CHAPTER 1

# *Parent–Child Relationships During Adolescence*

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No aspect of adolescent development has received more attention from the public and from researchers than parent–child relationships. Much of the research indicates that despite altered patterns of interaction, relationships with parents remain important social and emotional resources well beyond the childhood years (for recent reviews, see Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). Yet it is a challenge to reconcile this conclusion with the widespread perception that parent–child relationships decline in quality and influence over the course of the adolescent years. The aim of this chapter is to specify the characteristics and processes of parent–child relationships that sustain the centrality of the family amid the extensive changes of adolescence. We will argue that it is the content and the quality of these relationships, rather than the actions of either parent or adolescent alone, that determine the nature and extent of family influences on adolescent development. We will also argue that divergence between academic prescriptions and public perceptions about parent–adolescent relationships can be traced to the relative emphasis that each places on potential individual differences.

The chapter reflects three premises that have emerged from the sizable literature on parent–child relationships during adolescence. First, relationships with parents undergo transformations across the adolescent years that set the stage for less hierarchical interactions during adulthood. Second, family relationships have far-reaching implications for concurrent and long-term relationships with friends, romantic partners, teachers, and other adults, as well as for individual mental health, psychosocial adjustment, school performance, and eventual occupational choice and success. Third, contextual and cultural variations significantly shape family relationships and experiences that, in turn, affect the course and outcomes of development both during and beyond adolescence.

The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section outlines theoretical views of parent–adolescent relationships and their developmental significance. The second section focuses on the behavior of parents and children and on interpersonal processes between them, with particular attention given to the distinctive characteristics of parent–child relationships and how these relationships change during adolescence. The third section considers whether and how parent–child relationships and their transformations are significant for adolescent development. The fourth section focuses on variability in parent–child relationships during adolescence as a function of structural, economic, and demographic distinctions among families.

## THEORIES OF PARENT–ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR INFLUENCE

For heuristic purposes, we have divided theories of parent–adolescent relationships into two groups: those that describe changes in

relationships across the adolescent years and those that describe the influence of parenting and parent–child relationships. The first set of theories is dedicated to explaining the significant transformations that take place in parent–adolescent relationships. The second set of theories is dedicated to explaining the contributions that parents and parent–child relationships make to individual adolescent adjustment.

## Theories Addressing Relationship Transformations

Conceptual models of transformation in parent–adolescent relationships vary in whether their primary focus is on the adolescent or on the relationship (Laursen & Collins, 2004). The prevalent perspective for most of the last century was that adolescents' physical, cognitive, and social maturation undermined patterns of interaction in close relationships that were established during childhood. The implications of individual change varied from one theoretical perspective to another, the common focus being the relative turbulence and instability of relationships during adolescence relative to those during childhood. More recent models emphasize stable features of parent–child relationships. Enduring bonds forged between parents and children are assumed to be the foundation for continuity in the functional properties of the relationship that transcend age-related changes in the characteristics of participants and alterations in the content and form of their interactions.

### *Models of Individual Change*

Theories of individual change focus on disruptions caused by adolescent maturation and their potential to destabilize parent–child relationships. These models hold that changes in adolescents provoke changes in families. Maturationist models assume that a period of diminished closeness and heightened conflict accompanies adolescent maturation and that these perturbations continue until parent–adolescent relationships and roles are renegotiated. Most models hold that a rapprochement follows this period of normative relationship turbulence (Collins, 1995). Conflict should become less frequent and better managed, closeness should increase, and social interactions should grow more sophisticated and constructive as a result of transformations in relationships.

Psychoanalytic theorists (A. Freud, 1958; S. Freud, 1921/1949) 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. More recent psychoanalytic formulations place greater emphasis on adolescent autonomy striving and ego identity development than on impulse control (Blos, 1979; Erikson, 1968). These later models converge on the dual contentions that awareness of parental fallibility (deidealization) and psychic emancipation drive a wedge between parents and children that is exacerbated by the inner turmoil brought on by adolescent hormonal fluctuations. This account implies that heightened conflict and diminished closeness inevitably follow maturational changes, as adolescents grapple with psychic disturbances. Child withdrawal and disengagement should continue into young adulthood, although a measure of closeness may be reestablished after parents are no longer perceived as a threat to the ego, sometime after identity achievement is complete and intimate relationships with peers are established.

Evolutionary views also emphasize the role of puberty in transforming relationships, but propose that change processes stem from physical and cognitive advances that are designed to encourage adolescents to separate from the family in order to seek mates elsewhere (Steinberg, 1989). In this view, adolescent maturation threatens parental dominance, resulting in heightened conflict with and diminished closeness to parents. This prompts youth to turn away from their family to be comforted by peers who are experiencing similar relationship disruptions. Some envision a reciprocal process, whereby independence hastens pubertal maturation and vice versa

(Belsky, Steinberg, & Draper, 1991). Although evolutionary views stipulate no mechanism for reestablishing parent–child closeness during young adulthood, it may be that parental investment in offspring and the warmth experienced in earlier periods provide a foundation of positive affect and regard that enables both parties to transcend the difficulties of adolescence (Gray & Steinberg, 1999). Improved relations should follow the child's transition to parenthood to the extent that grandparents are interested in providing resources and assistance to help ensure the survival and reproductive success of the next generation (Crosnoe & Elder, 2002; Smith & Drew, 2002).

Other maturational models give cognitive development a central role in parent–adolescent relationship changes. In these accounts, advances in abstract and complex reasoning foster a more nuanced appreciation of interpersonal distinctions and an increasingly egalitarian view of relationships that were previously oriented around the unilateral authority of adults (e.g., Selman, 1980; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). As a result, adolescents increasingly aspire to reciprocity and equal power in their interactions with parents. The same cognitive advances underlie the emerging tendency to consider certain issues as matters of personal volition, even though they previously were under parental jurisdiction (Smetana, 1988). Parents' reluctance to transform the hierarchical relationships established in childhood into more egalitarian ones creates conflict and curtails closeness. Eventually, familial roles are renegotiated to acknowledge the child's enhanced status and maturity. Conflict should dissipate as relationship roles and expectations are realigned, but the long-term implications for relationship closeness and harmony depend on whether parents and children are successful in revising their relationship in a mutually satisfactory manner.

A fourth group of theorists view physical and cognitive maturation as sources of constraints and demands on adolescents but give equal emphasis to changes in social expectations and the need to adapt to a variety of new situations during age-graded transitions. Four kinds of moderated maturationist models typify this approach. The first set of models implicates changes in parents as the source of alterations in parent–adolescent relationships (Steinberg, 2001). Parents' developmental issues related to careers, personal goals, and future orientation can exacerbate the difficulty of the adjustments required in parent–adolescent relationships. Parents are also confronted with diminished or extinguished physical and reproductive capabilities and fading allure at a time when adolescent sexuality and attractiveness are blossoming, both of which may aggravate conflict and disengagement (Steinberg & Steinberg, 1994). A strong orientation toward work and investments in other nonfamilial domains could mean that parents view adolescents' movement toward autonomy as positive, ameliorating some of the obstacles to relationship transformation (Silverberg & Steinberg, 1990). Reestablishing positive relationship ties may be difficult for those who experience the most disruption, particularly if parents are unable or unwilling to address factors in their own lives that exacerbated transitional turmoil.

Two related theories emphasize the role of parents' beliefs and expectations in moderating age-related changes in relationships with adolescent children. Generalized or category-based beliefs models (Eccles, 1992; Holmbeck, 1996) posit a straightforward link between parents' stereotypes and expectations about adolescence in general and parents' relations with their own adolescent children. Beliefs become a self-fulfilling prophesy: Those who expect adolescence to be a period of turmoil are more likely to behave in a manner that provokes relationship deterioration compared with those who expect adolescence to be relatively benign. The expectancy violation–realignment model (Collins, 1995) begins with the assumption that interactions between parents and children are mediated by cognitive and emotional processes associated with expectancies about the behavior of the other person. In periods

of rapid developmental change, such as the transition to adolescence, parents' expectancies often are violated. In younger age groups, change may occur more gradually, so that discrepancies are both less common and less salient than in periods of rapid multiple changes, such as adolescence. Expectancy violations are assumed to be a source of conflict that eventually stimulates parents to realign their expectations. It follows that changes in the tenor of parent–child relationships over the course of adolescence will vary as a function of the accuracy of parental expectations; those with unrealistic expectations should experience frequent violations and more relationship disruption than those with accurate expectations. Expectancies should also shape relationship recovery. Parents who foresee improved relations, particularly those who anticipate altered expressions of relationship closeness, are more likely to successfully repair relationships than those who expect irreparable damage and those who expect a return to the perceived tranquility of childhood.

