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Parent-Child Communication During Adolescence

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Conventional wisdom regards parent-adolescent communication as an oxymoron. As is often the case with adolescence, however, conventional wisdom can be misleading. Although communication during the adolescent years certainly is a challenge for parents and children, this challenge stems primarily from the changing nature of the relationship, not from an inherent inability of adolescents and parents to engage in meaningful conversation (for recent reviews, see Laursen & Collins, 2009; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). As families navigate the transition from childhood into adulthood, the frequency and content of their interactions change. Increasing adolescent autonomy inevitably alters patterns of self-disclosure, shared experiences, and perceptions of privacy and responsibilities. Yet even in the face of these significant alterations, familial emotional bonds are noteworthy for their resilience and continuity.

To the extent that there is a generation gap, it is as much a product of incongruent perceptions and expectations as it is of inadequate or insufficient conversation (Steinberg, 2001). Parents and adolescents do not necessarily share the same view of the relationship and their ability to communicate, nor are their perspectives typically congruent with those of observers outside the relationship. Parents and adolescents pursue different implicit goals and timetables regarding the adolescent's autonomy, which may give rise to communication difficulties (Collins & Laursen, 2004). But families differ widely in the extent to which autonomy has a corrosive effect on parent-child communication. For some it is a difficult passage, but most families are well equipped to navigate the developmental challenges of adolescence.

This chapter will describe how patterns of parent-child communication are transformed across adolescence years in terms of changes in the nature and functions of relationships. We will focus on salient aspects of parent-adolescent relationships that best illustrate alterations in patterns of communication. The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section provides

an overview of theoretical accounts of parent-child relationships during adolescence. Most models of development assume perturbations in family relationships during the adolescent years, although there is less agreement as to the implications for family communication. The second section describes continuity and change in manifestations of parent-adolescent closeness. For most families, closeness and interdependence decline across adolescence, but the fall-off in intimate communication appears to be especially pronounced for those in troubled relationships. The third section describes continuity and change in manifestations of parent-adolescent conflict. Expressions of anger and coercion may increase during the transition from childhood to adolescence, particularly among families with prior communication difficulties, but strife is not a normative feature of this age period. The fourth section describes continuity and change in manifestations of parent-adolescent monitoring and information management. Parental control of adolescents' unsupervised activities may increasingly threaten adolescents' growing needs for autonomy, and parents need to provide an emotional climate in which adolescents voluntarily disclose information about their activities and whereabouts. The concluding remarks place changing patterns of parent-adolescent communication in the larger context of relationship transformations from childhood to adulthood.

Theoretical Accounts of Continuity and Change in Parent-Adolescent Relationships

Conceptual models of developmental changes in parent-adolescent relationships vary in whether their primary focus is on the adolescent or on the relationship. Those that focus on the adolescent emphasize that changes in the parent-adolescent relationship result from the child's biological or cognitive maturation. For decades, the prevalent theoretical perspective was that the manner in which family relationships are transformed and the ensuing consequences for family communication depend on the nature and processes of individual maturation. In contrast, models

that focus on the relationship tend to emphasize continuity and the enduring nature of parent-child bonds. These models hold that because the relationship is inherently stable, functional properties of family communication remain constant despite adolescent development and alterations in the content and form of interactions.

Models of individual change and their implications for parent-adolescent communication. Psychoanalytic theorists assumed that hormonal changes at puberty give rise to unwelcome oedipal urges that foster impulse control problems and anxiety, as well as rebelliousness and distance from the family (Freud, 1958). More recent psychoanalytic formulations (Blos, 1979; Erikson, 1968) presume that puberty is the driving force toward individuation from parents through a process that emphasizes adolescent autonomy striving and ego identity development rather than impulse control. These models agree that parental deidealization and psychic emancipation drive a wedge between parents and children that is exacerbated by inner turmoil produced by adolescent hormonal fluctuations. Heightened conflict and diminished closeness following pubertal maturation result in deteriorated family communication. Although conflict should abate and efforts may be undertaken to re-establish closeness once pubertal maturation and individuation are complete, the end result is permanent changes in the parent-child relationship that permit the adolescent to participate in family communication as an adult.

