted families compared with intact families. These general conclusions, however, are very much open to further research. A deficit family model approach in which non-nuclear families are seen as atypical and dysfunctional has guided most research. This model has probably favoured interpretations indicating lower levels of adjustment among children of divorce and remarriage. In contrast, the bulk of null findings should now encourage investigators to use alternative theories (e.g. family systems theory, social learning, role theory), that may be much more appropriate conceptualisations of adolescents' experience after the breakup of their families.

Chapter seven

The family and adolescent issues

As we have said many times before, despite the fact that the peer group assumes new importance in adolescence, the family is still central to the health and well-being of the young person. In fact, Sheppard, Wright and Goodstadt (1985) go so far as to say that: 'The peer group, contrary to what is commonly believed, has little or no influence as long as the family remains strong. Peers take over only when parents abdicate' (p. 951). While this comment reflects an extreme view, it is undoubtedly clear from all the research that we have reviewed that most adolescents want to maintain, as far as possible, close positive relationships with their parents, and want their support and help. Parents who have positive relationships with their children can remain more influential than the peer group throughout adolescence. In fact, teenagers frequently use the standards of one group or the other, depending on what type of decision they are making (Glynn, 1981). For example, peers may be the reference group for music and dress, while parents are the reference group for long-term decisions about education and careers.

Various problems such as smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and psychopathology are generally associated with the teenage years. In this chapter, we will look at the effects of both the family and the peer group on the extent to which these problems are likely to occur. We will begin by discussing the so-called battle between parents and peers and then look at the effects of various socialisation processes such as control, closeness, conflict and communication. We will also discuss the impact of the parents' own behaviour on the way the adolescent behaves and explore the effects of the parents' and the adolescents' personality on the likelihood of adolescents being involved in problem behaviours. Finally, we will examine ways of helping parents cope better with the problems of the teenage years.

Parents versus the peer group

There is quite a bit of evidence that the support of the family is crucial

to adolescents, and that those who do not have strong support from parents are more likely to become involved in undesirable behaviours. Adolescents who rely on the peer group, rather than the family, for their main support are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure to engage in problem behaviours such as smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol or using illegal drugs (Sheppard *et al.*, 1985). (These relationships are presented graphically in Figure 7.1.)

Figure 7.1 Effects for adolescents of reliance on family vs. peer group
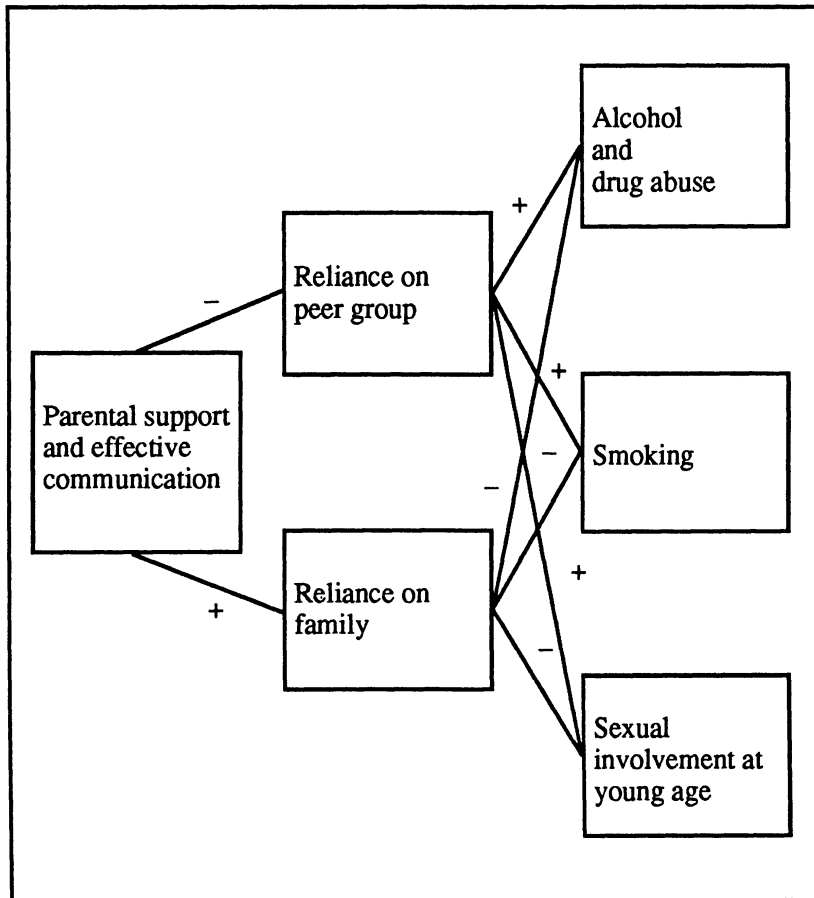
For example, Johnson (1986) examined the relative influence of parents and peers on adolescents' use and abuse of alcohol. The more involved adolescents were in their peer group, the more likely they were

to drink alcohol. These findings suggest how important it is for parents to stay by their adolescent and support them, rather than throwing them out of the home or withdrawing love and support in some other way. If parents fail to support their adolescents, the young people can become more involved with their peer group and even more committed to peer group values.