The second set of moderated maturationist models implicates changes in parent–older sibling relationships in alterations in parent–younger sibling relationships. Models differ in terms of their postulated consequences for younger siblings. According to the spillover model, changes in relations between firstborn children and parents dictate the timing of changes in relations between later born children and parents (Larson & Almeida, 1999). Relationships with later born children deteriorate and are renegotiated concurrent with (or shortly after) relationships with firstborn children. Thus, child maturation is more strongly related to parent–child relationship change in firstborn than in later born adolescents. Several mechanisms besides child maturation may be responsible for changes in relationships between later born children and parents, including sibling modeling and imitation, and a parental desire to avoid differential treatment. Parent–adolescent relationship decline and recovery may depend on the extent to which firstborn and later born children share the burden of conflict and role renegotiation. Relationships between parents and "me too" children should be more resilient because firstborns are apt to bear the brunt of negativity with parents and because younger children may continue to look to parents to satisfy more of their emotional needs (Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2003).

A related theory also postulates birth order differences in changes in parent–adolescent relationships. The learning-from-experience model argues that parents hone their skills with firstborn children and are thus better able to cope constructively with developmental changes in later born children (Whiteman et al., 2003). According to this view, it is the magnitude of parent–child transitions that differs between firstborns and later borns, not the timing of change. Declines in warmth and increases in conflict should be greater for parents and firstborn children than for parents and later born children because parents have learned how to navigate transitions during adolescence. Improved parenting skills should not only minimize relationship disruption but should also help relationships with later born children recover more quickly and perhaps more satisfactorily than relationships with firstborn children.

The third moderated maturationist model implicates parent and child gender in changes in parent–child relationships. The gender intensification model argues that with the onset of puberty, parents increasingly assume responsibility for the socialization of same-sex offspring (Hill & Lynch, 1983). The original model suggested that parent–child closeness increases in same-sex dyads and decreases in other-sex dyads. Another possibility, however, is that same-sex parent–child relationships become closer than other-sex relationships because, although absolute levels of closeness decline in both, the latter deteriorates more than the former. The model also has implications for parent–child conflict: With the advent of puberty, same-sex parent–child relationships should experience

greater turmoil than other-sex relationships, as conflict and role negotiation are focused on the parent who has most of the socialization responsibilities. Notwithstanding these different interpretations, there is general agreement that by the end of the adolescent years, children should have better relations with their same-sex parent than with their other-sex parent.

The fourth moderated maturationist model implicates schools and other extrafamilial peer settings in alterations in parent–adolescent relationships (Simmons & Blyth, 1987). According to this view, maturity-related expectations vary across peer contexts, accelerating or delaying demands for realigning relationships with parents. Settings that encourage contact between early adolescents and late adolescents may elicit parent–child relationship disturbance earlier than settings that limit contacts to same-age adolescents because the former may prompt young adolescents to seek greater rights and privileges than the latter. Thus, exposure to older peers may hasten the onset of parent–child relationship change and lengthen the period of estrangement and heightened conflict with parents. Reestablishing positive parent–child relationships after early, off-time transformations may be difficult in cases where closeness was discontinued prematurely and followed by a prolonged period of discord and dissatisfaction.

### *Models of Relationship Continuity*

Some models of parent–adolescent relationships focus on forces that promote stability within the dyad, rather than on the impact of individual change on the dyad. The most prominent example, attachment theory, emphasizes the strong emotional ties between parents and adolescents. As a mutually regulated system, parents and children work jointly to maintain the relationship in a manner consistent with cognitive representations derived from their history of interactions with significant others (Bowlby, 1969). Thus, the quality of parent–child relationships is presumed to be stable over time. Manifestations of attachment undergo gradual developmental transformations, but these changes are consistent with the underlying quality of the relationship, which tends to be durable (Ainsworth, 1989).

Attachment in adolescence is distinctive from attachment in earlier relationships, both behaviorally and cognitively. Strong emotional ties to parents may be indicated in subtle and private ways, including friendly teasing and small acts of concern, as well as in more obvious connections such as shared activities (particularly with fathers) and self-disclosure (particularly to mothers). Cognitive advances in adolescence make possible an integrated, overarching view regarding experiences that involve caregiving, caretaking, and confidence in the availability of significant others (Allen & Land, 1999). Consequently, whereas younger children view attachment in terms that are more specific to the parent–child relationship, adolescents are increasingly attuned to the similarities and differences between relationships with parents, other significant adults, friends, and romantic partners.

The functions of attachment relationships for adolescents, however, are parallel to those for young children. In both cases, parents serve as a secure base for exploring the environment. Whereas security facilitates the toddler's exploration of the immediate environment, security affords the adolescent a sense of confidence in family support for explorations outside of the family, including the formation of new relationships. Security also allows adolescents an opportunity to explore intellectual and emotional autonomy from the family, which includes the realization that parents are fallible and an appreciation of the advantages of amicably resolving disagreements (Allen et al., 2003). Put simply, the form of secure base behavior changes with age but the function remains essentially the same.

A key implication of attachment formulations is that relationship reorganization occurs gradually. Adolescents and parents with a history of sensitive, responsive interactions

and strong emotional bonds should maintain these positive features throughout adolescence, although supportive interactions may be reformulated as the child matures. Adolescents and parents with a history of difficult, unresponsive interactions are also likely to experience continuity in the quality of their interactions. Dismissive youth may seek to distance themselves from parents as soon as possible, whereas preoccupied youth may be unwilling or unable to embrace demands for greater autonomy made by parents. These families may experience an increase in conflict and a decline in warmth, but this does not necessarily signal worsening relationships, but may instead represent a new manifestation of insecurity. Attachment theory does not rule out the possibility that increasing adolescent autonomy may give rise to modest age-related changes in the frequency with which affection and disagreement are expressed, but these changes are thought to reflect shifts in forms of expression, not in the fundamental quality of relationships between parents and children (Allen & Land, 1999; Allen & Manning, 2007; Carlivati & Collins, 2007). Greater significance is attached to the tenor of interactions between parents and children and the degree to which participants treat each other with mutual regard. These and other indices of relationship quality are directly tied to attachment security. Stability in attachment security implies stability in relationship quality both over time and across individuals.

Similar predictions characterize developmental applications of interdependence and social relations models (Laursen & Bukowski, 1997; 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). In an interdependent relationship, partners engage in mutually influential exchanges and share the belief that their connections are reciprocal and enduring. These enduring interconnections are internalized by participants and organized into mental schemas that shape expectations concerning future interactions.

Cognitive advances during adolescence give rise to a realization that the rules of reciprocity and social exchange govern interactions with friends but not parents (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Greater autonomy provides an impetus for adolescents to seek changes in relationships with parents so that interactions incorporate many of the same principles of social exchange. Although the affiliation remains involuntary or obligatory, there is great variability in the degree to which parents and children remain interconnected during late adolescence and early adulthood. To the extent that affiliations become increasingly voluntary, exchanges may be revised to better reflect their costs and benefits to participants. The magnitude of change depends on the potential for children to lead independent lives: Children (of all ages) who are utterly dependent on their parents are less likely to insist upon equitable exchanges than children who are (potentially) self-sufficient.

Patterns of communication and interdependence established during childhood are assumed to carry forward into adolescence. As the child becomes more autonomous, the degree to which parent–child relationships change depends on the degree to which participants consider their exchanges to be fair, which is closely linked to perceptions of relationship quality (Laursen & Collins, 2004). Increased conflict may occur in poor quality relationships, along with a decline in closeness, as adolescents express a growing dissatisfaction with unequal treatment and unfavorable outcomes (Smetana, 1999). Participants in these relationships are usually ill equipped to navigate these challenges because they lack a history of collaborative interactions and a constructive process for resolving disputes. High-quality relationships, however, may change little during adolescence, or may even improve, as participants build on beneficent interactions to adjust exchanges in a mutually satisfactory manner. In sum, patterns of social

exchange in close relationships are resistant to change because they are sustained by a web of interdependencies. When adolescents push to revise interactions with parents, change comes slowly and in a manner that typically extends trajectories of relationship quality from antecedent periods.