Evolutionary views also emphasize the role of puberty in transforming relationships and communication (Hill, 1988; Steinberg, 1989). According to these views, the origins of this process lie with evolutionary pressures on the child to move away from the family to find a sexual partner. Physical and cognitive advances foster autonomy striving and individuation, which heighten conflict with and diminish closeness to parents. In turn, increased autonomy and individuation may help to promote pubertal development by creating distance between adolescents and parents and

encouraging children to look elsewhere for mates. Increased conflict and diminished closeness are presumed to be an integral part of the move toward adolescent independence and inevitably impede family communication. Nevertheless, a prior history of responsive parenting, which is thought to provide a foundation of warmth and respect, as well as grandparental investment in offspring once children make the transition to parenthood, may enable parents and children to transcend the difficulties of adolescence in young adulthood (Crosnoe & Elder, 2002; Gray & Steinberg, 1999).

A related group of maturational models hold that change in parent-adolescent relationships results from cognitive development. These models start from the premise that global advances in adolescent abstract reasoning foster a nuanced appreciation of interpersonal distinctions and an increasingly reciprocal and egalitarian view of parent-child relationships (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Cognitive advances may also prompt adolescents to perceive as personal decisions issues that were previously considered to be under parental jurisdiction (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). Parental reluctance to conform to these views by transforming their vertical affiliation into a horizontal one and by granting more autonomy creates conflict and curtails closeness. Once relationship roles and expectations are renegotiated in a mutually satisfactory way and parents have reduced their control, conflict should subside and parents and adolescents may reestablish closeness.

These models of individual change imply that because parents and adolescents necessarily go through a period in which they experience the same interactions differently, communication between parents and adolescents may be impaired as a consequence of relationship change. After relationship roles have been successfully realigned, parents and children may develop a more sophisticated framework for constructive communication (Collins & Laursen, 2000). Given that

perceptions mediate relationship experiences, reports of change in parent-adolescent communication are expected to vary across participants and one or both of these insider perspectives are likely to be at odds with independent outsider perspectives.

Models of relationship change and their implications for parent-adolescent communication. Alternative models of parent-adolescent relationships focus on forces for stability within the dyad, rather than on the impact of individual change on the dyad. Attachment theory is the most common relational perspective, and argues that the quality of the parent-child relationship is inherently stable over time. According to this perspective, one person's behavior with another is guided by a set of relatively stable cognitive representations derived from a history of interactions in attachment relationships (Bowlby, 1969). As a mutually regulated system, parents and children jointly work to maintain the relationship in a manner consistent with their cognitive representations. Specific interactions may vary from one age to the next, depending on the developmental challenges of the period, but the functional significance of interactions and the role of parents as a secure base for exploration are expected to vary little over time (Ainsworth, 1989). Although maturational changes in the adolescent stimulate greater autonomy-striving that transforms patterns of communication with parents, perceptions of the quality of the relationship should remain fairly stable. Separation and individuation may precipitate conflict and diminished feelings of closeness for a time and may make parental control less desirable, but the magnitude of these changes and their impact on the relationship should reflect the prior history of the relationship (Allen & Manning, 2007). Adolescents and parents with a history of sensitive, responsive interactions and strong emotional bonds may experience only temporary communication difficulties, whereas those in poorer quality relationships are more likely to sustain disruption and unresolved issues.

Social relations or interdependence models also emphasize the inherent stability of parent-child relationships (Laursen & Collins, 2009). In an interdependent relationship, partners engage in mutually influential exchanges and share the perception that their connections are reciprocal and enduring (Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000). Interdependence is a hallmark of all close relationships and is manifested in frequent, strong, and diverse interconnections maintained over an extended time (Kelley et al., 1983). These enduring interconnections are internalized by participants and organized into mental schemas that shape expectations concerning future interactions. The obligatory nature of parent-child relationships fosters expectations of interdependence, and participants come to expect behaviors of each other that maintain the connections between them. Patterns of communication established during childhood are likely to be carried forward into adolescence, but cognitive advances make adolescents realize that the rules of reciprocity and social exchange that govern interactions with friends are not similarly applied to interactions with parents (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Greater autonomy offers adolescents the opportunity to revise interconnections with parents so that they better reflect relationship costs and benefits (Laursen & Bukowski, 1997). The amount of change should vary depending on the degree to which the relationship is perceived to be inequitable. Poor quality relationships may experience difficulty with adjustment of parental control, an upsurge in conflict, and a concomitant decline in closeness as adolescents express a growing dissatisfaction with unequal treatment and unfavorable outcomes. High quality relationships, however, may change little, or even may improve, as participants build on mutually beneficent patterns of exchange and attempt to adjust for past inequities.

