Family Relationships

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KEYWORDS

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- Behavioral Control
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- Family Values
- Interparental Conflict
- Parent-Adolescent Conflict
- Parenting
- Psychological Control
- Remarriage
- Siblings
- Warmth

GLOSSARY WORDS

Attachment: A lengthy, selective, emotionally meaningful tie to a primary caregiver that functions as a source of comfort and security for children in times of fear or distress.

Boundaries: Characteristic rules and ways of exchanging resources, information, and materials within and across family relationships.

Deidentification: Attempts by an individual to establish their identity, skills, and interests as distinct from those of their siblings.

Diathesis-stress model: A developmental framework that considers the reciprocal influence of diatheses (i.e., intrapersonal attributes), such as temperament, attributional styles, or genotype, and stresses (i.e., environmental pressures), such as parenting, parent-adolescent relationship attributes, or the family context, in influencing individual development.

Family systems theory: A framework for understanding interpersonal processes within the family as a function of the interaction between multiple subsystems (e.g., parent-adolescent relationship, marital relationship) in the context of broader patterns of functioning in the family as a whole.

Familism: A cultural value typically associated with Latino families that underscores the importance of prioritizing family concerns and goals over the interests of the individual.

Filial piety: A cultural value typically associated with Confucianism and Chinese families prioritizing obligation to respect and obey elders and to defer to the broader family agenda.

Internal working models (Representations): A mental model or set of expectations and beliefs developed as a function of the history of interactions within interpersonal relationships that organize how the individual processes and interprets subsequent experiences, guiding future emotions and behaviors in similar contexts.

Parent-child coercive process: A multi-sequence interaction whereby parents attempt to reduce child misbehavior by issuing a directive, threat, or command, followed by the child's responding escalation of misbehavior, and culminating in a reciprocally escalating cycle of negativity which ends in parent capitulation, ultimately reinforcing child misbehavior.

Psychological autonomy: The internal feeling of responsibility for and ability to independently govern one's own thoughts, feelings, and opinions

Triangulation: A pattern of family relationships whereby two family members form an alliance or coalition against another family member.

PARAGRAPH SYNOPSIS

While no longer considered a period of unassailable “storm and stress”, scientists today recognize adolescence as posing unique challenges for the family. Parents, siblings, and extended family remain important sources of support as teens move through adolescence even as family members face changing roles and expectations. The overarching goal of this chapter is to provide a synopsis of the scientific knowledge on family relations in adolescence. Coverage of the research findings is organized so as to systematically address how the nature and quality of multiple family relationships, including the parent-adolescent, interparental, sibling, and extended family relationships, can inform an understanding of adolescent psychological development. Although cognizant of the diversity of approaches to studying the family in adolescence, the chapter focuses on the family as an interacting unit with each relationship contributing to adolescent development in the context of the broader family system.

BODY OF CHAPTER: FAMILY RELATIONS

The Family during Adolescence

Historical descriptions of adolescence recount a period of "storm and stress", crippling family conflict, and an insurmountable gap between generations. Today, research within normally developing families tempers recognition of the unique challenges of adolescence with the knowledge that a majority of teens continue to feel close and supported by family members and three-fourths of families move through this period with few lasting difficulties. Nonetheless, adolescence represents an important transition period in the life cycle of the family. Biological and psychological changes in the adolescent engender alterations in the expectations of each member's role in the family, leading to a renegotiation of interpersonal relationships. The role of the family in the social network of teens may change as well, with most adolescents spending increasingly less time with family members and more time with peers. Despite changing roles and influences, relationships within the multiple subsystems of the family commonly serve as significant sources of support and stress for teens.

The overarching goal of this chapter is to provide a synopsis of the scientific knowledge on family relations in adolescence. Accordingly, the chapter is designed to systematically address how the nature and quality of specific family relationships (i.e., parent-adolescent, interparental, sibling, extended family) can inform an understanding of adolescent psychological development, with a focus on how the family as an interacting unit operates to facilitate changing family roles and dynamics. Although there is a multitude of different approaches to studying the family in adolescence, a common underlying theme is the characterization of the teen years as a time of transition and plasticity for both the individual and the family. In this context, adolescence is a

developmental period that is ripe with the prospects of healthy change and growth but also the potential for heightened vulnerability to psychological difficulties.

The Parent-Adolescent Relationship

The parent-adolescent relationship remains one of the most studied areas of inquiry within adolescent development. Despite changes in their roles and responsibilities as socialization figures, parents typically remain important sources of guidance and support. While teens' autonomy increases, parenting during adolescence is by no means an easy task. Adolescents experience a myriad of stressful life events, developmental challenges, and increases in susceptibility to many forms of psychopathology (e.g., depression). At the same time, this period corresponds with low points in parental life and marital satisfaction. In spite of these many changes, teens continue to view the parent-adolescent relationship as the most important in their social network and parents as primary sources of affection, esteem, and intimacy across adolescence. The following sections describe primary parameters of the parent-adolescent relationship and their role in shaping the health and development of teens.

The Role of Child-Rearing Styles in Adolescent Development

Although scientific approaches to characterizing child-rearing styles differ, there is a general consensus among scientists that the broad characteristics of parenting can be parsimoniously differentiated into overarching constructs of warmth and control. Whereas warmth is commonly characterized by indicators of parental acceptance, emotional availability and support, sensitivity, and responsiveness to children's needs, control reflects attempts by parents to manage children's behaviors. Awareness of the distinct nature of these parenting dimensions has further advanced our understanding of the adolescent sequelae of parenting behavior. Although these two broad dimensions are both integral components of a broader parenting style, warmth

and control have consistently been shown to be unique prognosticators of adolescent mental health outcomes.

Warmth

Children typically report modest declines in appraisals of warmth and closeness with parents from childhood to adolescence. However, these declines occur largely within the context of continuity in the degree of positive emotion and support within the parent-child relationship across this period. In fact, in illustrating the continued importance of parental warmth, research consistently demonstrates that higher levels of warmth predict a wide array of positive indices of adolescent adjustment including harmonious peer relationships, academic competence, social adjustment, higher self-esteem, and lower risk for psychopathology. Conversely, forms of maltreatment characterized by neglect or emotional, physical, or sexual abuse commonly reflect severe perturbations in the availability of parental warmth and support. These experiences substantially increase adolescent vulnerability to aggression, delinquency, depression, and anxiety problems, as well as difficulties (e.g., violence) within their peer and romantic relationships. Although often discussed by researchers as if it were a unidimensional construct, warmth refers to a complex constellation of behaviors that are relatively distinct in their properties and characteristics. Research specifically indicates that relationships between various dimensions of the overarching warmth construct (e.g., praise, involvement, calm discussion of disagreements, proactive teaching) are often modest in magnitude and differentially predict forms of adolescent functioning.