Commitment to the peer group

The more the adolescent is committed to the goals of the youth culture, the more they are likely to get involved in whatever problem behaviours are part of that culture. If their particular peer group is involved in alcohol or drugs, then those adolescents are likely to experience problems with alcohol or drugs. If they perceive their peer group as approving a particular behaviour, such as binge drinking, then they are likely to increase their own alcohol use. Even knowing that their peer group has no sanctions against alcohol use can increase that behaviour for those young people committed to a particular peer group.

While knowing that their peer group disapproves of a particular behaviour is likely to decrease involvement in that behaviour, knowing that parents disapprove can increase involvement in a behaviour, particularly for those young people who feel rejected and unsure of the love and concern of their parents. For example, young people who have poor relationships with their parents and who are involved in a peer group where members are heavy users of alcohol are highly likely to drink too much alcohol. McLaughlin and his colleagues (1985) compared peer and parental use of alcohol, along with the personality variables of tolerance of deviance and emotional maladjustment as predictors of teenage alcohol use in 7th and 10th grade boys and girls. Irrespective of grade or sex, the strongest predictor of alcohol use was the extent to which members of the peer group used alcohol. Tolerance of deviance and parental alcohol use were also related to adolescent use, but not as strongly as peer use. Similar findings hold for smoking. Adolescents are also more likely to smoke if parents, siblings and peers are smokers (Biglan *et al.*, 1983). Having opposite-sex friends who smoke also increases the chances of taking up smoking.

Taking up smoking seems generally to be prompted by peers, although some adolescents seem to be more primed to smoking than others. These adolescents have often thought more about the possibility of smoking before the first cigarette is offered and accept the initial offer with less hesitation (Friedman, Lichtenstein & Biglan, 1985). Few adolescents report that they started smoking alone, while about 90 per cent claim that they started smoking with same-sex friends. This study

points to many other features of a first smoke. Another smoker is generally present, and there is frequently another person experimenting with smoking at the same time. While most adolescents claim that they are not pressured to smoke, 76 per cent admit smoking is suggested by another person and in 63 per cent of cases someone else actually offers a cigarette. About a quarter report being teased when they refuse or hesitate, and another quarter believe that taking the cigarette is necessary in order to be liked by their friends. Thus, there seem to be implicit pressures to smoke in these situations, although we must be careful not to take the responsibility away from the individual who is clearly still able to refuse. In the same study, nonsmokers asked about how they avoided taking the first cigarette said that they either politely said no, or else left the situation.

Just as the peer group is an important predictor of tobacco and alcohol use, it is also an important predictor of drug use. If adolescents are part of a peer group in which drug use is common, then they will be more likely to use drugs. In a rather polemical paper, Sheppard and her colleagues (1985) argue that adolescents who are interested in using drugs may seek out a peer group which supports that interest, as well as overestimate the prevalence of drug users in their community – the 'everyone is doing it' syndrome. In fact, Sheppard's data suggest that many young people are never offered cannabis, and many who are, simply refuse without feeling undue pressure to accept. These authors believe strongly that the responsibility for using drugs should be on the user, and that adolescents should be encouraged to realise that they do have a choice, and that they have the responsibility to say 'no' when pressured to conform in performing illegal or undesirable behaviours. Data collected by Meier, Burkett & Hickman (1984) also suggest that adolescents interested in using drugs tend to choose users as peers, and that this chosen peer group then serves to increase their usage, as well as to minimise the chances that sanctions will have any impact on them.

Young people who have sexual intercourse in their early teens are also more likely to have friends their parents don't like, to be more of a problem to their parents and to be more peer-oriented than the average adolescent. Girls engaging in sexual intercourse are also more likely to come from single-parent families and to be looking for affection. Overall then, the peer group can have strong influences on smoking, drinking and sexual behaviour. The strength of the impact, however, depends on the relative strength of commitment to the peer group and the quality of the parent–adolescent relationship. Parents will have more influence, and the peers less influence, when the parent–adolescent relationship is positive and cooperative.

Attachment to parents

Attachment to parents is related to the extent to which adolescents get involved in health-risk behaviours such as smoking and drinking. For example, adolescents who take up smoking are less strongly attached to their mothers than nonsmokers, and are more attached to their fathers and their friends (Skinner *et al.*, 1985). While attachment to friends would be expected, given that we have already shown that involvement with the peer group tends to encourage, rather than constrain, deviant behaviour, the researchers were not able to explain the effects of attachment to father. Fathers of smokers were more likely to also smoke, and this may have had some effect on the smoking behaviour of those who were strongly attached.