Interplay between continuity and discontinuity is a feature of parent–child relationships across the life span. Most models of parent–adolescent relationships acknowledge this interplay; few emphasize one without the other. Our depiction of models in terms of their relative emphasis on relationship change and stability obscures many theoretical subtleties, but it underscores an important conceptual distinction. Theories that focus on individual development inevitably emphasize universal changes in adolescents and their concomitant effects on relationships with parents. Theories that focus on relationship development inevitably focus on distinctive trajectories of parent–child relationships and their continuity with prior relationship functioning. These different orientations have important implications for models that describe the role parent–child relationships play in adolescent outcomes.

## Conceptual Models of the Influence of Parents and Parent–Child Relationships on Adolescent Development

In this section we summarize conceptual models that address associations between parents, parent–child relationships, and adolescent development. Most models share the assumption that parents (and relationships with parents) shape adolescent outcomes, but there is little agreement on the particulars. We begin with a description of the various modes of influence, followed by an overview of proposed influence mechanisms. We then discuss hypotheses concerning the direction and magnitude of influence attributable to parents and parent–child relationships, closing with a summary of theories describing developmental variations in patterns of influence.

### *Modes of Influence*

Approaches that describe modes of influence attempt to trace the paths through which parents shape child outcomes. Theories tend to be written in terms of concepts and processes, using the vocabulary of ordinary language. This differs from tests of hypotheses, which model links among variables using analytic terms. Consequently, the conceptual underpinnings of analytic models of modes of influence tend to be implicit rather than explicit. An explication of these analytic assumptions follows.

Perhaps the most obvious distinction in the analytic approach is that between correlated paths and causal paths. Some may be surprised that this issue remains a point of contention, given the extensive literature on parent–child relationships, but the issue continues to generate vigorous and legitimate debate. The argument that parent socialization contributes little to child outcomes hinges largely on the assertion that (1) most research on the topic is correlational; (2) causal designs yield sparse effects; and (3) genetically informed designs attribute minimal variance in child outcomes to shared environments (Harris, 1998). Scholars making the case that parents play an important role in child outcomes respond that (1) nonexperimental longitudinal designs reveal meaningful changes in child outcomes as a function of antecedent parent influence; (2) natural experiments and interventions reveal pronounced effects for parenting; and (3) traditional studies of heredity overlook gene–environment interactions and correlations, thereby underestimating parent socialization effects (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000). Both sides agree that little new can be learned from cross-sectional, correlational studies of parent behaviors and child outcomes.

In the most frequently proposed and tested models, parenting or parent–adolescent relationships are treated as predictor variables. Strictly speaking, parents are posited to be causal influences in these models, particularly (as is usually the case) when paths are not

reversed to consider parent behaviors as outcome variables. Influence paths may be direct or mediated. Direct paths imply that changes in parent behaviors or in parent–adolescent relationships are responsible for changes in adolescent outcomes, whereas indirect paths suggest that parent variables act on proximal variables (e.g., home environment) that, in turn, have consequences for youth development. Mediated models have also been proposed in which parent variables serve as mediators, typically between contextual variables (e.g., neighborhood distress) and adolescent outcomes.

Linear and nonlinear relations between parent variables and adolescent development have been proposed for both direct and mediated models. In linear models, incremental changes in parenting or in parent–adolescent relationships are associated with commensurate changes in adolescent outcomes. In nonlinear models, the effects of the parent variable are not constant across its range. Often, the relation posited is one in which parenting or parent–adolescent relationships have linear (or even exponential) effects below a certain threshold, but above that threshold, effects of the parent variable are weak, nonexistent, or reversed (Hoff, Laursen, & Bridges, in press). Consider parent–adolescent conflict, which is thought to be beneficial at moderate levels, but detrimental at high levels (Adams & Laursen, 2007). Analytic models are not always as they appear: Studies that focus on one part of the range of a parenting variable (e.g., harsh parenting) and ignore differences outside that range implicitly model nonlinear or threshold effects, despite the appearance of testing a simple linear model.

Direct and mediated parental effects may be ascribed to heredity and to socialization. The once common practice of assessing effects with an additive model that apportions unique variance to genes (plus error), shared environments (parent influence), and nonshared environments (nonparental influence) has given way to more nuanced strategies. As a consequence, contemporary approaches recognize the need for multiple methodologies to pull apart variables that typically go together (Rutter, Pickles, Murray, & Eaves, 2001). Although few dispute the conclusion that genes shape child outcomes, the claim that nonshared environmental effects outweigh shared environmental effects (Plomin & Daniels, 1987) has been challenged for several reasons (Turkheimer & Waldron, 2000). Sampling and methodological biases tend to favor genetic and nonshared influences at the expense of shared influences. The assessment of individual level variation overlooks population level variation, failing to recognize that beneficial parenting behaviors common across individuals may be invariant, but are influential nevertheless. Further, sibling differences are not necessarily due to nonfamilial influences; differential perceptions and differential treatment arise within shared environments. Thus, genetically informed models remind us that heritability accounts for much of the variance that might otherwise be ascribed to the direct effects of parental socialization, but they are somewhat limited in their ability to disentangle shared from nonshared environmental effects.

Further pressure on either/or views of influence comes from models of bidirectional influence. Several such models have been proposed (see Kuczynski, 2003, for review). These models share the common assumption that children and parents are unique socialization agents who construct meaning out of their social experiences and who initiate purposeful behavior intended to influence the partner (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006). Transactional models emphasize continual change in children and parents in response to recurring, reciprocal interchanges (Sameroff, 1975). One partner responds to the other's behavior, and the response influences the form of his or her subsequent behavior. Transactional models are not linear in the sense that stable behaviors in one partner cause stable outcomes in the other; they depict a dialectic of constantly changing

dynamics that fosters qualitative change in the relationship and its participants. In contrast, circular causality models typically imply linear, microanalytic influences that contain a recursive loop in which cause and effect cannot be isolated. In one example, difficult child temperament and inept parenting combine to foster a vicious cycle of escalating coercion (Patterson, 1982). Finally, fit and coevolution models suggest that causality is located not in the interactions between parents and children, but in the system they construct and the degree to which their attributes and needs mesh (Thomas, Chess, & Birch, 1977). Linear effects may be hypothesized as a function of goodness-of-fit, or qualitative distinctions may be made according to the salient features of parents and children.

In another type of model, parent variables serve as moderators. These models typically start from the premise that there are qualitative differences between groups. As a consequence, associations between predictor variables and outcome variables differ for those who experience different types of parents or relationships. Parenting styles provide an example. Authoritative parents differ from authoritarian parents on a constellation of attributes that combine to create distinct child-rearing environments (Baumrind, 1991; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Within each, similar parent behaviors may elicit different outcomes. For instance, adolescents with authoritative parents may be less likely to dissemble in response to parental requests for information than adolescents with authoritarian parents (Darling, Cumsille, Caldwell, & Dowdy, 2006). Parent moderators may enhance risk for some youth and buffer against adversity for others. Some argue that authoritarian parents may buffer against detrimental peer influences for youth in troubled neighborhoods, but the same parents may alienate youth in benign settings, inadvertently promoting fraternization with other alienated youth (Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999).

All of the foregoing models invoke parenting or parent–child relationships as a substantive influence or a meaningful outcome at some point in a causal sequence. Direct effects models imply that parents cause subsequent adolescent outcomes. Mediated effects models imply that parents cause change in an intermediary agent, which, in turn, causes change in adolescent outcomes. Bidirectional models imply that parent behaviors are both the cause and the consequence of child behaviors. In contrast, correlated change models argue that parent influences are limited to genetic contributions and to external causal factors that are either correlated with or responsible for the parent behaviors that are linked to child outcomes.

### *Agents of Influence*

Models that assume participant driven effects, typically from parents to offspring, are still the primary framework for research on parent–adolescent relationships (Collins, 2002). They stem from an implicitly individualistic approach that focuses on associations between differences among the properties of individuals and differences among their behaviors and outcomes. Models that describe relationship driven effects are not uncommon, however, and research designs increasingly adopt this perspective (Laursen & Collins, 2004). Relationship-focused models reflect a systemic approach that focuses on associations between differences among the properties of relationships or systems of relationships and differences among the behaviors and outcomes of individuals (Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000).