In addressing the question of why warmth is lawfully associated with adolescent functioning, significant progress has been made in identifying the mechanisms that mediate or explain the developmental consequences of parental warmth. For example, various indices of warmth (e.g.,

responsiveness to distress) signal that the parent-child relationship is a safe and supportive resource for adolescents to effectively regulate negative emotions. A warm and supportive relationship provides a training ground for the development of deeper emotional understanding as adolescents hone their ability to recognize and produce the emotional displays necessary for effective interpersonal communication and to comprehend the causes and meaning of emotions. Higher levels of emotional competence, in turn, are thought to provide teens with effective building blocks for success in extrafamilial contexts, particularly in managing the salient developmental tasks of establishing and maintaining reciprocal, close friendships and romantic relationships. Reflecting the importance of multiple mediating mechanisms, research has also identified pathways in which high levels of parental rejection and diminished warmth foster negative appraisals and attribution styles within the parent-child relationship that are subsequently used as a blueprint or lens for processing peer events and relationships in hostile ways. These proclivities toward hostile evaluations and response tendencies have been shown to increase adolescent vulnerability to poor peer relationships, aggression, social isolation, and depression.

Control

Consistent with the conceptualization of warmth, control is a broad construct that encompasses different parental approaches to managing adolescent behavior through parental communication of rules of conduct, monitoring child activities, and the enforcement of rules with discipline. Researchers have identified two main classes of control that differ qualitatively in their composition and developmental consequences for adolescents: behavioral control and psychological control.

Greater behavioral control is characterized by monitoring or supervising the activities and

whereabouts of teens and enforcing rules through consistent punishment that is tailored to the nature of the transgression and is accompanied by parental constructive communication of its consequences. Higher levels of monitoring and consistent, measured punishment have each been associated with teens' ability to better regulate their behaviors and emotions. In contrast, lax monitoring and inconsistent discipline indicative of low behavioral control is a robust precursor of adolescent delinquency, conduct problems, and risky behavior (e.g., precocious and unsafe sexual activity, substance use).

Scientific attention is now increasingly focused on understanding why behavioral control is associated with adolescent adjustment by identifying how moment-to-moment disciplinary actions coalesce into more organized and stable behavioral, cognitive, and affective-motivational patterns that ultimately contribute to adolescent mental health outcomes. For example, a key mechanism accounting for links between low levels of behavioral control and teen problems is the parent-child coercive process. In the first step of this multi-sequence process, parents issue a directive, threat, or command in an attempt to gain child compliance or reduce misbehavior. In the second step, the child escalates misbehavior which, in some cases, results in escalating, reciprocal negativity within the dyad. However, as the child continues to escalate the behavior, parents may capitulate, resulting in the negative reinforcement of misbehavior. Although the parent-child coercive process represents a potent risk factor across developmental periods, it may assume particular salience during adolescence. With growing physical stature, desire for autonomy, and more sophisticated social-cognitive abilities, many adolescents begin to challenge parental authority with added frequency and persistence, increasing the likelihood that parents will abdicate power.

As another primary strategy for controlling children's behavior, parental use of psychological

control consists of techniques that are designed to gain child compliance and cooperation by negatively manipulating and exploiting the parent-child emotional relationship. Parental psychological control can be manifested in several ways in interactions with teens, including the frequent withdrawal of love, induction of guilt, discounting the feelings and perspective of the child, and domineering approaches that limit child expressiveness and autonomy (e.g., power-assertive lecturing, intrusiveness, over-protectiveness, interrupting, personal attacks). Even after taking into account levels of parental behavioral control, psychological control has been shown to be a significant predictor of adolescents' psychological problems. Although psychological control is most consistently related to adolescent internalizing (e.g., anxiety, depression, eating disorders) symptoms, dimensions of psychological control also predict a wide array of other adjustment problems including delinquency, low academic achievement, substance use, and physical complaints. In attempting to address why psychological control poses a risk for adolescents, researchers have identified several potential explanatory mechanisms. Current directions include delineating how this profile of negatively manipulating the parent-child bond instills (1) negative self-appraisals evidenced by poor self-worth, helplessness, and low self-confidence, (2) prolonged bouts of self-blame, guilt, and excessive worry about the self and the family, and (3) ways of coping that rely on dependence, inhibition, and submissiveness. These evolved patterns, in turn, are thought to increasingly broaden and crystallize into emotional problems that are stable across time and context.

Higher Order Profiles of Parenting

The documented significance of parental warmth and control for understanding trajectories of teen adjustment has also led to progress in identifying higher order typologies of parenting that encompass assessments of both dimensions. <Figure 1 near here> Figure 1 provides an

illustration of a common formulation of the four-fold parenting typology produced by integrating these dimensions. Authoritative parents, who exhibit high levels of warmth and control, are not only supportive and responsive but establish firm behavioral guidelines, monitor adolescents' conduct, engage them in decision-making while still maintaining their role as an authority figure, and flexibly adapt their child-rearing goals to fit the changing developmental needs of their teen (e.g., granting increasing autonomy to adolescents as they get older). Extensive research over the past several decades supports authoritative parenting as protecting adolescents against the risk of developing psychopathology and promoting higher academic achievement, social competence, and higher self-esteem. A key benefit of authoritative parenting resides in the support of psychological autonomy; a process characterized by parental guidance and support of adolescent attempts to evaluate and solve problems in an increasingly independent way. Because teens experience increasing cognitive growth, identity development, and social understanding during this period, encouraging self-reliance in the context of a warm and accepting relationship is an important protective factor against later adjustment problems.

Compared to those growing up with authoritative parents, adolescents who experience the other three profiles of parenting are at greater risk for adjustment problems. Indulgent or permissive parenting characterized by high levels of warmth without consistent enforcement of guidelines of conduct (e.g., little or no discipline) predict adolescent problems with self regulation, poor academic performance, impulsivity, rebelliousness, and aggressiveness. In contrast, authoritarian parents exhibit a profile of child-rearing characterized by little warmth and support, strict and inflexible rules, unilateral disciplinary decision-making, and harsh punishment for misconduct. Although the adolescents of authoritarian parents may exhibit lower levels of conduct problems in the short-term, they do exhibit higher levels of fearfulness, mood

difficulties, aimlessness, and unfriendly and passively hostile interpersonal relationships, particularly within middle-class community samples. Finally, the adolescents of uninvolved parents, who are low in both warmth and control, exhibit the widest array of difficulties, including lack of self control, low self-esteem, internalizing and externalizing symptoms, and poor social and academic competence.