Both the individual and the relational perspectives on parent-adolescent relationships emphasize three key features of communication: closeness, which functions as a potential

attractor that helps to maintain connections between family members despite changes in the individuals; conflict, which functions as a potential repellent that creates psychological and physical distance between family members; and parental monitoring, which is closely related to adolescent information management. These features of communication are the features of relationship change most salient to parents (Shearer, Crouter, & McHale, 2005). The remaining sections of our chapter focus on these three relationship features, with particular attention to their implications for communication in the family.

Continuity and Change in Parent-Adolescent Closeness

Closeness refers to the degree to which individuals affect and are affected by each other. Commonly invoked indicators of closeness include affection, cohesion, companionship, interdependence, intimacy, and trust. There is considerable continuity between positive features of relationships during adolescence and those earlier in life, despite the altered patterns of interaction, emotion, and cognition. Around the world, parents and adolescents perceive relationships with one another as warm and supportive (Collins & Repinski, 2001).

Developmental trends. Continuities in parent-child relationships co-exist with significant changes in the amount, content, and perceived meaning of interactions, in expressions of positive and negative affect, and in interpersonal perceptions of participants (Collins & Laursen, 2000). Closeness and intimacy during adolescence are manifest in different forms than in earlier life. Cuddling and extensive joint interactions decline as children mature, but conversations in which information is conveyed and feelings are expressed increase. These adaptations are appropriate responses to the maturity level and changing needs of the adolescent.

Age-related differences in absolute levels of parent-child closeness are well documented. Subjective rankings of closeness and objective measures of interdependence similarly decrease

across the adolescent years. The amount of time parents and adolescents spend together declines in a linear fashion from preadolescence to late adolescence (Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck, & Duckett, 1996). Relative to preadolescents, adolescents perceive less companionship and intimacy with parents and report lower feelings of acceptance by parents and satisfaction with family life (Hill, 1988). Although perceptions of relationships remain generally warm and supportive, perceived parental support decreases from early to middle adolescence but tends to increase again from mid- to late adolescence (De Goede, Branje, & Meeus, 2009). Similar developmental trajectories in warmth and closeness have been found in ethnic minority youth, with some variations in the timing of when closeness declines (Fuligni, 1998).

The quality of relationships at the outset of adolescence is indicative of changes that take place in relationships across adolescents. Mothers and children who report low levels of negativity in early adolescence enjoy sustained high levels of support across adolescence. But for those with initially high levels of negativity, perceived support starts low and drops precipitously (Laursen, DeLay, & Adams, 2010). In a German study, three developmental trajectories of mother-adolescent and father-adolescent relationships were found (Seiffge-Krenke, Overbeek, & Vermulst, 2010). The majority of adolescents showed high and slightly decreasing levels of closeness and stable low levels of conflict, but about one-third of the adolescents reported increasingly negative relationships with parents and about 10 % of the adolescents were characterized by low and decreasing closeness and negative affect.

Reports of age-related diminished closeness may overstate the significance of changes in parent-adolescent relationships because they focus exclusively on change at the level of the group without considering change at the level of the family. When closeness is examined in terms of the rank order of a single family on a particular dimension relative to other families on

the same dimension, a picture of relationship cohesion emerges. For instance, longitudinal data from the Pittsburgh Youth Study revealed moderate to high levels of stability in parent and child reports of positive and negative relationship qualities (Loeber et al., 2000). Indeed, across childhood and adolescence the relative ordering of families on various dimensions of closeness remained fairly constant from one year to the next, even though the mean level of each variable fell. Yet for most youth, parents remain the most influential of all adolescent relationships, shaping most of the important decisions confronting children, even as their authority over mundane details such as attire wanes (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000). These findings suggest a complex dynamic of relationship continuity and change that disprove the conventional view of an abrupt descent into distance and alienation.