Early conceptions of family influence focused exclusively on parents: The parent cast a social mold for the child, which was responsible for his or her development (Collins, 2002). Few today would advocate this position conceptually, but research designs tell another story. Despite the growing acceptance of child-centered, relationship, and bidirectional frameworks, most research designs still entail the straightforward prediction of adolescent outcomes from parent behavior. Prominent in this regard are studies of parenting styles and parenting practices, and other topics that that

have recently come to dominate the research landscape, such as parent psychological control. Most learning theory models of coercive training, inept parenting, and deviant modeling also fall into this category; the contributions made by temperamental difficulties in offspring have been added to recent formulations, but the research is overwhelmingly parent-driven, particularly as it applies to the second decade of life.

Child-driven or evocative models have greater currency in the study of young children than in the study of adolescents. In these models, offspring with certain characteristics or behaviors elicit particular responses from parents, which, in turn, shape child outcomes. The development of antisocial behavior in temperamentally difficult children is one example. Parents tend to respond to disruptive, aggressive children by withdrawing affection and reducing monitoring, which increases the risk of alienation and affiliation with deviant peers (Lytton, 2000). Child-driven models applied to adolescence typically focus on the influence of personality and emotional regulation. One recent model suggests that adolescent openness and disclosure elicits parent behaviors that are usually operationalized as monitoring (Kerr, Stattin, & Pakalniskiene, 2006). In this view, parent reactions to adolescent engagement and withdrawal shape subsequent adolescent outcomes and behaviors. This may strike some as circular causality, but the process is clearly categorized as child driven.

Considerable interest surrounds bidirectional models that address concurrent and over-time influences between children and parents. These models include child-driven effects and parent-driven effects, but it is one thing to hypothesize a model in which both participants in a relationship are agents of influence, and it is another thing to apply this model to actual data. Statistical obstacles have long plagued efforts to identify bidirectional effects as scholars have struggled to test reciprocal and joint influences (Laursen, 2005). Most conventional analytic procedures cannot easily incorporate data from both participants; those that do typically provide biased or misspecified results. Recent advances in dyadic data analyses can overcome these limitations, which will help to bridge the gap between theory and research (Card, Little, & Selig, 2008; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). It is important to note that although dyadic analytic techniques were initially developed to describe the influence of one partner on another over the course of a specific interchange, they have been successfully applied to global perceptions of concurrent parent–adolescent relationships, including attachment security (Cook & Kenny, 2005) and perceived social support (Branje, van Lieshout, & van Aken, 2005). Modifications for longitudinal data have been proposed that will permit the analyses of nonindependent data across multiple time points (Kashy & Donnellan, 2008; Laursen, Popp, Burk, Kerr, & Stattin, 2008).

Relationship models start from the premise that parent–child relationships are more than the sum of the child's behavior and the parent's behavior. As a consequence, relationships are hypothesized to be important influence agents. Relationship influence mechanisms range from global indices of relationship quality (such as attachment security and support), to composites that describe positive and negative attributes of the relationship, to specific features of the relationship (such as communication and cohesion). Direct links are hypothesized between relationship quality and child outcomes, on the assumption that positive relationships are beneficial to development and negative relationships are detrimental. Relationship experiences are also filtered through relationship perceptions, which serve as a lens through which the child interprets the environment. This suggests an indirect effects model in which perceived relationship quality partially or wholly mediates associations between parent behavior and child outcomes.

### *Developmental Patterns of Influence*

Conventional wisdom holds that parental influence wanes across the teen years relative

to peer influences. Plato quotes Socrates's lament about the youth of his time: "They have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for their elders and love chatter in place of exercise." More recently, Bronfenbrenner (1970) observed that adolescent concern with and conformity to peer norms increases with age as the school structure becomes more impersonal. That is, as schools get larger and contact with teachers becomes more superficial, youth band together to form their own culture; social pressures within the peer group increase, gradually eclipsing that exerted by adults. Similar claims of declining parental influence accompany theories of parent deidealization (Blos, 1979). According to this view, identity development and individuation require youth to separate from their parents. As adolescents recognize that parents are not infallible, they increasingly question and resist parent influence attempts. This creates an influence vacuum, which tends to be filled by peers.

But other scholars have noted that influence is not necessarily a zero-sum proposition. According to this view, parent influence is not necessarily tied to peer influence (Brittain, 1963). If absolute levels of influence are unrelated across relationships, change in influence accorded to one relationship does not necessarily prompt change in influence accorded to another. It follows that when peers become more influential, parents do not necessarily become less influential. In other words, the influence of parents may not decline in absolute terms over the course of the adolescent years, although it may decline relative to that of peers. A more nuanced version of this model holds that developmental changes in influence are domain specific (Kandel & Lesser, 1972). Different developmental patterns of influence may arise for different outcomes. For instance, peer influence may increase over matters such as attire but not over matters such as future career aspirations.

The models described thus far portray a steady growth in peer influence across the adolescent years. Curvilinear models of peer influence have also been advocated (Devereux, 1970). According to this view, adolescents are especially vulnerable to peer pressure during the process of identity formation because, in the absence of a clear sense of self, they look to age-mates for guidance. Susceptibility to peer pressure purportedly declines in late adolescence with a rise in autonomous thought. In keeping with the notion of domain specificity, different curvilinear trajectories may apply to different outcomes (Berndt, 1979). For instance, normative increases in delinquent activity between early and mid-adolescence should accompany increases in peer pressure to experiment with deviant behavior; these pressures subside by late adolescence and so does the prestige of youth engaged in delinquent acts. Similar developmental trends would not be anticipated in peer pressure concerning internalizing problems or prosocial behavior.

Berndt (1999) offers an important caveat to the coda. It is typically assumed that parents and peers are opposing sources of influence. Adolescents are thought to be buffeted between the competing interests of family and friends. An alternative scenario holds that parents and peers are generally complementary sources of influence, providing a consistent message concerning adolescent behavior. Parents are hypothesized to have considerable direct and indirect leverage over the child's selection of friends (Parke & Buriel, 2006), so we should expect parents to encourage youth to befriend those who share their values. Another possibility holds that parent and peer influences are distinct during the early adolescent years, as adolescents struggle to establish and maintain unique identities, but that parent and peer relationships (and their influence) become gradually more integrated over time (Collins & Laursen, 2000). After youth establish an independent sense of self, sometime during mid-adolescence, peer group cohesion should decline and adolescents should spend more time in mixed-sex cliques and with romantic partners. By late adolescence, family and

friend relationships are reintegrated as youth prepare for the challenges of young adulthood. This suggests that parents and peers become increasingly complementary forces across the adolescent years.

### *Magnitude of Influence*

Until recently, the notion that parenting played a significant role in adolescent outcomes was taken for granted. Even today, after two decades of evidence suggesting that heredity accounts for a substantial proportion of the variance previously ascribed to parenting, it is still unusual to see models that hypothesize effect sizes. The focus remains squarely on statistical significance, with little or no discussion about whether large or small effects are expected. There are many good reasons to consider the magnitude of effects. First, if there is no conceptual distinction between strong trends and weak trends, there is no incentive to consider the magnitude of a particular trend. Second, models that fail to distinguish weak effects from strong effects suggest a simple main-effects model in which parents exert uniform influence over all aspects of adolescent development. Weak or null effects are counterfactual to this proposition, which leaves the door open to the assertion that parents don't matter. Third, those models that do not anticipate the relative strength of parent effects tell us only whether parents make contributions to outcomes but are of little use in explaining when and why these contributions are important.

Conceptual models hold practical and statistical implications for research. Moderated effects and nonlinear effects, which are central to many contemporary models, are difficult to detect without large samples (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). Furthermore, they typically yield small effects. Scholars who adopt these models must be prepared to argue that statistical procedures tend to underestimate their magnitude or else describe how small effects have important implications for development. Bidirectional models tend to be tested within a path or structural equation–modeling framework, which can make the estimation of effect sizes less than straightforward. Effects for any one particular influence path are bound to be small after variance is partitioned across variables and relationship participants (Saris & Satorra, 1993). One consideration often overlooked is that models often dictate the selection of constructs. Event-based constructs may be less prone to bias from relationship cognitions but, as a consequence, they are less reliable and poorer predictors of outcomes (Burk, Dennissen, van Doorn, Branje, & Laursen, in press). Constructs that are highly stable also tend to yield small effects because they have insufficient variability to predict change in outcome variables. Finally, systemic models are apt to yield greater effects than individualistic models because the former encompass a wider range of variables than the latter. By the same token, interpreting systemic effects can be more difficult than interpreting individualistic effects because influence mechanisms may be less obvious.