Against the backdrop of distinct associations between parenting typologies and adolescent psychological adjustment, there is an increasing empirical documentation of considerable heterogeneity in the outcomes of adolescents exposed to similar parenting styles. To better understand sources of variability in the outcomes of teens, researchers have identified various contextual factors that alter the way parenting impacts adolescent adjustment. For example, in neighborhoods characterized by high rates of crime, violence, gang activity, and illegal drug use, authoritarian profiles of parenting including tough enforcement of rules and strict demands for unquestioned obedience may actually be adaptive in protecting adolescents from external dangers they do not yet fully comprehend. Consistent with the role of ecological contexts as moderators of parenting styles, maternal restrictive control is related to poorer academic performance for adolescents living in safe neighborhoods, but better academic performance for adolescents living in dangerous neighborhoods.

The Role of Reciprocal and Dyadic Relationship Processes in Adolescent Development

Although parenting assumes a significant role in the lives of adolescents, teens are not simply passive recipients of these socialization processes. Rather, in reflecting reciprocal influences between adolescent and parent functioning over time, the consensus is that adolescents actively interpret, react to, and evoke changes in parents' behavior and socialization goals. For example, research supports the notion that parents tend to respond to the emergence or intensification of

child conduct problems by increasing authoritarian methods of discipline in the short-term. However, difficulties controlling and managing these behavior problems may eventually cause distressed parents to become increasingly disengaged and tolerant of misbehavior as they progressively abdicate their role as disciplinarians. Illustrating another way in which adolescents actively contribute to their development in the context of parenting, research indicates that the ways in which teens process and appraise the parent-child relationship can alter the effectiveness of parents as socialization agents. For example, adolescent perceptions of parents as warm and supportive figures has been shown to increase the effectiveness of parental discipline strategies by increasing teen identification with and motivation to internalize parental values. The following sections illustrate how transactions between adolescents and parents operate within two particularly salient family contexts: parent-adolescent conflict processes and attachment relationships.

Parent-Adolescent Conflict Processes

Reciprocity between parents and adolescents is particularly evident in the context of research on parent-adolescent conflict. Adolescence is typically characterized by moderate levels of conflict, although this may vary depending on the conflict property examined and the developmental level of the adolescent. For example, conflict frequency in parent-child relationships normatively increases and peaks during early adolescence, whereas the emotional intensity of conflicts continues to rise and peak in middle adolescence. Increases in conflict during adolescence have been associated with pubertal changes signaling increasing maturity, adolescent attempts to establish a more egalitarian role in decision-making, and advances in sociocognitive abilities that lead to increasing desire and ability to engage parents. However, it has been estimated that parents and teens engage in intense, prolonged, and unhealthy conflict in

only about 20% of American families. For most, conflicts are relatively short-lived, mild in intensity, and revolve around everyday issues (e.g., chores, personal habits, school work).

In addressing why conflict increases during this period, social-cognitive research indicates that parent-adolescent conflict is a product of differences in the ways in which teens and parents reason about particular issues. Parents and adolescents generally agree that decisions involving personal safety (e.g., drug use), moral standards (e.g., lying to or stealing), and the enforcement of social convention (e.g., calling parents by their first names) are ultimately under parental jurisdiction, while personal issues (e.g., friends, extracurricular activities) are outside the domain of parental authority. Rather, the source of the majority of parent-teen disagreements is rooted in multifaceted issues that can be interpreted as either personal or conventional (e.g., cleaning one's bedroom, clothing choices, school work). Teens largely view these everyday issues as matters of personal choice while parents view them as issues of social convention and reflective of their ability to teach their child to operate within commonly accepted social guidelines. Thus, conflict most commonly results from the clash between parents' and adolescents' differing perceptions of the scope of parental authority over these multifaceted issues. Individual differences in adolescent desires for autonomy, parental willingness to increase their teen's scope of autonomy, and adolescent perceptions of the parent-child relationship each contribute to the frequency and intensity of parent-adolescent conflict.

Under normative conditions, these conflicts are generally not harmful and may even promote adolescent development. For adolescents who generally remain engaged, attentive, and sensitive to parental perspectives, actively participating in reciprocal exchanges that involve opposing viewpoints and even mild, well-regulated negative affect provide adolescents with opportunities to further develop interpersonal coping strategies, social skills, and critical thinking

abilities. Furthermore, parent-adolescent conflicts provide a foundation for the important adolescent task of negotiating greater autonomy in their decision-making without undermining their emotional closeness with parents. By the same token, multiple destructive forms of parent-adolescent conflict have also been identified by researchers. Openly hostile disagreements in which adolescents exhibit high levels of escalating hostility, criticism, dysregulated negative affect, and overt challenges to parental authority that fall outside the scope of personal or multifaceted issues are associated with a wide range of internalizing and externalizing problems. Still other adolescents may, on the surface, appear well-behaved and exhibit heightened concern for the parental perspective (e.g., actively listening to parents, asking for parental opinion). However, when this obliging style is also accompanied by little or no assertion of their own perspective and passive, premature acquiescence to the parental viewpoint, adolescents are more likely to experience poor social competence, low self-esteem, anxiety, and depressive symptoms.

Attachment Relationships

The value of capturing the reciprocal and dyadic nature of the relationship between parents and adolescents is further reflected in research on parent-adolescent attachment relationships. The attachment relationship is defined as a lengthy, selective, emotionally meaningful tie to a primary caregiver that functions as a source of comfort and security for children. Within this relationship, children's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are organized in a way that is designed to elicit the support and protection of caregivers under conditions of perceived internal (e.g., fatigue, physical illness) or external (e.g., angry adults, novel or challenging social situations) sources of distress or threat. Although effectively utilizing the parent-child relationship as a haven of security is a developmental task that first becomes prominent during infancy, the parent-child attachment relationship continues to be an important source of support in times of

need for adolescents.

A history of parental sensitivity and responsiveness to distress during childhood has been shown to predict subsequent secure attachment relationships, characterized by teens' confidence in their parents as sources of protection as they navigate the many stresses and challenges of adolescence. Expectations of parental support and protection provide a secure base from which adolescents are able to gradually develop autonomy, foster a natural motivation to explore and learn about the world, fuel a sense of efficacy, and build upon the interpersonal skills necessary to establish and maintain affiliative relationships with peers. Conversely, child-rearing patterns characterized by high levels of emotional disengagement, rejection, and psychological control have been shown to reduce adolescents' confidence in parents as sources of protection and support. Within these insecure relationships, teens harbor pessimistic expectations about their ability to successfully enlist parents as supportive figures and, as a result, exhibit behaviors reflecting a reluctance to turn to parents in times of need. Consequently, insecure adolescent-parent attachment relationships commonly increase adolescents' risk for developing psychopathology and poor psychological adjustment by sapping them of their motivation to master the physical and social environment, constraining their autonomy, undermining their ability to use external and internal resources to regulate emotions, and increasing their proclivity to interpret other interpersonal relationships (e.g., friendships, peers) in negative, hostile ways.