Reporter perspectives. Parent and adolescent views of the family are notable for their divergence, particularly during early adolescence. There is more overlap between maternal and paternal reports of their own relationship with an adolescent child and in adolescents' perception of the mother-child and father-child relationships than in the reports of parent and child (Cook & Goldstein, 1983). Whereas parents seem to give greater weight to the distinctiveness of their relationships with children, adolescents' perceptions of parents are more driven by their general view of the family (Branje, Van Aken, & Van Lieshout, 2002). Parents, especially mothers, tend to hold a more optimistic view of the parent-child relationship than adolescents. Mothers routinely report more warmth and affection among family members than do children, which may be an attempt to ward off the decline in maternal life satisfaction that accompanies adolescent detachment (Silverberg & Steinberg, 1990). Mismatches and developmental expectations are highest at the outset of adolescence, and adolescent and parent discrepant views of positive and negative features of their relationship gradually grow more convergent over time (Collins &

Laursen, 2004). It is important not to overstate the significance of perceptual differences. The variance that reporters share, not the variance that is unique to one or another member of the relationship, accounts for associations between parent and adolescent reports of relationship quality and adolescent well-being (Laursen, Furman, & Mooney, 2006).

   Individual differences. Closeness varies from one adolescent to another and from one parent-adolescent pair to another. Adolescents spend more time and are more apt to share feelings with their mothers (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). In contrast, adolescents view fathers as somewhat distant authority figures to be consulted primarily for information and material support. Three possible explanations for these absolute differences are that (a) the predominant paternal role of playmate may become irrelevant and even embarrassing for adolescents, (b) in many cultures men are associated with disciplinary functions, and (c) fathers tend to interact less sensitively with children than mothers (Lewis & Lamb, 2003). Compared to daughters, sons have similarly warm relationships with mothers, but are typically closer to fathers. These trends tend to accelerate across the adolescent years, yet gender differences also have roots in earlier phases of the relationship. One longitudinal study showed that although father involvement during childhood predicted father-adolescent closeness for sons and daughters, these links were stronger for girls than for boys (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002).

   Variation in closeness in the parent-adolescent relationship tends to be associated with family structure. Interparental conflict, divorce, and single-parenthood appear to be related to lower warmth and intimacy (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000; Loeber et al., 2000). These findings suggest problems in the marital system to spillover into the parenting system and thus to affect the parent-child system. Birth order of the adolescent may also affect developmental changes in parent-adolescent closeness. Although both firstborns'

and second-borns' reports of parental warmth declined from early to mid- adolescence, paternal warmth declined less for second-borns than for firstborns, suggesting that fathers learn from their experience with the firstborn child (Shanahan, McHale, Crouter, & Osgood, 2007).

Moreover, higher parent-adolescent closeness is associated with fewer adjustment problems for adolescents. Accumulating evidence suggests that child adjustment problems predict changes in relationship support rather than the other way around (Branje, Hale, & Meeus, 2008; Hafen & Laursen, 2009). Interindividual differences in relationship warmth tend to increase with age, primarily because of increases in the magnitude of genetic effects. These findings suggest that developmental changes in closeness are interpreted as reflecting genotype–environment correlation processes whereby adolescents increasingly influence the parent-child relationship (McGue, Elkins, Walden, & Iacono, 2005).

Implications for family communication. Communication is a core element both of interdependence between family members and their subjective feelings of closeness. Disruptions of established patterns of interaction inevitably mean that parent-adolescent communication will differ in frequency, content, and tenor from that of earlier age periods (Collins & Laursen, 2000). Families differ in the degree to which they are affected by individual and relationship changes. Most are able to capitalize on greater adolescent maturity by fostering patterns of sustained communications that promote a psychological closeness that is less dependent on frequent interactions. They do so by adapting prior interconnections to meet new demands for adolescent autonomy (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Families with a history of communication problems, however, are missing the adaptive interconnections that form the foundation for new forms of closeness during this period of detachment and, thus, may be unable to surmount the barriers to effective communication that arise during adolescence.