A final point is that theories of relationship transformation have implications for models of parent influence on adolescent outcomes. Conceptualizations that emphasize change in parent–child relationships in response to the maturation of the child do not speak directly to patterns of adolescent adjustment because an accounting of normative changes experienced by all youth cannot anticipate individual differences in outcomes. Approaches that emphasize enduring characteristics of relationships should help to explain patterns of adolescent adjustment because they are predicated on the notion that some parents and some relationships are better equipped than others to help children successfully navigate the challenges of adolescence.

Maturational models assume that all families experience a period of heightened conflict and diminished closeness associated with adolescent physical and cognitive development. Differences in adjustment outcomes may be traced to the extent to which maturation is normative, both in its course and its timing. The

notion that adolescence is a period of normative disturbance (Blos, 1979; A. Freud, 1958; Hall, 1904) stands in contrast with more recent assertions that youth whose physical development is internally asynchronous (e.g., pubertal maturation in the absence of emotional maturation) and youth who are off-time relative to peers are at risk for adjustment difficulties (Simmons & Blyth, 1987). The general premise that variation in parenting and parent–child relationships is a product of adolescent development, rather than a cause of maladaptive development, contrasts with theories of relationship continuity. These latter models do not assume that adolescence is inevitably a time of troubled parent–child relationships. Rather, they are predicated on the view that parenting and parent–child relationships at the outset of adolescence anticipate changes in individual adjustment over the course of adolescence: Youth in secure, supportive relationships should experience few difficulties coping with maturational changes. Youth in poor quality relationships may lack resources to cope with maturation and thus may experience an upsurge in interpersonal difficulties that heighten the risk of adjustment problems. These difficulties do not spring up overnight. Escalating conflict and emotional alienation are thought to be symptomatic of relationship distress that is evident in the years leading up to adolescence.

## INTERPERSONAL PROCESSES AND RELATIONSHIP PERCEPTIONS

These theoretical views underscore a fundamental but often neglected point: Despite a long-standing orientation to the impact of parental actions, the significance of relationships with parents derives from joint action patterns. The meaning of most parental actions depends on the history of interactions between parent and adolescent and the immediate context of the action of each toward the other (Maccoby, 1992). This suggests that a focus on behavior alone provides a less-than-complete picture of the relationship; we must also consider how participants perceive their own behavior and that of their partner. There are systematic differences between parents and children in perceptions of their relationship. There are also individual differences in views of relationships. Put simply, interactions differ across relationships and these interactions are interpreted differently by parents and children, and by individuals with specific attributes. In this section we will describe these behavioral and perceptual differences and discuss some of their ramifications.

Most of the developmental research on parent–child relationships has focused on identifying aspects of the relationship that are subject to change and to charting the course of these normative alterations. As is the case in relationships generally, parent–adolescent dyads vary in the content or kinds of interactions; the patterning, or distribution of positive and negative exchanges; the quality, or the degree of responsiveness that each shows to the other; and the cognitive and emotional responses of each individual toward the partner and his or her behavior. In this section, we will describe continuity and change in parent–child relationships during adolescence and review the available evidence concerning age-related trends in parent and adolescent behaviors and perceptions as well as individual differences that affect them.

### Parents and Adolescents as Relationship Participants and as Relationship Reporters

Thirty years ago, Olson (1977) made an important distinction between insider and outsider views of the family. The point is worth repeating (and the chapter is worth rereading), because it contains many subtle distinctions that tend to be lost or overlooked. There is widespread acknowledgment that family members experience family relationships differently. But what, exactly, does this mean? For starters, it means that mothers, fathers, and adolescent children have different

expectations about their relationships. Fathers expect the family to be a respite from work; mothers anticipate family obligations to be a major source of stress and gratification; adolescents, whose emotional energies tend to be focused on peers, tend to hold utilitarian views of the family (Larson & Richards, 1994). These expectations are a product of schema, cognitive structures that interpret experiences on the basis of past interactions and that construct scripts that guide future interactions (Baldwin, 1992). Differences in relationship schema arise because the nature and the content of interactions differ across family members: Mothers have more mundane socializing interactions with children than fathers, and a much higher percentage of mother–child interactions fall into this category than father–child interactions. In contrast, fathers devote a higher proportion of their time with adolescents to recreational activities. These distinctions are amplified in households with more than one child. Participants interpret these interactions in terms of their relationship schema; fathers, looking to relax, seek to minimize socialization hassles with children, whereas mothers, who often experience negative affective spillover from work, may invest considerable emotion in otherwise mundane interactions with children.

Differences in schemas and experiences have important implications for reports about family relationships and interactions. Olson (1977) notes that reports differ not only between members of a family, but also between family members and observers. The relationship schema held by observers are not the same as those held by parents or children because observers have no common relationship history on which to base expectations and no emotional stake in the interaction. Does this mean that observer reports are more accurate? Not necessarily because, although observers may be less biased, they are also less informed. Observers may have difficulty distinguishing playful insults from hostility, and they may miss inside jokes or veiled animosity (Gonzales, Caucé, & Mason, 1996). This is not to say that observer reports are unhelpful. There are many important uses for observer reports, particularly when one needs an objective take on microanalytic events. But self-reports are important for precisely the reason they are often shunned by researchers—namely, because they are biased by participant perceptions, expectations, and cognitions. The challenge for developmental scientists is how best to collect and utilize reports from both participants in a relationship, which are, by definition, not independent. To understand the true course of parent–adolescent relationships, we must distinguish stability and change as they are experienced by each participant. This requires longitudinal data for each reporter. To understand the role that parent–child relationships play in adolescent outcomes we must distinguish each participant's perceptions of the relationship from their perceptions of their own behavior and that of their partner. This requires analytic techniques designed for interdependent data (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). There are very few circumstances in which the optimal research strategy involves (1) focusing exclusively on the views of a single relationship participant or (2) combining parent and child reports into a single score.

### Parenting Styles and Practices

Interactional variations from one parent–adolescent dyad to another have been subsumed, in part, by the construct of parenting styles (Baumrind, 1991; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Parenting styles characterize parents and their relations with specific children. *Authoritative parenting* denotes a complex amalgam of actions and attitudes that give priority to the child's needs and abilities while at the same time implying age-appropriate maturity demands. By contrast, *authoritarian parenting* is typified by interactions implying relative neglect of the child's needs in favor of the parent's agenda, strong demands for child compliance, and forceful methods for gaining compliance and punishing infractions.

*Permissive parenting* implies low demands from parents related to child-centered indulgence and self-direction on the part of the child. A fourth dimension, *uninvolved parenting*, refers to parent-centered inattentiveness and neglect of the child (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). These concepts almost certainly gain their explanatory power from diverse interactions whose influence is often mistakenly attributed to parents alone (Collins & Madsen, 2003). Indeed, parenting styles are defined in terms of the attitudes that parents have toward children and child rearing, the tenor of interactions between parents and children, and expressions of warmth and discipline. For example, Maccoby and Martin (1983) identified the defining features of authoritativeness as interactions that are high in reciprocity and bidirectional communication, whereas authoritarian and indulgent styles imply relationships in which reciprocity and communication are disrupted by the dominance by the parent (in the authoritarian style) or the child (in the indulgent style). As initially conceived, interactions between parents and children were both a marker and a product of different styles of parenting.

The distinction between the parent's attitudes about children and the parent's actions toward children becomes clearer in Darling and Steinberg's (1993) formulation, in which *parental styles* are global attitudes and emotional stances, and *parental practices* are specific strategies for gaining children's compliance, maintaining control, and enforcing expectations. Although relevant to relationships, styles and practices should not be considered indices of relationship quality; rather, these variables refer to the parent's views about the relationship and behavior within the relationship, respectively. Practices are postulated to be an outgrowth of styles, so styles have more influence over the overall quality of the relationship than practices. Neither is fixed: practices change as attitudes about parenting are modified and, presumably, parents modify styles on the basis of experiences with particular practices in specific relationships. As their names imply, parental styles and parental practices describe parents, who are assumed to be the primary vehicle of influence in the relationship. Styles and practices are related to characteristics of parents, such as education and personality, but they are not traits; parents can and do adopt different styles and practices with different children (Baumrind, 1991).