In conclusion, parenting processes and the reciprocal transactions evident in attachment and conflict in the parent-adolescent relationship are pivotal factors for understanding the development of adolescents. Given its developmental significance, it is not surprising to find that the parent-adolescent relationship constitutes the largest area of scientific inquiry in the study of family relationships in adolescence. Nevertheless, it is not the only family relationship that has

the potential to impact the lives of adolescents. Therefore, we now turn to understanding how the interparental relationship, or the relationship between parents, can also serve as a significant socialization force in adolescent development.

The Interparental Relationship

The prevalence of divorce, remarriage, and premarital childbearing in contemporary society has contributed to the diversity in the structural characteristics of families. Thus, adolescents today vary widely in their experience of different relationship arrangements between parents. Research examining the developmental implications of different family structures has documented that the experience of interparental relationship instability in the form of separation, divorce, multiple relationship transitions (e.g., divorce followed by remarriage), and single parenthood place adolescents at risk for psychological problems, including academic difficulties, poor social competence, emotional problems, and delinquency.

Nevertheless, it is important not to over-pathologize the risk associated with these forms of interparental relationship instability, as the magnitude of risk tends to be relatively modest or weak in magnitude. Thus, many teens who experience divorce, single parenthood, or other transitions in the interparental relationship structure will develop along trajectories that are relatively indistinguishable from teens of parents who remain together. Several initial scientific inquiries into the nature of the risk posed by interparental relationship dissolution proposed that the physical absence of a parent and the loss of family income were the primary mechanisms underlying adolescent difficulties. Although these factors may play some role in increasing adolescent vulnerability, they are not the only or even primary mechanisms. For example, researchers found that adolescents from step-families display just as many, if not more, problems than those residing in single-parent homes despite the benefit of two parents and dual incomes.

Similarly, youth from single-parent homes who never experienced divorce but who have either lost a parent due to death or whose parents never married have fewer problems compared to their peers from divorced or remarried families. In searching for other operative mechanisms, researchers have subsequently found that the emotional tenor and quality of the interparental relationship is a pivotal factor in understanding how adolescents adjust to different types of family structures. As a primary cornerstone of the family, how parents approach stress, conflict, and challenges in the interparental relationship has important and lasting implications for the welfare of teens. Thus, scientists now generally agree that structural perturbations in the family (e.g., divorce, separation) serve as rough proxies of patterns of destructive interparental relationship properties that play more proximal roles in the development of adolescent adjustment difficulties.

Interparental Relationship Properties

Because conflict is normative and inevitable in any relationship, it is important to distinguish between the properties of conflict that are harmful and benign for children and adolescents. Constructive forms of conflict involving calm, rational disagreements that end in resolution are associated with a lower likelihood of adolescent psychopathology. In fact, constructive conflict may have a positive effect, teaching teens important conflict management strategies that they can subsequently use when interacting with siblings and peers. However, high levels of hostile, escalating, and unresolved forms of interparental conflict are consistent predictors of a wide array of adolescent problems, including social difficulties, behavioral problems, emotional symptoms, academic setbacks, and physical troubles (e.g., illness, sleep problems). In delineating the mechanisms and processes that explain the risk posed to adolescents exposed to destructive interparental conflict, researchers have identified two distinct

pathways by which interparental conflict predicts adolescent difficulties < Figure 2 near here> (see Figure 2).

Implications of Destructive Parental Conflict: Direct Pathways

The first pathway is often labeled as a direct path because research has documented that the stressfulness of witnessing high levels of destructive conflict between caregivers can directly alter how children process and cope with stress and, over time, increase their susceptibility to mental health problems. Within this area of inquiry, researchers have identified several specific dimensions of child coping that act as mediators of destructive conflict. Guided by social-cognitive formulations, adolescent perceptions of threat and self-blame in the context of parental conflicts have been shown to account, in part, for problems exhibited by adolescents from high conflict homes. For example, adolescents have a tendency to become increasingly prone to perceive parental conflicts as threatening with repeated exposure to destructive disputes between parents. Increasing appraisals of threat, in turn, predispose teens to experience a wide array of emotional problems, including anxiety and depression. Likewise, advances in interpersonal sensitivity and social-cognitive abilities allow adolescents to assume increasingly sophisticated and complicated roles as peacekeepers, mediators, and confidantes in the face of interparental conflicts. These roles may, on the surface, appear to be manifestations of prosocial functioning. However, greater adolescent involvement in the complex problems and destructive conflicts of parents is generally ineffective in improving interparental relations and is a significant prognosticator of teen tendencies to assume responsibility and blame for family difficulties. Over time, adolescent appraisals of self-blame forecast a multitude of emotional problems characterized by guilt, shame, helplessness, and poor self-worth.

Operating from the premise that interparental conflicts are emotion laden, complementary

lines of research have identified adolescent emotion regulation processes as key carriers of risk in associations between destructive interparental conflict and child functioning. Research has specifically documented that repeated exposure to interparental conflict actually sensitizes children to subsequent conflicts. Thus, rather than emotionally habituating to conflicts, teens exhibit progressively greater distress, involvement, and avoidance reactions to conflicts if they are bystanders of prolonged, unresolved, and hostile disagreements between their parents. The significant concerns for their welfare and safety that underlie these negative affective and behavioral reactions can undermine adolescent functioning by hindering their abilities to devote sufficient attention and resources toward achieving other important developmental challenges and goals. For example, because adolescence is a period partly characterized by the stage-salient issue of first forming dating relationships, the quality of the interparental relationship may have particular significance in terms of how adolescents accomplish or resolve this task, as teens' representations and behavioral patterns within dating relationships reflect their earlier ways of processing and responding to interparental conflicts.

Implications of Destructive Parental Conflict: Indirect Pathways

Illustrating a second class of mechanisms, indirect path formulations propose that interparental processes are lawfully related to adolescent adjustment through their associations with family processes. As a primary hub of the family system, the interparental relationship is an organizer of family life with significant ramifications for the child-rearing strategies of parents, the ability of parents to coordinate raising their teen within their coparenting relationship, and the tenor of the parent-child attachment relationship. Consistent with this assumption, interparental relationships characterized by warmth and effective resolution of problems are predictors of salubrious child-rearing strategies (e.g., warmth, consistent discipline) and cohesive, well-

coordinated teamwork by parents in raising their teens. Furthermore, this profile of family functioning has been shown to predict more secure attachment relationships characterized by high levels of teens' confidence in their parents as sources of protection and support and optimal mental health outcomes. By the same token, destructive interparental relationships, characterized by frequent bouts of unresolved hostility, substantially increase the likelihood that parents will engage in pernicious child-rearing strategies characterized by lax parental monitoring, inconsistent or harsh discipline, greater psychological control, emotional unavailability, and coparenting conflicts. In turn, these perturbations have been empirically documented as proximal predictors of adolescent problems (e.g., internalizing and externalizing difficulties).