Continuity and Change in Parent-Adolescent Conflict

Conflict, defined in terms of disagreement and overt behavioral opposition, is ubiquitous in all close relationships, but it is especially prominent between family members. Surveys of adolescents indicate that disagreements are most common with mothers, followed by siblings, friends, and romantic partners, then fathers. Angry disputes arise more frequently with family members than with close peers (Laursen & Collins, 1994). Most parent-adolescent disagreements concern mundane topics, famously tagged by Hill (1988) as "garbage and galoshes" disputes. Parent-adolescent conflicts usually adhere to a coercive script: Relative to those with friends, disagreements with parents more often involve a combination of power assertive resolutions, neutral or angry affect, and win-lose outcomes (Adams & Laursen, 2001). Reflecting the asymmetry in power, the majority of disagreements between parents and adolescents end through compromise or win-loss resolutions; standoff is relatively rare (Recchia, Ross, & Vickar, 2010).

Developmental trends. Until recently conflict with parents was thought to follow an inverted-U shaped function that peaked during mid-adolescence, but meta-analytic methods revealed that this presumed trend was an artifact of the failure to distinguish quantity from affective tenor (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998). The evidence indicates a decline in the frequency of conflict with parents from early adolescence to late adolescence. However, anger in these conflicts increases from early adolescence to mid-adolescence, with little change thereafter. Longitudinal studies suggest an inverted U-shaped development of conflict intensity (De Goede et al., 2009).

No reliable age differences have been found in topics or outcomes of parent-adolescent conflict, but there is some indication that resolutions may change across the adolescent years, with rates of submission declining and rates of disengagement increasing (Smetana, Daddis, &

Chuang, 2003). Conflict management in the parent-adolescent relationship changes in favor of a more horizontal relationship. From early to middle adolescence, adolescents increasingly use positive problem solving and withdrawal, although their use of negative conflict management with mothers temporarily increases as well. Parents use less negative conflict management over time, and fathers increasingly use positive problem solving and withdrawal (van Doorn, Branje, & Meeus, 2011). The goals of conflicts change with age as well: older adolescents report more dominance and emotional support goals and less instrumental goals than younger adolescents. This possibly reflects their stronger metacognitive abilities and their increasing infuriation with maternal restraints in a relationship that is expected to become more egalitarian (Lundell, Grusec, McShane, & Davidov, 2008).

Reporter perspectives. Parents and adolescents are known to experience their relationships in dramatically different terms. Adolescents appear to have a more accurate (or more honest) view than parents of unpleasant aspects of the relationship. When it comes to describing family conflict, reports from independent observers frequently match those of adolescent children, but neither observer nor adolescent reports accord with parent reports of the same events (Gonzales, Caucé, & Mason, 1996). Particularly mothers tend to underestimate the incidence of parent-adolescent conflict, but at the same time they overestimate its severity (Steinberg, 2001). Not coincidentally, mothers also report the most negative repercussions from conflict with adolescent children (Silverberg & Steinberg, 1990). Chief explanations for these findings are that (a) mothers experience conflict as a personal failure, because it is an indictment of their ability to serve as family conciliators and peacemakers (Vuchinich, 1987), and (b) conflict is the primary vehicle through which adolescents renegotiate their role in the family, which inevitably diminishes maternal (but not necessarily paternal) authority (Steinberg, 1989).

The fact that parent and child reports of conflict appear to converge during late adolescence suggests that disagreements, however unpleasant they may be, play an important role in aligning expectations and facilitating communication among family members (Collins, Laursen, Mortensen, Luebker, & Ferreira,, 1997).

Individual differences. Parent-child conflict behavior and patterns of developmental change may be moderated by characteristics of individual participants, such as gender and puberty, and characteristics of the family, such as family structure and climate. Accumulating evidence shows that conflict and negative affect are higher in mother-daughter relationships than in other parent-child relationships (Laursen & Collins, 1994). A meta-analysis revealed that conflict rates decline more across adolescence in mother-child relationships than in father-child relationships (Laursen et al., 1998), but gender does not moderate developmental trends in conflict affect. Conflict resolutions vary as a function of parent and adolescent gender. Compromise is more common with mothers than with fathers and disengagement and giving in are more typical of conflict with sons than of conflict with daughters (Smetana et al., 2003; Vuchinich, 1987). Again, there is no reliable evidence that gender moderates patterns of developmental change.