Since the study reported by Skinner and his colleagues (1985) was longitudinal, they were able to look at changes over time related to stopping smoking. Those who stopped were more closely bonded to their parents on the second occasion, although bonding to friends had not changed. Those who had continued smoking were less strongly bonded to their parents on the second occasion. Smokers who continued, reported associating more with smokers both initially and later. Other factors related to giving up smoking were becoming more religious and having a father who had cut back on smoking. These findings again support the likelihood that those who are closely identified with their fathers are likely to model their smoking on him. These young people are also more likely to stop smoking when their father expresses his concern about smoking by cutting back his own intake of cigarettes.

Drug-taking is affected by the quality of relationships with parents. In fact, these relationships can even predict changing patterns of drug use over a two year period (Norem-Hebeisen *et al.*, 1984). These researchers found that increasing drug use between grades 9 and 11 was associated with the adolescents' perceptions of parental disapproval and of receiving few expressions of caring and affection from their parents. These teenagers also described their fathers as angry with them and rejecting of them. Both parents also seemed to be continually and increasingly trying to control the teenagers' comings and goings. The adolescents who did not use drugs reported more positive relationships with their parents between the 9th and 11th grades, with more affirmation from both mothers and fathers and less hostility between themselves and their fathers.

Parental supervision

While adolescents tend to react negatively to parents who try to control them too much, some parental supervision seems to be important to their

well-being, and particularly minimises the chances of their becoming involved in problem behaviours. Those who spend a lot of time unsupervised are more likely to engage in a range of such behaviours. For example, females are less likely to smoke if they are subjected to more parental supervision and if they associate less with female friends who smoke.

Illicit drug use is also related to amount of supervision, and is particularly high among young adults who are often on their own or who are living away from home with friends (Thorne & DeBlassie, 1985)). Of course, an important question concerns whether these young people use drugs more because they are away from home or leave home in order to be free to use drugs. It is clear, however, that being at home and being under some supervision reduces involvement in drugs.

Socialisation practices in the family

Given that the quality of the parent–adolescent relationship is so strongly related to the involvement of adolescents in problem behaviours, parents' socialisation practices are highly likely to be relevant. A range of family factors are related to drug use and abuse (see Jurich and his colleagues (1985)). Conflict between the parents, absence of one or both parents when the child was growing up, little closeness between parent and child, parental rejection and hostility, lack of communication in the family, problematic discipline procedures in the family, and the parents' own use of drugs, all have been implicated as causes of adolescent drug abuse. In this section, we will discuss the relationship between family functioning or socialisation practices and the adolescent's involvement in a range of problem behaviours.

Closeness and cohesion

An important issue is the level of closeness in the family. There are concerns, in fact, about whether families can be too close (Beavers & Voeller, 1983; Olson *et al.*, 1983) and what may be the consequences of too much closeness (see Steinhauer, 1987 for a discussion of this issue). Epstein and his colleagues (1978) describe an extreme level of symbiotic (or enmeshed) involvement as 'so intense that the boundaries between the two or more individuals are blurred' and 'extreme involvement that blurs individual differentiation' (p.26). The main issue is whether individuals are clearly differentiated (able to separate self from nonself) and able to function as separate autonomous beings. The assumption of many theorists seems to be that high closeness always involves low or nonexistent autonomy (e.g. Bowen, 1978; Minuchin,

1974). Of course, the relationship between autonomy and closeness is an empirical question and should be treated as such. We suspect, however, as Beavers and Voeller comment, that capable families are able to respect individual choice, as well as being able to maintain high levels of closeness (Lewis, Beavers, Gossett & Phillips, 1976).

Individuation and autonomy are as crucial to the adolescent's development of a separate sense of self, appropriate levels of self-esteem and healthy, constructive relationships with others. Enmeshed individuals are likely to rely excessively on primitive defences such as projection and introjection, especially in stressful situations (Steinhauer, 1987). This reliance leads to confusion of the individual's own feelings, thoughts and needs with those of the parent, and to generally destructive family relationships involving a great deal of acting-out and manipulation. A further concern is that those who are enmeshed as adolescents are likely to continue the pattern into their own families, and their children are also at great risk of being enmeshed.

On the other hand, those adolescents who experience warmth and closeness in their families are less likely to be over-influenced by the peer group and to be involved in problem behaviours. Jurich and his colleagues (1985), for example, found that families that were warm and close had fewer problems with adolescent drug use and abuse. Those adolescents who do not experience warmth and closeness in the family tend to look to their peer group and to engage in smoking, drinking and marihuana use to gain that support and acceptance (Sheppard *et al.*, 1985). They may also get involved in sexual relationships early as a way of finding the warmth and affection that is missing from their family relationships. As we shall see in the next section, however, there is also evidence that the balance between support and control in the family is more important than the level of closeness per se.