Adolescent-Sibling Relationships

Although the role of sibling relationships in adolescent development remains an understudied area of research, recent findings highlight the importance of sibling relationship processes in adolescent development. Early research examining sibling relationships focused primarily on structural characteristics of the sibling dyad (e.g., gender composition, age-spacing) due to their easily accessible comprehension and straightforward methods of assessment. In general, relationships with same-sex siblings are perceived as being more warm and close, as well as less conflictual, compared to opposite-sex sibling relationships. Siblings closer in age also report more warmth within their relationships than those spaced further apart. In adolescence, teens report decreases in overall intimacy and affection, less intensity, and more egalitarian roles in their relationships with both older and younger siblings. However, structural characteristics are, at best, rough approximations of adolescent psychological experiences within their sibling relationships that are inconsistently related to adolescent mental health outcomes. Thus, toward the goal of better understanding how sibling relationships affect adolescent

development, researchers have focused more recently on identifying the proximal relationship characteristics (i.e., warmth, conflict) that may help to understand individual differences in adolescent psychological adjustment.

Warmth and Conflict

Despite modest overall declines in teens' perceived intimacy with siblings, sibling relationships remain an important source of warmth, support, and companionship across adolescence. Adolescent-sibling relationships marked by warmth and closeness predict positive teen outcomes such as school competence, sociability, and greater self-esteem. Moreover, positive perceptions of sibling relationships predict better quality friendships for adolescents. The uniquely egalitarian structure of the sibling relationship within the family is theorized to provide an important context in which to explore and refine social skills conducive for social and psychological functioning. Warm sibling relationships may also act protectively to buffer adolescents from stressful life events (e.g., family problems). For example, most adolescents report seeking contact with a sibling for support in the face of family stressors. However, the same characteristics of affection and admiration between siblings that predict positive outcomes for teens can have negative consequences if younger adolescents model the risky behaviors (e.g., substance use, drinking, sexual activity) of older siblings. For example, adolescents living with a sister experiencing a teenage pregnancy are more apt to become sexually active at an early age and are 2 ½ times more likely to become teen mothers themselves.

Like warmth, teens and parents report a modest decrease in sibling conflict across adolescence. However, with the exception of mothers, early adolescents report more conflict with siblings than with any other interpersonal relationship partner. Frequent and intense conflict between siblings represents a risk factor for negative adolescent psychological adjustment,

particularly when it occurs in the context of low warmth and intimacy in the relationship. A large body of research has demonstrated that sibling conflict is uniquely associated with deleterious adolescent outcomes (e.g., anxiety, depression, delinquency, poor peer relationships) even after taking into account other sources of conflict within the family (e.g., marital conflict). Destructive sibling conflict has been theorized to provide a training ground within which adolescents learn, practice, and perfect antisocial and aggressive behavior. However, as with the parent-adolescent relationship, conflict characterized by constructive forms (e.g., discussion, compromise, resolution) can offer teens experiences that enhance their psychosocial skills.

Adolescent Sibships in Family Context

Research has demonstrated the importance of the sibling relationship as a unique source of interpersonal support or stress during adolescence. However, the impact of parents on the broader emotional climate of the family can play a major role in both the quality of sibling relationships and their impact on adolescent development. For example, adolescent-sibling dyads report more warmth in their relationship when parent-child and interparental relationships are characterized by satisfaction, happiness, and cohesion. Conversely, research shows that adolescents who are subjected to parental rejection and negativity and high levels of interparental conflict and distress tend to exhibit more aggression with siblings, contributing to conflictual adolescent-sibling relationships. Parental favoritism also has the potential to engender conflict between siblings. However, research indicates that adolescents view parental differential treatment negatively only when they believe it is unfair or unjust (e.g., parent favoring or preferring one sibling over another). In fact, as children grow older, they generally appreciate the reasons why parents may need to handle siblings differently. How adolescents view parental treatment is likely to be particularly pivotal during adolescence, as identity development

becomes salient. In a process known as deidentification, adolescents attempt to differentiate themselves from their siblings and establish their own personality and role in the family. Fair parental differential treatment may therefore contribute to their teens' feelings of uniqueness.

Adolescent Development in the Broader Family System

A full consideration of family processes cannot be achieved by simply summing together specific characteristics within parent-child, interparental, and sibling relationships. Understanding how adolescents develop over time requires an understanding of broader processes within the family system, including the role of extended family, implicit rules of communication, values shared by the family as a whole, and, ultimately, the formulation of accounts of adolescent development as products of the complex interplay between family dynamics and child characteristics.

Extended Family

Adolescents in contemporary society vary widely in the larger composition of their households and the nature of their extended families. Reflecting the increasing salience of extended relatives in caregiving contexts, the incidence of children living in a household maintained by their grandparents has increased substantially over the past three decades to a rate of approximately 6% in the U.S. The teens of custodial grandparents experience a complex mixture of risks and benefits. On the one hand, children reared primarily or solely by grandparents fare significantly worse on a wide range of mental health indices compared to children raised by their parents. However, a significant source of these problems can be attributed to pre-existing stressors, such as a likelihood of prior histories of exposure to prenatal toxins (e.g., parental drug use), perinatal complications, and adverse socialization contexts (e.g., maltreatment by biological parent, family conflict). On the other hand, grandparents who share

child-rearing responsibilities with other adults as part of a broader kinship network are often regarded as supportive and effective socialization figures that promote the healthy development of teens. Large kinship networks consisting of extended relatives within a single household are particularly salient and important for minority families in the U.S.

Under the more common family circumstances in which adolescents do not live with extended relatives, increases in adolescent involvement in peer, school, and community activities result in normative trends toward less frequent contact and emotional closeness (e.g., less support, fewer conflicts) with grandparents as teens grow older. However, studies indicate teens still hold high regard for their grandparents as central components of their support networks throughout adolescence. Consistent with this observation, closer and more supportive grandparent-adolescent relationships are associated with fewer adolescent emotional problems and greater prosocial behavior. In fact, close grandparent-adolescent relationships may assume even greater salience in reducing psychopathology and promoting mental health in nontraditional family structures (e.g., single parenthood, divorce, stepfamilies). Furthermore, as gatekeepers of grandparent involvement, parents generally have considerable power in fostering and maintaining grandparent-adolescent relationships. For example, stronger rapport between grandparents and parents is associated with parent encouragement of adolescent contact with grandparents and higher quality grandparent-adolescent relationships. In spite of these recent findings, surprisingly little is known about the role of extended family members in the lives of adolescents.