Variation attributed to puberty may be parsed into two sources: pubertal status and pubertal timing. Pubertal status refers to the child's absolute level of physical maturation. Meta-analytic comparisons yield a small positive linear association between pubertal status and parent-adolescent conflict affect such that greater maturity is linked to greater negative affect (Laursen et al., 1998). Conflict frequency was not related to pubertal status. Pubertal timing refers to the child's relative level of physical maturation. Early maturing sons and daughters appear to experience more frequent and more intense parent-child conflict than adolescents maturing on-

time (Steinberg, 1989). Several explanations for these findings have been offered, most suggesting that parents do not agree with children that physical precocity is a sufficient basis for enhanced autonomy. In general, the effects of pubertal timing on parent-adolescent conflict are larger and more robust than those for pubertal status (Laursen & Collins, 1994).

Furthermore, conflict behavior may be moderated by characteristics of the family. Although on average parent-child conflicts may be more frequent in adolescence than in other periods of life, only a small portion of parent-adolescent dyads have frequent and angry disagreements (Branje, van Doorn, van der Valk, & Meeus, 2009) and the most conflictual parent-adolescent dyads had more problematic relationships in childhood as well (Smetana, 2008). Whether and how conflicts are resolved may be more important than the occurrence of conflicts. Most conflicts between parents and children do not have a long-term negative impact on the relationship (Van Doorn, Branje, Hox, & Meeus, 2009), but chronic fighting with negative conflict management strategies has been linked to adolescent maladjustment (Branje et al., 2009). One important study illustrates how the impact of conflict varies across parent-adolescent relationships. High levels of conflict predicted poor outcomes regardless of relationships quality, but moderate amounts of conflict may be beneficial for those whose relationships are good (Adams & Laursen, 2007). When adolescents reporting no conflicts with mothers and fathers are compared to those reporting an average number of conflicts, the latter had higher school grades if they were in better but not poorer quality relationships and reported more withdrawal if they were in poorer but not better quality relationships.

As with closeness, birth order is another moderating factor in developmental changes in parent-adolescent conflict. In line with a spillover model, changes in relationships between firstborn children and parents dictate the timing of changes in relationships between later born

children and parents, so that elevation in parent-adolescent conflict frequency is timed to

firstborns' transition to adolescence for both first- and secondborns (Shanahan, McHale, Osgood,

& Crouter, 2007). These findings may be explained by sibling modeling and imitation, a general

increase in family conflict during firstborns' transition to adolescence, or a parental desire to

avoid differential treatment.

　　　　Implications for family communication. Almost 40 years ago, Bandura (1964) argued

against the impression that adolescence brought about a precipitous upsurge in parent-child

conflict. Instead, difficulties in parent-adolescent relationships are lawfully related to, and

consistent with, difficulties in pre-adolescent relationships. Although many families experience a

modest uptick in conflict at the outset of adolescence, conflict during adolescence may actually

strengthens the parent-child relationship by providing a much-needed vehicle for communication

(Laursen & Collins, 1994). Disagreements offer parents and adolescents a forum for revising

expectations and renegotiating roles and responsibilities in a manner commensurate with the

autonomy typically accorded to youth in a particular culture (Collins et al., 1997). Most families

successfully meet this challenge because they are able to draw on healthy patterns of

communication established in response to the challenges of earlier age periods. However, families

who do not learn to communicate effectively when children are young are at risk for dysfunctional

discord during adolescence because these families may be incapable of constructively addressing

the developmental challenges of autonomy and the transformations in parent-child relationships

that accompany it.

Continuity and Change in Parental Monitoring and Adolescent Information Management

　　　　Adolescents spend most of their daily leisure time in activities with peers that go unsupervised

by adults. Monitoring of adolescents' leisure activities, such as structuring the child's environment

and tracking the child's behavior, has long been considered as an important way for parents to remain informed about adolescents' activities and whereabouts (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). Recent studies that operationalized control as behavioral control instead of parental knowledge suggested, however, that parental knowledge results from adolescent spontaneous disclosure of information more than from parental active soliciting for information or behavioral control (Keijsers, Frijns, Branje, & Meeus, 2009; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Thus, disclosure of information by the adolescent seems to enable parental supervision. These mixed findings are comprehensible when one considers that parental control is incompatible with one of the major developmental tasks in adolescence: to become an autonomous and independent individual (Blos, 1979). In this chapter, we will distinguish parental solicitation for information, parental control, and adolescent disclosure as information management activities that allow parents to keep track of and acquire knowledge about adolescents' lives and activities.