Balance between support and control

Adolescent patterns of alcohol consumption are related to the balance between support and control in the family (Barnes *et al.*, 1986). Alcohol problems among adolescents are particularly prominent where mothers are low in both support and control and at their lowest when mothers are high in support and low or medium in control. Alcohol problems also occur at high levels when fathers are low in support and high in control and at low levels when fathers are high in support and exert a medium level of control.

Support and control in the family also predict drug use, particularly for girls (Block, Block & Keyes, 1988). Parents of daughters who are more likely to become drug users are highly permissive with these daughters. They also make little attempt to inculcate traditional values,

providing, instead, a rather unconventional family environment where the children are permitted to be highly expressive emotionally, and to challenge both parents and teachers. These daughters are encouraged towards early independence but are not pushed to achieve. The families and homes are generally noisy and poorly organized and manners are not expected.

It seems that families that are either too authoritarian or too permissive are most likely to have problems with drug abuse. The relationships between the level of control in the family and adolescent problem behaviours is presented in Figure 7.2. Jurich *et al.* (1985) compared a drug-using group (infrequent or occasional use of legal or nonaddictive drugs) with a drug-abusing group (almost daily ingestion of dangerous drugs).

Figure 7.2 Relationship between level of control in the family and problem behaviour of adolescents
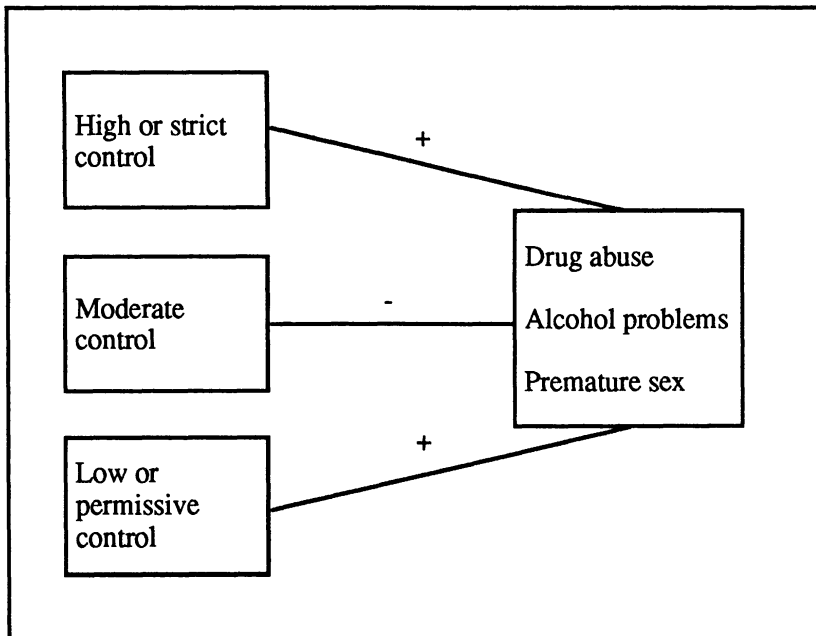
Parents of drug-abusers were less likely to be democratic in their parenting and were more likely to use either authoritarian discipline techniques or laissez-faire techniques. Authoritarian techniques are likely to increase parent–adolescent conflict and adolescent frustration, and to lead to acting-out on the part of the adolescent. Laissez-faire discipline, on the other hand, allows the adolescent more freedom than

he or she can handle responsibly and may encourage a hedonistic use of drugs.

Having permissive parents also increases the chances of adolescents' being involved in sexual intercourse at an early age and of becoming teenage parents. Two factors are likely to be relevant here: the lack of parental supervision and the permissive parents' failure to discuss the issues with the adolescent, to inculcate standards and to point out the possible consequences of their behaviour.

In addition, power and control are relevant to the development of psychopathology in an adolescent family member. Again, a balanced level of control seems most appropriate. Psychopathology is most likely to occur in families where there is excessive dominance of one partner over other members (Rodick & Henggeler, 1982) or in families where mothers have difficulty taking the role of a parent and are too permissive (Barton, Alexander & Turner, 1988).

Inappropriate hierarchies (e.g. Hetherington, Stouwie & Ridberg, 1971) and inappropriate coalitions in the family have also been implicated. Inappropriate hierarchies occur where children, rather than parents, dominate decision-making in the family and parents have little or no control. Inappropriate coalitions occur when the parents do not operate as a unit, but either the mother or the father continually sides with one or more of the children against the other parent. Minuchin (1974) particularly emphasises the need for clear separation between the parent subsystem and the child subsystem and the importance of parents taking a clear leadership role. Children should not be encouraged to behave like parents, and parents should not abdicate their roles and behave like children.