Implicit Communication Rules in the Family

Within a family systems perspective, the meaning of any behavior or interaction pattern within a specific family relationship or subsystem cannot be fully deciphered without an

understanding of the implicit rules that structure communication patterns. Boundaries within and across relationships in the family are defined by characteristic ways of exchanging resources, information, and materials within the family unit as a whole. The most common boundary types include cohesive, disengaged, enmeshed, and triangulated patterns of communication. Flexible, well-defined boundaries characteristic of cohesive families provide adolescents with ready access to resources (e.g., warmth, support, guidance) while respecting their autonomy and individuality. Conflict and distress among family members tend to be mild, well-managed, and encapsulated within interparental, parent-child, and sibling relationships and are substantially outweighed by warmth, affection, and autonomy-support. Thus, in these families, adolescents tend to evidence relatively healthy psychological adjustment.

Adolescents experiencing the other family typologies tend to fare significantly worse. Disengaged families are characterized by boundaries that are overly rigid, inflexible, distant, and emotionally cold. The resulting experience with relatively high levels of conflict without the benefits of warm, supportive, and involved relationships increases the risk that adolescents will develop psychological problems, particularly in the form of greater aggression, delinquency, and social alienation. In contrast, the diffuse boundaries within and between relationships in enmeshed families are manifested in high levels of spillover of distress and dysfunction from one individual or relationship to the larger family system. Although resources (e.g., support) are available in some cases, weak boundaries signal that adolescents often have to sacrifice their autonomy to access them. Exposure to the resulting family profile of high conflict, hostility, distress, and psychological control (e.g., guilt induction, intrusiveness) increases adolescent risk for a wide array of difficulties, including anxiety, depression, and conduct problems. Finally, triangulated families commonly reflect a multi-faceted pattern of boundary disturbance in which

two family members form a coalition against another family member. Triangulation can take many forms, including an alliance of parents against the adolescent, an alliance between the adolescent and one parent against the other parent, or more complex configurations involving adolescents, siblings, and parents. Although little is known about whether adolescent adjustment varies as a function of the coalition type, triangulation has been associated with greater risk for experiencing psychological problems, especially when adolescents take on the formidable adult roles (e.g., caretaker, confidant, mediator) within these family coalitions.

Extrafamilial Contexts: Race, Culture, and Family Values

Families can also differ substantially in their set of values or beliefs about the roles and functions of family members. Much of the limited research in this area has focused on the role of race and ethnicity as rough proxies of the cultural contexts that may shape distinct sets of family values. In comparison to the emphasis placed on the cultural value of individualism in White families, many racial and ethnic minority families place greater primacy on the value of family closeness, obligation, and sacrifice. For example, the principle of familism in many Latino American families underscores the value of prioritizing family concerns and goals over the interests of the individual. Likewise, filial piety within Asian American families reflects a strong commitment to respecting and deferring to parents and the broader family agenda.

Ethnic- and racial-differentiated values have been shown to shape adolescent development in two primary ways. First, family values act as scripts that structure and regulate interactions in the family. For example, lower levels of parent-adolescent and family conflict within Asian and Latino American families in comparison to European American families have been traced back to the greater value placed on adolescent respect for parental authority. Second, family values may alter how different family characteristics impact adolescent development by

modifying the meaning adolescents and families assign to family events. For example, strict control of children in White families commonly has negative connotations because the underlying perceived goal of "breaking the will" of the child directly violates the cultural value of individualism. However, high levels of what might be perceived as intrusive or controlling patterns of parenting by families that place greater emphasis on individualism are more likely to be interpreted as benign or healthy for adolescents within certain cultures (e.g., Asian or Latino American) that place considerable worth on family closeness and respect. Thus, conventional ways of defining of parenting (e.g., authoritarian) and family (e.g., disengaged) characteristics that have been derived largely from studies of White families may not readily apply to some cultural contexts because adolescents in these families may ascribe culturally distinct meanings to morphologically similar parenting behaviors.

By the same token, it would be a gross overgeneralization to conclude that there is a one-to-one correspondence between values and any indices of culture (e.g., race, ethnicity). As a general rule, differences in values tend to be more pronounced within race, ethnicity, and culture than between families who vary in race, ethnicity or culture. Thus, considerable research is now being devoted to understanding why families with similar racial or cultural backgrounds differ so widely in family values. For example, differences in the values of families (e.g., familism) with similar cultural (e.g., Latino) backgrounds are predicted by variations in the degree to which families balance their involvement with their culture of origin with involvement in the host culture (biculturalism) and gaps between parents and adolescents in their biculturalism.

Transactional Models of Adolescent Development in the Family

To better understand adolescent development, current research is now moving toward more complex analysis of the interplay between the attributes of the adolescent and family

characteristics over time. As illustrated in <Figure 3 near here> Figure 3, organism-environment interaction or diathesis-stress frameworks are often invoked by family psychologists to better understand why adolescents differ in their mental health trajectories. The organism or diathesis component consists of personological characteristics of the adolescent such as temperament and personality differences, attributional styles, genetic liabilities, and coping patterns. Conversely, within family models of adolescent development, the environmental or stress component reflects adolescent exposure to specific family characteristics including parent attributes (e.g., perceived competence, depressive symptoms), child-rearing practices (e.g., warmth, control), parent-child relationship dynamics (e.g., attachment), interparental relationship properties (e.g., co-parental support, interparental aggression), and larger family system processes (e.g., cohesion, disengagement). When integrated together, these models are designed to identify whether adolescents with certain intrapersonal attributes respond differently to similar family events. For example, using these formulations, family discord and conflict have been shown to be significantly stronger predictors of distress for adolescents who exhibit difficult temperament characteristics.

However, these models do not simply reflect a lone snapshot of the confluence of static family and adolescent attributes in predicting adolescent mental health outcomes at one point in time. Rather, the developmental component of these models, depicted in <Figure 4 near here> Figure 4, characterizes adolescent psychological adjustment as an evolving product of the transactions between the changing adolescent in the context of dynamic family processes over time. Accordingly, family characteristics may themselves magnify pre-existing attributes of the adolescent which, in turn, feedback to accentuate the family processes in a spiraling, reciprocal cycle. Consistent with these transactional models, research has documented that forms of conflict

in the family (e.g., interparental) are predictors of subsequent increases in adolescent psychological problems which, in turn, are associated with greater family difficulties over time. Thus, these research directions have yielded more accurate depictions of how adolescents play an active role in shaping the nature of the family characteristics and their implications for their health and well-being over time.

FIGURE TITLE/CAPTIONS:

Figure 1. A typological conceptualization of parenting styles based on the dimensions of warmth and control.

Figure 2. A depiction of the direct and indirect pathways between exposure to destructive interparental conflict and adolescent adjustment difficulties.

Figure 3. An organismic-environment interaction depiction of the interplay between family and adolescent attributes in the prediction of adolescent psychological adjustment.