Developmental trends. The stage-environment fit perspective (Eccles, 1991) emphasizes that levels of parental control and regulation should match adolescents' developmental needs. Parents need to find an optimal balance between parental control and support for autonomy. As adolescents get older, they experience an increasing need for privacy, independence, and autonomy and consider it less legitimate for parents to exert control over things they consider their personal jurisdiction (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). Parents gradually relax their control as adolescents get older (Keijsers et al., 2009), although parents' soliciting for information, which is a less intrusive way of being involved in adolescents' lives, tends to remain stable. Most parents thus respect the growing need for autonomy of their child and use less intrusive ways to acquire knowledge about the whereabouts and activities of their aging child, resulting in a lower level of parental knowledge as adolescents get older (Loeber et al., 2000).

Adolescents are also active agents in claiming autonomy by strategically withholding information from parents about their activities and whereabouts. By not disclosing to their parents, adolescents have the power to undermine parental control and create a more egalitarian distribution of power in the relationship. Adolescents increasingly consider information as private or personal and legitimate to withhold from their parents (Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006). With age, they disclose less to their parents and increasingly have secrets from their parents (Keijsers et al., 2009; Keijsers, Branje, Frijns, Finkenauer, & Meeus, 2010). This type of information management plays a facilitating role in gaining autonomy, but also may damage mutual trust and understanding in the parent-child relationship (Finkenauer, Engels, & Kubacka, 2008). Adolescents thus have to optimize their information management towards parents to reach a balance between independence and connectedness to parents.

Reporter perspectives. Adolescents and their parents are known to have discrepant expectations regarding the timing of transitions in authority, autonomy, and responsibilities. Adolescents would like their autonomy to increase more rapidly than parents wish (Collins et al., 1997), and parents think adolescents are more obligated to disclose to them than adolescents themselves think (Smetana, Metzger, et al., 2006). These different expectations are reflected in divergent perceptions: Adolescents report lower levels of disclosure to parents and a stronger decline in disclosure than parents do, and strikingly, they also report lower levels of parental control and parental solicitation for information than parents do (Keijsers et al., 2009). Possible explanations for these findings are (a) the generational stake, or the tendency for adolescents to emphasize autonomy and for parents to emphasize continuity in relationships (Bengston, Schaie, & Burton, 1995) and (b) adolescents become increasingly proficient in managing personal information, making it increasingly difficult for parents to recognize what they don't know.

In addition to the divergent reports of adolescents versus parents, accumulating evidence shows that mothers report higher levels of adolescent disclosure and parental solicitation and control than fathers do (Keijsers et al., 2009). Although adolescents also report more disclosure to mothers than to fathers, mothers tend to overestimate adolescents' disclosure to a greater extent than fathers do (Smetana, Metzger, et al., 2006). These findings may reflect the greater involvement of mothers in parenting of adolescent children compared to fathers (Lewis & Lamb, 2003). A study that showed that fathers have more knowledge about their children when mothers work longer hours (Crouter, Helms-Erikson, Updegraff, & McHale, 1999) suggests that when fathers increase their involvement, adolescent disclosure and paternal control may also increase.

Individual differences. Developmental changes in parental monitoring and adolescent information management may depend on characteristics of individual participants, such as gender of the adolescent. Accumulating evidence suggests gender differences in the development of absolute levels of monitoring, disclosure, and secrecy, with stronger decreases in monitoring knowledge and stronger increases in secrecy for boys (Keijsers et al., 2010; Laird, Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 2003). The effects on relationship quality tend to differ for boys and girls as well. For example, secrecy and relationship quality were longitudinally and bidirectionally related in girls but not in boys (Keijsers et al., 2010). These findings underscore that connectedness, intimacy, and reciprocity in the parent-child relationship are more central in the development of girls than in the development of boys (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Compared to boys, girls may experience higher relational costs of secrecy that do not outweigh the benefits of secrecy in the form of higher autonomy, and girls may therefore more often choose to reveal personal information.