On the other hand, it is also important that family roles and rules are not upheld too rigidly. Adaptability is very important to family functioning (see also Chapters 1 and 4). Parents need to be continually assessing roles and rules in the family to see whether they are still appropriate. Rules and roles in the family need to be altered in response to developmental changes in family members. Rules that were appropriate to a family with primary school children are often not appropriate to high school children. Rules that were appropriate to high school children may not be suitable for adolescents who are working or attending university. Rules may also need to change with changes in external circumstances such as moving house or involvement in outside activities. Roles and rules must be able to accommodate to each individual's unique situation and special needs.

Communication and conflict

Family communication is relevant to the adolescent's involvement in

problem behaviours in several ways. The quality of the communication in the family dictates the quality of the relationships between the parents and the adolescent, which, as we have already seen, affects the child's bonding to the parent and his or her involvement in the peer group. Those families where communication is positive and effective are less likely to be involved in problem behaviours. For example, poor parent–child relationships and parent–child communication are related to involvement in alcohol, drug abuse and sexual intercourse for young people.

Good communication is likely to mean that the adolescent confides in the parents and looks to them as a source of information. This willingness to confide is likely to be particularly relevant for sexual behaviour where there seems to be a serious lack of accurate information among teenagers. Adolescents who are able to talk to their parents about sex tend to be more knowledgeable than those who cannot discuss such issues with their parents (Rothenberg, 1980). In most families, however, parents are the least important sources of sex information, especially for sons. Given what we have said earlier about the lack of communication about sex in the family (see Chapter 3), we would not expect parents to be important sources of sexual information for their kids. A further problem is that parents do not always know the answers to the questions adolescents ask about sex (Fox & Inazu, 1980; Rothenberg, 1980), and adolescents often think they know everything when they don't. Providing good reading material for adolescents can be another way of ensuring that they have accurate information.

Morrison (1985) cites studies indicating quite clearly that adolescents are 'a mine of misinformation' about sexuality and conception. For example, adolescents often cite the time of the month as a reason for not using contraception, yet they are often wrong about which time of the month is 'safe'. Other amazing beliefs cited in studies of teenagers include 'if a girl truly doesn't want a baby, she won't get pregnant' (Sorenson, 1973) and 'a woman must have an orgasm in order to get pregnant' (Reichelt & Werley, 1975). Some adolescent girls do not understand that fertility begins when they start menstruating, and some believe that it is not possible to get pregnant the first time they have intercourse. While those who have had some form of sex education tend to have more accurate knowledge than those who do not, the appalling ignorance among adolescents does not seem to be totally alleviated by such classes (Morrison, 1985). The ideal is probably classes attended with parents, followed by discussion between parents and their own children. Unfortunately, given the reticence among family members to talk about sex, it is likely that adolescence is too late and discussion about sex needs to start much earlier. As we know, adolescents who have good relationships with their parents are also more likely to

confide in them about any problems with alcohol, drugs or relationships. If adolescents are able to talk to their parents and respect their parents' advice and opinions they are likely to have fewer prob- lems in these areas and to be prepared to seek help when they need it.

Another reason why good communication is important is that families with effective communication have less conflict at both the marital and family levels, with high levels of conflict being related to adolescent psychopathology and delinquency. In addition, where family conflict is high, adolescents are likely to leave home earlier and thus be more prone to involvement in undesirable activities such as drug abuse and prostitution.

A number of studies point to a relationship between marital conflict and conduct disorders in boys. Rutter (1971) found that where the parents' marriage was rated as good, boys were not involved in antisocial behaviour. On the other hand, almost 40 per cent of those whose parents' marriages were rated as very poor were engaging in antisocial activities. The boys most at risk were those whose parents' marriage was rated as very poor and whose relationships with both parents were unsatisfactory. Having a good relationship with one of their parents halved their chances of being involved in antisocial behaviours.

A child in a family where marital conflict is high and the opposite-sex parent is very dominant is especially at risk for an internalizing disorder such as depression. For instance, a daughter, in a family where there is high marital conflict and the father is very dominant, is likely to be torn between identifying with the mother (because she is the same sex) and the father (because he is the more powerful). The conflict will be even stronger if the father treats the mother with contempt. Such a scenario is likely to lead to low self-esteem and depression in the daughter (see Martin, 1987).

While adolescents whose parents have a healthy relationship tend to develop strong positive identities and separate fairly smoothly from their parents, those whose parents are in conflict may have more separation problems. Martin suggests that separation from the parents may be particularly difficult if one of the parents is too involved with the adolescent, or if one or both parents is maladjusted. Conflicted parent–child relationships can also make separation difficult, rather than easy, for the adolescent because of the guilt, anxiety, resentment and anger that the adolescent feels toward the parent.