Figure 4. An illustration of a developmental transactional model of the interplay between family and adolescent attributes in the prediction of adolescent psychological problems.

FURTHER READING

Cummings E M and Davies PT (2010) *Marital Conflict and Children: An Emotional Security Perspective.* New York: Guilford.

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Granic I, Dishion TJ and Hollenstein T (2003) The family ecology of adolescence: A dynamic systems perspective on normative development. In: Adams GR and Berzonsky MD (eds.) *Blackwell Handbook of Adolescence*, pp 60–91. Oxford, UK: Blackwell

Hardway C and Fuligni AJ (2006) Dimensions of family connectedness among adolescents with Mexican, Chinese, and European backgrounds. *Developmental Psychology* **42**: 1246-1258.

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Smetana JG, Campione-Barr N and Metzger A (2006) Adolescent development in interpersonal and societal contexts. *Annual Review of Psychology* **57**: 255-284.

Steinberg L (2001) We know some things: Parent-adolescent relationships in retrospect and prospect. *Journal of Research on Adolescence* **11:** 1-19.

LIST OF RELEVANT WEBSITES

*Due to the paucity of websites reflecting family processes in adolescence beyond the parent-adolescent relationship, some websites are links within a broader topic area. The top-level website is provided first, with each related link indented below it.

Shoulder to shoulder: Research and advice for parenting teenagers
http://www.shouldertoshoulderminnesota.org/

Society for Research on Adolescence (main webpage)
http://www.s-r-a.org/

Study group for Parent Involvement in Teen's Peer Relationships:
http://piaper.education.wisc.edu/

Family Relationships and Adolescent Development Laboratory
University of Missouri; Director: Dr. Campione-Barr
http://bengal.missouri.edu/~campionebarrn/pub_pres.htm

National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD) (main webpage)
http://www.nichd.nih.gov/

ADDHEALTH (adolescent health) Study – focus on how social relationships, including family, impact adolescent health behavior
http://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/add_health_study.cfm

ABCD Parenting Young Adolescents Program - Parenting Research Centre
http://www.abcdparenting.org/

Tufts University: Child & Family Web Guide
http://www.cfw.tufts.edu/

Parenting Teens:
http://www.cfw.tufts.edu/?/category/family-parenting/2/topic/parenting-teens/29/

National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth
http://www.ncfy.com/

Research database on youth and family issues:
http://www.ncfy.com/literature/index.htm
Family violence prevention: http://www.ncfy.com/fvp/index.htm

Laurence Steinberg's Faculty Website
http://www.temple.edu/psychology/lds/

A conversation with Dr. Steinberg (NY TIMES)
http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/01/science/01conv.html

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Meredith J. Martin is currently a graduate assistant and Ph.D. candidate in the Developmental Psychology program at the University of Rochester. Her research centers on the developmental psychopathology of interpersonal relationships and she is presently working with parents and teens towards understanding the impact of interpersonal processes underlying family and peer interactions on adolescent psychosocial development. Her recent work, including her Master's thesis, has focused on evolutionary models of emotion and social behavior in the contexts of family and peer relationships, with an emphasis on emotional security as a fundamental goal system underlying the development of psychopathology and adjustment difficulties across childhood and adolescence.

Sonnette M. Bascoe, M.A.

Ms. Bascoe attended undergrad at Spelman College and graduated Summa Cum Laude in 2002 with honors in psychology. She recently received her masters in developmental psychology at the University of Rochester where she's currently a candidate for the Ph.D. Ms. Bascoe's research interests generally involve the ways that relationships within the family (i.e., interparental, parent-child, sibling) influence children's socio-emotional adjustment. Her master's thesis examined children's peer representations as an explanatory mechanism underlying the association between their insecure representations of interparental and parent-child relationships and their psychological maladjustment, published in *Developmental Psychology* in 2009. Ms. Bascoe was awarded a pre-doctoral individual fellowship in 2009 which focuses on integrating family systems and developmental psychopathology theory and research to understand the processes underlying the association between destructive marital conflict and children's psychological adjustment with a specific emphasis on the role of sibling relationships. Ms. Bascoe has served as a reviewer for the *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, and she's the recent recipient of the Emory L. Cowen Award for outstanding publication. She's also a member of several professional organizations including the Society for Research in Child Development, Phi Beta Kappa, and Psi Chi, Golden Key, and Alpha Lambda Delta National Honor Societies.

Patrick T. Davies, Ph.D.

Patrick Davies, Ph.D., is a Professor of Psychology in the Department of Clinical and Social Sciences in Psychology at the University of Rochester. Dr. Davies is broadly concerned with understanding relationships between family processes, child coping and adaptation to stress, and child psychological adjustment and maladjustment. He received his Ph.D. in 1995 and is an author of approximately 75 publications in the field of developmental psychology and psychopathology. Dr. Davies has served on the editorial boards of several developmental and clinical psychology journals and is currently an associate editor of *Developmental Psychology* and *Development and Psychopathology*. He is a recipient of the Boyd McCandless Early Career Award for Significant Contributions to Developmental Psychology, American Psychological Association, Division 7 (Developmental) Award, the University of Rochester Georgen Award for Distinguished Achievement and Artistry in Undergraduate Education, and the Reuben Hill Research and Theory Award from the National Council on Family Relations.

Figure 1. A typological conceptualization of parenting styles based on the dimensions of warmth and control.

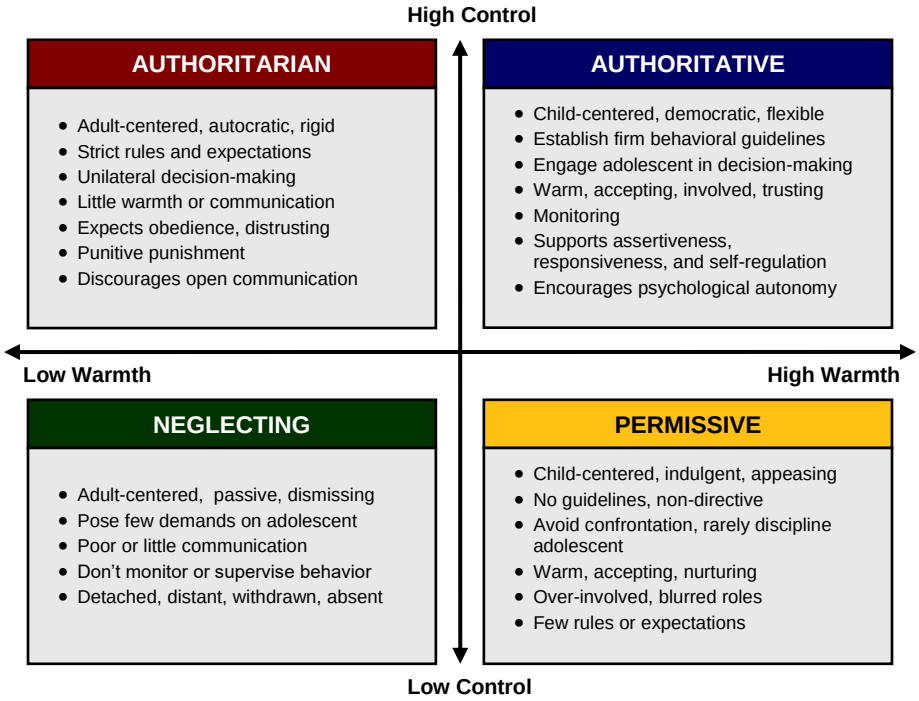

Figure 2. A depiction of the direct and indirect pathways between exposure to destructive interparental conflict and adolescent adjustment difficulties.