Scholars have devoted considerable effort to the challenge of parsing authoritative parenting. Two areas of controversy merit mention. The first concerns distinguishing psychological control from other aspects of authoritative parenting (Barber, 1996; Gray & Steinberg, 1999). Despite recent studies suggesting that psychological control is distinct from autonomy granting (Silk, Morris, Kanaya, & Steinberg, 2003) and monitoring (Smetana & Daddis, 2002), the construct remains poorly understood, in part because some studies operationalize psychological control as an index of parenting style whereas others treat it as a parenting practice (Steinberg, 2005). The second area of controversy concerns the distinction between parental monitoring and adolescent disclosure (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Although monitoring is typically defined as parents' attempts to elicit information about youths' activities and whereabouts, measures tend to conflate parental knowledge with parental efforts to stay informed (Stattin, Kerr, & Tilton-Weaver, in press). Stattin and Kerr argue that most parental knowledge comes from the voluntary disclosure of information by adolescents rather than the active solicitation of information by parents. Disclosure, they argue, is a product of family climate or parenting style, not parenting practices. These controversies underscore the need for scholars to separately consider information from parents and children because there are obvious confounds between the child's reports of their own behavior and their views of their parents' styles and practices.

In North American samples, authoritative parenting and indulgent parenting are more

prevalent than authoritarian parenting and neglectful parenting. Most studies that describe parents of adolescents focus on mothers; some report the average of maternal and paternal scores; few examine mothers and fathers separately. There is some evidence to suggest that mothers and fathers in the same household tend to adopt similar or pure parenting styles (Steinberg, 2001). A recent study (Simmons & Conger, 2007) revealed consistency between parents but divergence between reporters: Both child reports and observer reports agreed that pure parenting prevailed in most households. Children indicated that indulgent parenting was the most common style, whereas observers indicated that authoritative parenting was prevalent. Cross-sectional findings imply that practices associated with authoritarian parenting decline across the adolescent years, practices associated with indulgent parenting increase across the adolescent years, and practices associated with authoritative parenting hold steady (Steinberg & Silk, 2002).

### Positive Interactions and Perceived Support

In order to maintain relationships in the midst of rapid and extensive change, they must be adapted to the characteristics of individuals. The most obvious pressure on relationships comes from the physical, social, and cognitive changes in adolescents. At the same time, adolescents have a number of new experiences that differ from their experiences with family members. As a consequence, the importance of parents in adolescents' lives depends less on the physical power of parents and the extent to which they share experiences with their children and more on the emotional and instrumental support the family provides and the psychological bond between parents and children. Even so, there is considerable continuity between positive features of relationships during adolescence and those earlier in life, despite alterations in interaction, affect, and cognition.

Early studies pitting parents against peers found that the latter steadily gained influence at the expense of the former across the transition into adolescence and beyond (Bowerman & Kinch, 1959). Subsequent work underscored the limitations of this hydraulic perspective, revealing that relative parent and peer influences vary across domains. For issues relating to the future (e.g., school and career), parent influence remains greater than peer influence across the course of adolescence, but for issues concerning contemporary lifestyle (e.g., attire and leisure activities), peer influence increases during adolescence and eventually outweighs that of parents (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). Taken together, the literature suggests that relationships with parents remain the most influential of all adolescent relationships and shape most of the important decisions confronting children, even as parents' relative authority over mundane details of adolescents' lives wanes. Yet the issue is far from settled because important questions remain about the mechanisms of influence, the relative strength of parents and peers over specific forms of behavior, and the degree to which relative influences vary as a product of individual differences in family and friend relationships and in characteristics of youth.

*Closeness* is an umbrella term that describes the extent to which two individuals are connected behaviorally and emotionally. Commonly invoked indicators include interdependence, intimacy, support, trust, and communication. Although parents and adolescents who consider themselves close also report positive thoughts and feelings (Laursen & Williams, 1997), a minority appear to have highly interdependent and mutually influential relationships comprised predominantly of negative interactions in which one person neither feels positive about nor close to the other person (Collins & Repinski, 2001). The generally positive views attributed to parents and adolescents rest on findings that both report frequent, supportive interactions and a very low incidence of problems such as physical withdrawal and communication difficulties. This depiction of positive, well-functioning

parent–adolescent relationships applies to families in cultures around the world (Collins, 1995; Collins & Repinski, 2001).

Continuities in relationships coexist, however, with significant changes in the amount, content, and perceived meaning of interactions; in expressions of positive affect between parents and adolescents; and in their perceptions of each other and their relationship (Collins, 1995). Closeness during adolescence is manifest in forms that differ from closeness in earlier parent–child relationships. For example, intimacy, as expressed by cuddling and extensive joint interactions, decreases as children mature, whereas conversations in which information is conveyed and feelings are expressed increase (Hartup & Laursen, 1991). These adaptations are appropriate responses to the maturity level and changing needs of the adolescent.

Developmental changes in closeness are well documented. Subjective rankings of closeness and perceived support and objective indices of interdependence decrease across the adolescent years (Laursen & Williams, 1997; Mooney, Laursen, & Adams, 2006), as does the amount of time parents and adolescents spend together (Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck, & Duckett, 1996). Both the form and the content of time spent together change. As children get older, they spend more time watching TV with their parents and less time sharing meals and going out together (Dubas & Gerris, 2002). Relative to preadolescents, adolescents perceive less companionship and intimacy with parents (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987) and report lower feelings of acceptance by parents and less satisfaction with family life (Hill, 1988). Although perceptions of relationships remain generally warm and supportive, both adolescents and parents report less frequent expressions of positive emotions when compared with reports during preadolescence. Decreases in expressed warmth appear to be steepest from preadolescence to mid-adolescence, tapering off or even rebounding by late adolescence. In relationships with mothers and fathers, warmth expressed by daughters declines more than that expressed by sons, in part because the former start from a higher level than the latter (McGue, Elkins, Walden, & Iacono, 2005). Birth order appears to moderate these trends. First-born children report the warmest relationships with mothers and fathers across the course of adolescence, but firstborns also report the steepest drops in warmth from early adolescence to mid-adolescence (Shanahan, McHale, Crouter, & Osgood, 2007). Maternal experiences with older siblings predict subsequent maternal perceptions of relations with younger siblings; parents who have unsatisfactory relationships with older siblings tend to have similarly unsatisfactory relationships with younger siblings (Whiteman & Buchanan, 2002).

It is important to note, however, that descriptive data on age-related declines in closeness may overstate the significance of changes in parent–adolescent relationships. Many of the changes reflect a declining dependence on parents, but not necessarily erosion in the positive features or the importance of these relationships. This point may be obscured because research typically focuses on accumulated estimates of change at the group level without considering change at the level of the family. Longitudinal data from the Pittsburgh Youth Study revealed moderate to high levels of stability in parent and child reports of relationship qualities (Loeber et al., 2000). 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. Other findings show that despite decreases across the adolescent years, parents remain second only to friends or romantic partners in perceived support during late adolescence (Furman & Buhrmester, 1989). Almost 20% of late adolescents nominated a parent as their closest relationship partner, and 25% rated these relationships as their most interdependent (Laursen & Williams, 1997). Taken together, the available findings portray

a complex dynamic of relationship continuity and change that belies the conventional view of an abrupt descent toward distance and alienation.

Parent and adolescent views of the family are notable for their divergence, particularly during early adolescence. In general, children tend to see the family in terms quite different from parents. Maternal and paternal reports of their own relationships with an adolescent child agree more than the child's reports and that of either parent (Cook & Goldstein, 1993). Where mothers and fathers see unique relationships, adolescents see monolithic ones. Parents, especially mothers, tend to appraise the family more positively than adolescents do (Laursen & Collins, 2004). Mothers routinely report more warmth and affection among family members than adolescents do (Noller & Callan, 1988), which may be an attempt to ward off the decline in maternal life satisfaction that accompanies increasing adolescent autonomy (Silverberg & Steinberg, 1990). Another explanation of perceptual discrepancies is rooted in the different orientations of parents and children. Based on a round-robin, Social Relations Model design (Cook & Kenny, 2005), recent findings indicate that adolescents' perceptions of family support were primarily driven by their general views of the family, whereas parents' give greater weight to evaluations of specific relationships (Branje, van Aken, & van Lieshout, 2002). Discrepant expectations and mismatched perceptions of cohesion, expressiveness, and support are highest at the outset of adolescence; parent and child views gradually converge over time (Collins, Laursen, Mortensen, Luebker, & Ferreira, 1997; Seiffge-Krenke, 1999).