While conflict increases the strains on the family, how adolescents try to cope with this stress and conflict has a greater impact on their behaviour than the presence of the stress. Adolescents who experience a build-up of family stressors and strains are more likely to get involved in smoking, drinking or drugs than other adolescents (McCubbin,

Needle & Wilson, 1985). Those who are most at risk for heavy involvement in behaviours that put their health at risk, are those who tend to 'ventilate' or externalise in response to stress – blaming others, getting angry, yelling and complaining. On the other hand, those who cope with these strains by talking with their parents and trying to work out difficult issues with family members are much less likely to engage in these health-risk behaviours as a means of coping. Thus the quality of their communication with their parents is again likely to be crucial.

Family conflict, along with other communication problems, is implicated in both the development and maintenance of psychopathology in adolescents (Goldstein & Strachan, 1987). For instance, families of schizophrenics have a tendency to communicate with less clarity and accuracy than normal families, both with one another and with the schizophrenic patient (see also Alexander & Parsons, 1982; Klein, Alexander & Parsons, 1977). There is also evidence for less facilitative information exchange and extremes of conflict (Barton, Alexander & Turner, 1988). Goldstein and Strachan (1987) note that, across a number of studies, parents of schizophrenics tend to have difficulty maintaining a shared focus of attention, communicating meaning clearly and accurately and taking the perspective of another person.

Using a longitudinal design, Goldstein and his colleagues (Doane, West, Goldstein, Rodnick & Jones, 1981; Goldstein, Judd, Rodnick, Alkire & Gould, 1968) were able to demonstrate that communication problems were present in the family before the onset of a schizophrenia spectrum disorder (includes other schizotypal disorders). In a 15-year follow-up, they showed that schizophrenia spectrum disorders were most likely in families where parents had difficulty communicating clearly, used a negative affective style and were high in emotional expressiveness (harsh criticism and intrusiveness).

Some theorists also argue (e.g. Beavers & Voeller, 1983) that different types of problematic family interaction (or different family styles) produce different types of psychopathology in adolescents. According to Beavers and his colleagues, families which are extremely family-focused and have little interaction with the outside world (families he called centripetal) are likely to produce adolescents with internalizing disorders such as depression or schizophrenia. On the other hand, families which are focused strongly on the outside world, with only loose bonds between family members (families he called centrifugal) are likely to produce adolescents with externalizing disorders, that is, delinquent and conduct-disordered young people.

Effective communication in the family also provides the adolescent with models of social competence, as well as training in skills such as self-disclosure and problem-solving. There are several indications, for

example, of a relationship between loneliness and an individual's social competence (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). Lonely people tend to avoid social situations, and have difficulty taking the initiative in conversations, making friends, introducing themselves to others and making phone calls to arrange social activities. Those whose parents have not provided them with good models in these areas, and have not helped them to overcome any reticence to initiate social contacts are more likely to be lonely and to have problems doing anything about that loneliness.

Learning appropriate patterns of self-disclosure in the family is also likely to decrease the chances of adolescents being lonely. Teenagers who learn to self-disclose in the family are more likely to self-disclose to their peers. In addition, teenagers who are more willing to self-disclose to their peers are also less likely to feel lonely (Franzoi & Davis, 1985).

For several reasons, loneliness seems to be a particularly acute problem among adolescents. During this time, teenagers attempt to achieve individuation, emphasise autonomy and freedom, and have problems of self-identity. They are involved in a search for meaningfulness, are developing their cognitive processes and often find themselves in a 'social limbo' (Mijuskovic, 1986). While adolescents who have more problems making friends are likely to be lonelier, those with more close friends are not necessarily less lonely (Medora, 1983; Medora & Woodward, 1986). Loneliness is also related to happiness, with those who are less lonely reporting themselves as happier. While we would expect the lonely to be less happy, they also tend to be consistently more negative in their outlook, so the results about happiness may reflect the possibility that this negative outlook increases their chances of being lonely. There is also evidence of negativity among lonely students who describe themselves as 'angry, self-enclosed, empty and awkward' (Russell *et al.*, 1978).

Adolescents model the social skills of parents with whom they have a positive relationship. High-school students report being more likely to self-disclose to parents who are warm and loving. Those who disclose to parents are also more likely to disclose to peers and thus be less lonely. There is also evidence that mothers' social competence directly affects the social competence of their children. Filsinger and Lamke (1983), for example, show that mothers who are anxious and socially withdrawing tend to have adolescents who behave similarly. These adolescents are also likely to be low in social self-esteem and to have problems with intimate relationships. These are the adolescents who are most likely to be lonely and unhappy.