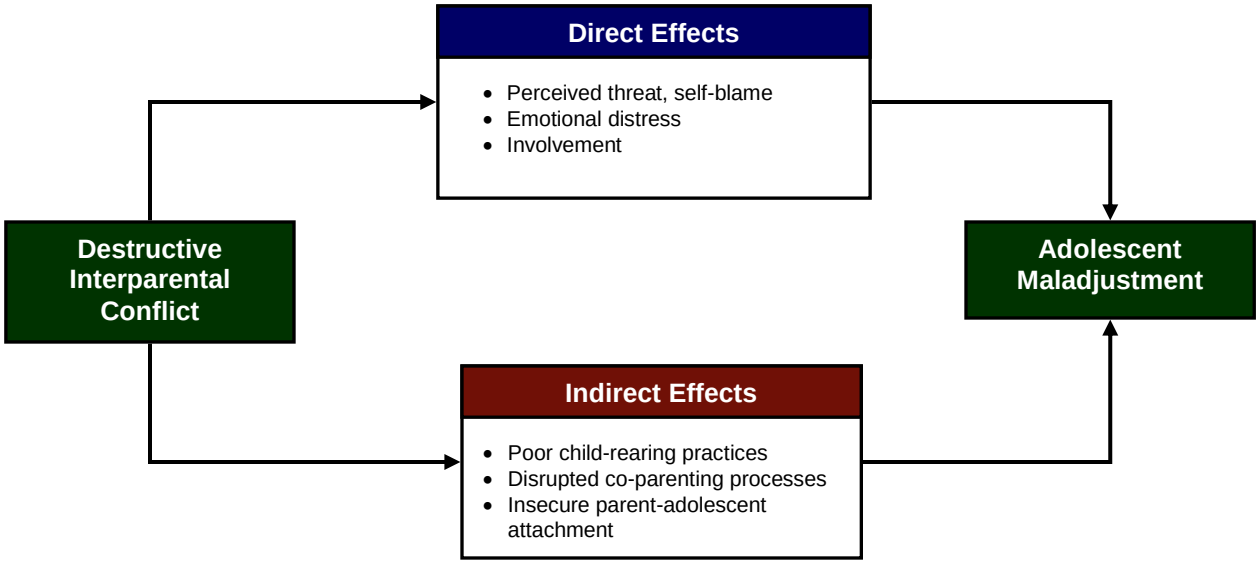

Figure 3. An organismic-environment interaction depiction of the interplay between family and adolescent attributes in the prediction of adolescent psychological adjustment.

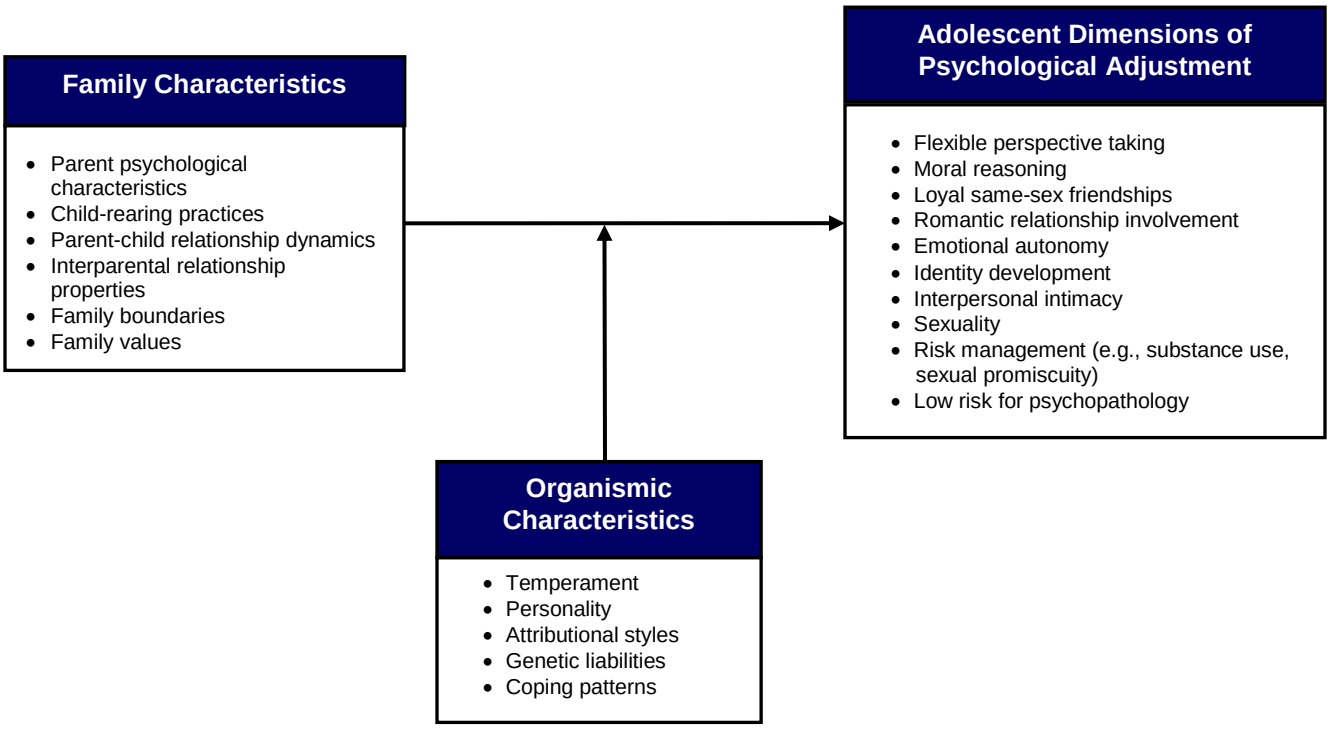

Figure 4. An illustration of a developmental transactional model of the interplay between family and adolescent attributes in the prediction of adolescent psychological problems.