Monitoring behavior and disclosure may also be moderated by characteristics of the parent-child dyad and by family structure. Especially in families with a positive family climate in which

children feel supported by their parents, adolescents are more likely to understand high parental control as privacy invasive or excessively controlling (Hawk, Hale, Raaijmakers, & Meeus, 2008; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Adolescents from authoritative homes are also more likely to disclose and less likely to lie (Darling, Cumsille, Caldwell, & Dowdy, 2006). This differential effect of parental control under different emotional family climates suggest that the merits of parental control have been overestimated, and that excessive levels can be interpreted as developmentally inappropriate parenting. Regarding family structure, single-parent families report lower monitoring knowledge and less monitoring than families with two biological parents present in the household (Laird, Pettit, Dodge & Bates, 2003; Loeber et al., 2000).

Implications for family communication. Adolescents have an increasing need for autonomy and parent-child communication needs to change to meet these changing needs. Driven by the increasing need for autonomy and independence, adolescents establish boundaries around information they consider personal and want to keep secret (Finkenauer et al., 2008), and as they get older they disclose less to parents about their whereabouts and activities. Parents tend to gradually relax control during adolescence, suggesting that parents generally acknowledge their child's increasing need for autonomy and collaborate in creating a more egalitarian relationship (Laursen & Bukowski, 1997). By establishing a positive family climate, parents can create an environment in which adolescents are willing to disclose information about their personal lives, thereby enabling parents to guide and support their adolescent and to stimulate adolescent well-being. Parents who use intrusive levels of control will likely elicit adolescent secrecy and inhibit healthy autonomy development and individuation.

Conclusions

This brief, selective review underscores several principles of parent-child communication

during adolescence and points the way to areas of inquiry requiring greater attention.

Relationships do not operate in a vacuum. Youth who have better quality relationships with parents also tend to have better quality relationships with friends (De Goede, Branje, Delsing, & Meeus, 2010), and youth who receive similarly high levels of support from friends and parents are better adjusted than those with differing levels of relationship support (e.g., Laursen, Furman, & Mooney, 2006). Findings such as these suggest that greater attention must be given to adolescent relationship networks. Parent-adolescent relationships are known to differ as a function of characteristics of the family and the environment, including culture and ethnicity, household structure, and socioeconomic status (see Laursen & Collins, 2009, for review). Some contextual variables, such as differences in family communication related to parental divorce and remarriage, are beginning to come into focus (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002), but other critical variables, such as ethnic group (García Coll & Pachter, 2002) and social class differences (Hoff, Laursen, & Tardiff, 2002), remain poorly understood. A better understanding of these differences is essential because differences resulting from circumstances of economic disadvantage and experiences as members of minority groups almost certainly affect responses to the changes of adolescence. Greater attention to contextual processes is imperative because it may very well be the case that normative adolescent development encompasses several different pathways of parent-child relationship transformation that vary as a function of environmental demands (Collins et al., 2000). We anticipate this research will reveal differences across settings in typical patterns of communication and control but similarities in pathways of influence such that families emphasizing mutuality, respect for the child's opinions, and training for maturity will be most effective in helping adolescents develop attitudes and behaviors appropriate to their society.

      Three principles of family communication stand out from our review. First, the vagaries

of communication are deeply embedded in qualities of the parent-adolescent relationship. Some differences between communication during adolescence and communication during childhood reflect physical and cognitive development, as well as normative psychosocial changes in autonomy striving. Other differences, however, reflect the ability of the family to cope with the developmental demands of adolescence. As families adapt long-standing expectations and interaction patterns to maturational changes in the child, communication typically falters for a time and then recovers much of its accustomed fluency, albeit in more adult forms. Second, despite significant changes in communication during the adolescent years, most families experience a reassuring continuity in their emotional bonds. Relative to families with a history of communication difficulties, those families that enter adolescence with a history of positive, responsive communication appear to experience fewer disruptions in communication and cope more constructively with those disruptions. In this manner, families that build upon prior successful developmental transitions handle the demands of adolescence by revising communication patterns in a manner appropriate for incipiently adult offspring. Third, parent-adolescent conflict is normative, and fosters communication that is integral to necessary realignments of relationship roles. This constructive process is most likely to occur when conflicts are neither extreme nor persistent and when they arise in a warm and close relationship. The successful ability of most parent-adolescent dyads to balance conflict, closeness, and information management during this period of relationship transformation reaffirms the integral role of communication in human functioning.

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