Personality factors

Some personality factors in parents and adolescents predict problem behaviours in the adolescent. A notable study by Brook and her colleagues (e.g. Brook, Whiteman & Gordon, 1983; Brook, Whiteman, Gordon & Cohen, 1986) showed that parents who are conventional and warm and provide a structured environment for their children are less likely than other parents to have adolescents who use drugs. On the other hand, Brook and her colleagues have found evidence for drug-prone personalities in adolescents which lead to higher levels of drug usage, even when the family and peer environments are positive. Such personality traits include tolerance of deviance, rebelliousness, lack of conventionality, sensation-seeking, depression and obsessiveness. Teenagers with these personality traits are more likely to be involved in drug abuse. On the other hand, where the family environment is negative, adolescents tend to be involved in higher levels of drug use, even when they do not have 'drug-prone personalities' and their peer group is conventional. Drug use is more likely, however, where more than one of these factors are operating. For example, a lack of maternal warmth combined with unconventionality in the adolescent is more likely than either of the aspects separately to increase the level of drug use. The presence of several positive characteristics (e.g. warmth in the mother–child relationship and conventionality in the adolescent) is more likely to decrease the level of drug use.

The parent's personality seems to have an indirect effect on the child via the child's relationship with the parent. If the parent's personality is conducive to a warm, positive parent–child relationship, then the chances of involvement in problem behaviours are lower than if the parent's personality leads to a hostile, rejecting parent–child relationship, although the effects for relationships with the mother are stronger than those for the father. The mother who is both psychologically stable and conventional is more likely to have a relationship with the adolescent which is very affectionate and not marred by too much conflict. This positive relationship increases the probability that the adolescent will also be conventional and psychologically stable and therefore less likely to be involved in activities such as drug abuse.

Effects of the parents' own behaviour

Alcohol consumption and drinking patterns among adolescents tend to reflect the drinking patterns of adults in the same sociocultural milieu (Barnes, Farrell & Cairns, 1986). Drinking by adolescents is also affected by the drinking patterns of their parents. While parents who are heavy drinkers are more likely to have heavy drinkers among their

adolescent children, abstaining mothers are also more likely to have heavy-drinking adolescents than are mothers who drink moderately. Adolescents are also more likely to smoke when their parents, siblings and peers are smokers (Biglan *et al.*, 1983) and they are also likely to have more problems giving up smoking when those closest to them smoke.

Other members of the families of drug abusers are more likely to use drugs than are the members of the families of adolescents who do not abuse drugs. Adolescents are especially likely to be influenced to abuse drugs when a powerful family member such as a parent uses drugs (Jurich *et al.*, 1985). These findings support the work of other re-searchers which shows that adolescent drug-takers are more likely to have one or more parents with alcohol problems (Barnes, 1977; Bratter, 1975) or who are heavy users of prescription drugs (Josephson & Caroll, 1974). In addition, adolescents who use drugs are much more likely than non-users to have parents who use drugs, including alcohol and tobacco (McDermott, 1984). Two explanations are possible, of course: a social learning explanation would see the parents as modelling drug-taking behaviour for their family members, while family theorists, on the other hand, would be more likely to suggest that environments where one or both parents are heavy users of drugs or alcohol are likely to be stressful and difficult environments in which to raise young people. The level of stress is likely to increase the probability that the adolescent will use drugs as a means of coping with the higher level of stress.

The adolescents' perceptions of their parents as permissive or nonpermissive in their attitudes towards drugs are also important predictors of drug use, with teenagers who perceive their parents as holding permissive attitudes being more likely to use drugs. In addition, parental attitude seems to be at least as important as the parents' actual behaviour in predicting drug use. Of course, the parents' own use of drugs may be a powerful indicator to a young person that the parent has permissive attitudes towards drugs.

Helping parents cope with adolescents' problems

Helping professionals are often called on to assist parents in coping with problems with their adolescent offspring. Parents are frequently confused about what style of parenting is appropriate for adolescents, and about the best way of reacting to their problem behaviours. Parents are usually anxious to know what action they can take, without making the situation worse. In this section, we will try to tie together the things we have been saying in terms of advice to parents about handling adolescents. It is important to recognise that we are trying to present

general principles that seem to emerge, and that these may not apply in some cases.

It is clear from much that we have said that most adolescents want and need close, warm relationships with their parents. Constructive, helpful parenting aims to provide such a relationship. Adolescents who feel comfortable about their relationship with their parents are more likely to reflect their parents' values, to disclose to them and to cooperate with them. Obtaining adolescents' cooperation is much more crucial than obtaining their obedience. Where adolescents cooperate with their parents, obedience becomes a non-issue.

Authoritarian parenting-styles may increase conformity and obedience in the short-term, but adolescents with authoritarian parents are at risk for developing more external styles where they lack internal controls on their own behaviour and are more concerned about getting caught than about doing what is right for its own sake. Adolescents with external styles are also more likely to blame others when things go wrong and are less likely to take responsibility for their own decisions and behaviours.