Closeness varies from one adolescent to another and from one adolescent–parent pair to another. Adolescents spend more time with their mothers and are more likely to share feelings with them. Adolescents are more likely to disclose information about personal matters to mothers than to fathers (Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006). Fathers are often somewhat distant figures, who tend be consulted primarily for information and material support. Sons and daughters have similarly warm relationships with mothers, but fathers are typically closer to sons than daughters (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). These trends accelerate across childhood and adolescence. One longitudinal study showed that parent involvement during childhood predicted closeness during adolescence, with stronger links between early father involvement and closeness to father at age 16 for girls than for boys (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002). Adolescent pubertal maturation, above and beyond age, has also been implicated in increased family distance, but the effects are small and inconsistent (Susman & Rogol, 2004); the timing of puberty appears to be a more potent predictor of changes in closeness than physical maturation per se.

Families adapt to individual and relationship changes in varying ways. Most families capitalize on greater adolescent maturity by fostering patterns of sustained interaction that promote a psychological closeness that depends less on frequency of interactions than was the case in childhood. They do so by adjusting interaction patterns to meet demands for adolescent autonomy (Collins, 1995). Families with a history of interpersonal problems, however, may lack the adaptive patterns needed for new forms of closeness during periods of relative distance and thus may be unable to surmount the barriers to effective relationships during adolescence (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Hauser, Powers, & Noam, 1991). Longitudinal evidence is consistent with the notion that some families experience greater diminutions in warmth and closeness than others. Youth who report the highest levels of support from mothers at the outset of adolescence experience little or no decline in perceived support across ages 11 to 13, whereas those who perceive the lowest initial levels of perceived support report steep drops in subsequent support (Adams, 2005). Similar findings emerge from measures of attachment,

where the general trend indicating a decline in parent–child attachment across the adolescent years appears to be moderated by characteristics of the relationship (Buist, Deković, Meeus, & van Aken, 2002). Mother–adolescent attachment security remains steady and even increases slightly during mid-adolescence for nondistressed youth, but it declines dramatically for distressed youth (Allen, McElhaney, Kuperminc, & Jodl, 2004). With age, insecurely attached youth increasingly turn to peers to fulfill attachment needs (Markiewicz, Lawford, Doyle, & Haggart, 2006).

### Negative Interactions and Perceived Conflict

Conflict, which is ubiquitous in close relationships, is especially prominent in families. 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, 1995). When college students were asked to recount three memories that defined the person they came to be, almost all of the memories involving parents concerned conflict during the adolescent years (McLean & Thorne, 2003). Thus, significant meaning is attached to some parent–child disagreements.

There is considerable continuity in parent–child discord. Negativity begets more negativity. From one year to the next across the course of adolescence, children's negative feelings for parents predicted a subsequent increase in parent's negative feelings for children, and vice versa (Kim, Conger, Lorenz, & Elder, 2001). Family contentiousness during the adolescent years is best forecast by family disharmony during the preadolescent years (Stattin & Klackenberg, 1992), and parent–child conflict during the adolescent years predicts negative interactions between parents and children during young adulthood (Belsky, Jaffee, Hsieh, & Silva, 2001).

Negativity takes many different forms, but it is most commonly gauged in terms of interpersonal conflict. Disagreements are composed of discrete components with a sequential structure (Laursen & Collins, 1994). Like plays or novels, conflicts follow scripts consisting of a protagonist and an antagonist (the participants), a theme (the topic), a complication (the initiation), rising action and crisis (the resolution), and a denouement (the outcome and aftermath). Conflicts that adolescents identify as important differ from other conflicts primarily in terms of the intense negative feelings generated during and lingering after the interaction (Laursen & Koplas, 1995).

A few words about assessment are in order. Disagreement is common, but serious conflict is not. This poses a problem for measurement. Some scholars address this problem by asking parents and children to describe global perceptions of conflict in their relationship. Unfortunately, global rating scales of event frequency are heavily influenced by individual atrributes, such as personality, and by overall perceptions of relationship quality (Schwarz, 1991). Other scholars ask participants to report on events using a recall period that spans an extended period of time, such as the past 2 weeks or month. This, too, introduces perceptual confounds. When compared to ratings of conflict immediately after the interaction, adolescent reports of the same interaction 6 weeks later shifted to be more consistent with their attachment-related representations (Feeney & Cassidy, 2003). When compared to peak ratings of emotion made at the close of the day, individuals who described themselves as neurotic recalled more negative emotions one month later, whereas individuals who described themselves as extraverted recalled more positive emotions one month later (Barrett, 1997). Still other scholars ask participants to report on recent events, such as those during the current or previous day. This minimizes perceptual confounds, but raises the risk that some youth will describe unrepresentative days; large samples ameliorate this liability to some extent, although it is still the case that the highly contentious are

most accurately described. A running average of reports from several consecutive days may afford the least biased measure of conflict. By definition, the stability and reliability of reports of conflict from a single day will be lower than those that encompass longer time periods, which, in turn, will be lower than those from global rating scales; these differences have less to do with the assessment of conflict than with the fact that the variables confounded with conflict (e.g., personality, relationship representations) are highly stable (Burk et al., in press). One final concern: Participants infer meaning from the time frame given for the recollection of conflict; long periods imply rare, affectively laden events, whereas short periods suggest that the investigator is interested in frequent, mundane experiences (Winkielman, Knäuper, & Schwarz, 1998). These issues, combined with the absence of a common measurement metric, mean that considerable variability should be expected in accounts of parent–adolescent conflict.

Most disagreements between parents and adolescents concern mundane topics, famously tagged by John Hill (1988) as "garbage and galoshes" disputes. Findings from a small meta-analysis indicate that parent-adolescent disagreements are usually resolved through submission or disengagement; compromise is relatively rare (Laursen, 1993). Adolescents report that conflicts with parents have few negative repercussions for the relationship, despite the fact that coercive tactics prevail. The prototypical conflict between parents and adolescents involves a mundane topic, with a power-assertive resolution and a winner/loser outcome that elicits neutral or angry affect (Adams & Laursen, 2001). This form of disagreement is to be expected in obligatory affiliations where power is shared unequally and where interactions tend to take place on a closed field (Homans, 1961). During the adolescent years, children remain dependent on parents and have little choice but to engage them in matters of mutual concern. The continuity of the relationship does not depend on getting along, so participants are free to adopt coercive strategies in conflicts without fear that the relationship will dissolve as a consequence.

Conflict with parents was once thought to increase in early adolescence and decline beginning in middle adolescence, but meta-analytic methods demonstrated that this presumed inverted U-shaped curve was an artifact of the failure to distinguish the frequency of conflict from its affective quality. Evidence from multiple studies actually reveals linear declines in the frequency of conflict with parents from early adolescence to mid-adolescence and again from mid-adolescence to late adolescence. Significantly, however, the anger associated with these conflicts increases from early adolescence to mid-adolescence, with little change thereafter (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998). Thus, conflict rates fall as negative affect rises, leaving families with the perception of worsening discord. A recent challenge to this explanation argues that curvilinear trends in parent–child conflict take place at the level of the family, not the dyad (Shanahan, McHale, Osgood, & Crouter, 2007). According to this view, conflict between parents and all children in the household follows an inverted U–shaped function, beginning when the eldest child is an early adolescent. This spillover hypothesis opens a new avenue of research on a topic that many thought had been settled.