Authoritarian parenting can also lead to rebellion and a complete breakdown of the parent–adolescent relationship. These parents are likely to believe that the answer to their problems with their adolescents is to be more and more controlling. The more strict and rigid their controls become, however, the more reactant their adolescents will become and the lower the chances that they will do what their parents want. In addition the adolescents will become more determined to free themselves from the 'tyranny' of their parents. Many kids are on the street because of this type of breakdown in their relationships with their parents.

Adolescents cope much better when they feel accepted by their parents and able to talk about their problems and issues and to negotiate changes in roles and rules. Many problems stem from the difficulties parents and adolescents have in communicating their feelings and needs and working out mutually acceptable solutions. Adolescents also need to be able to come to their parents for important information and to discuss issues with them. An accepting environment also helps adolescents to engage in the more basic tasks of identity exploration and development.

Parents need to be flexible in their dealings with adolescents. They must be prepared to change role expectations and rules when they are no longer appropriate. The emphasis on consistency so often found in the popular literature about child-rearing needs to be discussed here. It is important that adolescents know what the important family rules are, and that they are not punished for something one week that they got away with the week before. However, they should also expect that

parents will be prepared to take into account their individual needs and circumstances and to negotiate changes. For example, if a family rule which says that all family members should be present at breakfast precludes a family member from training for the school swimming team as she would like to, then such a rule may need to be revised.

A further important consideration is that adolescents who are able to talk with their parents about their issues and rely on them for emotional support are likely to rely less on the peer group for both their emotional support and for guidance as to what behaviour is appropriate. Those whose main focus is on the peer group are more likely to be pressured into using less constructive means of coping such as drinking or drugs. In addition, the build-up of unresolved stressors and strains on the adolescent makes them increasingly at risk for using health-risk behaviours. Parenting styles encouraging the development of problem-solving approaches which involve talking to family members and trying to find ways of resolving the issues are much more constructive.

It is important for both adolescents and their parents to recognise that adolescents have to be responsible for their own behaviour, and not blame others or circumstances when they get involved in undesirable behaviours. The only real protection an adolescent has when confronted with the opportunity to engage in illegal, immoral or undesirable behaviours is the ability to say no and to withstand pressure. Parents, therefore, should emphasise internal rather than external controls and discourage inappropriate attributions of blame to external sources. Blaming peers or circumstances for excessive drinking of alcohol, for example, does not help the adolescent to take control of their drinking and take appropriate steps to decrease their indulgence. Parents should also be careful that the implicit messages sent to the adolescent are ones which encourage good judgment and competence.

Implicit messages related to smoking, drinking, drug abuse and sexual behaviour are also important. Adolescents are not likely to respect parents who expect a high standard of behaviour from their children, while indulging in problem behaviours themselves. The heavy drinking father, for example, is unlikely to be able to persuade his adolescents that drinking is not the best answer to stress if he, himself, continually uses alcohol for that purpose. The mother who regularly takes prescription drugs to deal with stress is also giving family members a clear message that such behaviour is appropriate.

Attitudes to the opposite sex are modelled in similar ways. Fathers who talk about women as though they are merely servants or sex objects are unlikely to engender healthy self-esteem in their daughters, or encourage their sons to treat women as equals. Wives who accept abuse from their husbands as though it is their due also provide poor role models for their daughters. Mothers who continually make negative or

disparaging comments about men are likely to have negative effects on the sex role attitudes and close relationships of both their sons and their daughters. Sons are likely to have low self-esteem from hearing their sex continually degraded, while girls are likely to take on their mothers' negative opinions of the opposite sex. In situations such as these, the modelling of the parents is likely to have very powerful effects on their adolescents.

Attitudes to work and unemployment are also learned in the family and some adolescents are likely to learn destructive attitudes of one sort or another. Some may blame themselves inappropriately for situations which have more to do with government economic policy than with individuals. Others may learn to look to external authorities such as governments to solve their own and their family's problems and not realise that there are things they can do to help themselves. Either of these attitudes can be causes for concern. It is not appropriate for adolescents to be blamed for not working when no jobs are available, and governments must be prepared to provide backup services in such situations. On the other hand, young people should not be encouraged to expect governments to supply all their needs.

We began by discussing the controversy in the literature about whether adolescence is a time of storm and stress for families or whether most adolescents make a smooth transition from childhood to adulthood. We have opted for the relational view which suggests that adolescents renegotiate their relationships with their parents during adolescence. The achievement of new relationships on the basis of greater mutual respect and equality is likely to cause some problems in the short term for both parents and adolescents, and require a certain amount of patience on the part of both. Those who are able to manage the transition, however, will generally find that their relationships with their parents or children will be even more rewarding than before, and that these relationships will then continue indefinitely. Perhaps some of the ideas we have presented will help to make these transitions more painless and rewarding.

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