No reliable age differences have emerged in either the topics or the outcomes of parent–adolescent conflict, but there is some indication that conflict resolutions are somewhat altered across the adolescent years. The frequency with which adolescents submit to parents declines, accompanied by an increase in disengagement and, during late adolescence, compromise (Smetana, Daddis, & Chuang, 2003; Smetana & Gaines, 1999). Perhaps more important are changes in views concerning the legitimacy of parental authority and decision making (Smetana, 2000). Across the adolescent years, but particularly during early adolescence, parents and children renegotiate

domains of authority. Adolescents view an increasing number of issues to be personal matters outside of parental authority, whereas parents continue to see the same topics as prudential or social-conventional matters that fall within their jurisdiction. Steinberg (2001) suggests that one reason adults see adolescence as a particularly contentious age period is that in the process of claiming authority over domains previously regulated by parents, youth may appear overly eager to reject the ways of their elders.

In contrast to the relatively detailed information available about parent–child conflict during adolescence, we know remarkably little about changes in parent–child conflict from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood. Evidence is limited to a single cross-sectional survey indicating that children perceive conflicts with mothers and fathers to be more prevalent during adolescence than during childhood or young adulthood (Furman & Buhrmester, 1989). In the absence of an empirical literature, Laursen and Collins (2004) offered two speculative propositions regarding long-term developmental trends in parent–child conflict: (1) The level of negative affect in parent–child conflict probably is higher during adolescence than during any other age period, except perhaps toddlerhood; and (2) the prevalence of coercion and winner/loser outcomes in parent–child conflict gradually declines across successive age periods from toddlerhood to adulthood. To this we would add that parents and children view these developmental trends somewhat differently. Parents may regard the changes as signs of rejection and deteriorating relationships, whereas adolescents may regard them as evidence of an (overdue) acknowledgment of enhanced maturity. Those who perceive loss (i.e., parents) in response to change experience greater stress than those who perceive gain (i.e., adolescent children).

Viewing relationships through the prism of personal gain and loss helps to explain why parents and adolescents describe their interactions in different terms (Noller, 1994). Adolescents appear to have more accurate (or more honest) appraisals of unpleasant aspects of the relationship than do parents. Reports of family conflict from independent observers frequently match those of adolescent children, but neither observer nor adolescent reports accord with parent reports of the same events (Gonzales et al., 1996). Although fathers are stereotyped as the family member most likely to be out of touch, accumulating evidence implies that it is mothers who most often underestimate the incidence of parent–adolescent conflict and overestimate its severity. Not coincidentally, mothers also report the most negative repercussions from conflicts with adolescent children (Silverberg & Steinberg, 1990). Several explanations have been offered for mothers' relatively extreme responses. Chief among them is that conflict represents a personal failure for mothers because it is an indictment of their ability to serve as family conciliators and peacemakers (Vuchinich, 1987). Moreover, conflict is the primary vehicle through which adolescents renegotiate their role in the family, which inevitably diminishes maternal (but not necessarily paternal) authority (Steinberg, 1981). The fact that parent and child reports of conflict appear to converge during late adolescence suggests that disagreements, though often unpleasant, play an important role in aligning expectations and facilitating communication among family members (Collins, 1995).

Parents appear to become either more skilled or less invested in changes in relationships with later born children as compared with firstborn children. It is also possible that later born children learn how to better navigate relationships with parents by watching their older counterparts. In any event, second-born children report less conflict during early and mid-adolescence than firstborn children did during these age periods (Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2003). Compared to second-born children, mothers and fathers discipline firstborn children relatively more often during early

adolescence, particularly if they display high levels of emotionality (Tucker, McHale, & Crouter, 2003). This type of differential treatment is not necessarily detrimental. Adolescent perceptions of differential treatment are associated with parent reports of greater relationship hostility only when the child perceives the treatment to be unfair (Kowal, Krull, & Kramer, 2004).

The extent to which gender moderates the relation between parent–child conflict behavior and developmental changes in adolescents varies according to whether the focus is the frequency of conflict, the affective response to it, or the resolution. Rates of conflict and levels of negative affect are higher in mother–daughter relationships than in other parent–child relationships (Laursen & Collins, 1994). In the meta-analysis by Laursen and colleagues (1998), conflict rates declined more in mother–child relationships than in father–child relationships, but gender did not moderate changes in affective intensity. Conflict resolutions vary as a function of both parent and adolescent gender: Compromise is more common with mothers than with fathers, and disengagement is more typical of conflict with sons than of conflict with daughters (Smetana et al., 2003; Smetana, Yau, & Hanson, 1991; Vuchinich, 1987). In contrast, studies of negative affect and conflict resolution yield no reliable evidence that gender moderates patterns of developmental change. Too little attention has been given to understanding the role gender plays in differences between dyadic and triadic parent–child conflict. Adolescents clearly interact differently with one parent than they do with two parents (Vuchinich, Emery, & Cassidy, 1988), and some evidence suggests that conflict discussions are more constructive when they involve one parent than when they involve both (Gjerde, 1986). Fathers and sons are particularly likely to alter conflict behaviors in the presence of another parent (Smetana, Abernethy, & Harris, 2000).

Variations in conflict attributed to puberty depend on whether the indicator is pubertal status or pubertal timing. Pubertal status refers to absolute level of sexual maturity. Meta-analytic comparisons yield a small positive linear association between pubertal status and conflict affect, indicating that greater physical maturity is associated with greater negative affect (Laursen et al., 1998). No similar association emerged for pubertal status and the frequency of parent–child conflict. Observational studies of problem-solving interactions among fathers, mothers, and children suggest that family dynamics shift as a function of pubertal maturation (Hill, 1988; Steinberg, 1981). Fathers interrupt adolescents during discussions more in the middle phases of pubertal maturation than in earlier or later phases, successfully signaling their dominant role in family decision making. Adolescents and mothers mutually interrupted each other most often during mid-adolescence, as the former challenges the authority of the latter. In later pubertal phases, mothers interrupt less and appear to be less influential over the outcomes of group decisions than sons; mothers and daughters interrupt each other less and exert similar levels of influence over family decisions.

Pubertal timing is an indicator of adolescents' level of maturity relative to peers. Generally, early maturing sons and daughters experience more frequent and more intense parent–child conflict than do adolescents who mature on time (Laursen & Collins, 1994). Indeed, pubertal timing accounts for much of the variance in parent–adolescent conflict that might otherwise be attributed to pubertal status. Several explanations for the association between pubertal timing and parent–child conflict have been offered, most of which suggest that parents do not agree with adolescents that physical precocity is a sufficient basis for autonomy granting (Laursen & Collins, 2004). Evolutionary accounts take a more distal view, arguing that heightened parent–adolescent conflict accompanies early puberty and the onset of sexual activity, which helps to ensure reproductive success under conditions of environmental risk (Belsky, Steinberg, & Draper,

1991). Findings that heightened conflict precedes rather than follows the early onset of puberty (Belsky et al., 2007; Graber, Brooks-Gunn, & Warren, 1995; Moffitt, Caspi, Belsky, & Silva, 1992) underscore the notion that individual differences in parent-adolescent conflict are rooted in long-standing differences in family relationships.

Although families vary considerably, the extreme forms of conflict implied by the popular impression of storm and stress are neither typical nor inevitable. Bandura (1964) forcefully argued that difficult relations during the teenage years are generally circumscribed to those families that also had difficult relations during childhood. Subsequent reviews of the literature consistently conclude that turmoil characterizes a small minority of households with adolescent children—probably somewhere between 5% and 15% of North American families. As we will discuss later, individual adjustment is closely bound to interpersonal conflict (Smetana et al., 2006). Relationship difficulties usually have more to do with distressed family systems or individual mental health problems than with the challenges posed by adolescent development (Offer & Offer, 1975; Rutter et al., 1976). This serves as a fitting backdrop to findings from cluster analyses indicating that bickering is fairly common in some families, but only a small fraction have frequent and angry quarrels (Branje, van Doorn, van der Valk, & Meeus, in press; Smetana, 1996).

Conflict management processes also vary across dyads such that the significance of a disagreement depends on the perceived quality of the relationship. Feelings of positive connectedness promote the consideration of alternatives in a nonthreatening context; in less supportive relationships, disagreement may be interpreted as a hostile attack that requires an antagonistic response (Hauser et al., 1991). It is not surprising, therefore, that securely attached adolescents report fewer conflicts overall and are more likely to resolve conflict with parents through the use of compromise and are less likely to rely on disengagement than dismissing adolescents (Ducharme, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 2002). One of the most important tasks confronting parents and children during adolescence is to renegotiate their roles and relationship; the overall tenor of the affiliation has an important bearing on the attitudes that each brings to the discussion.

To conclude, many families experience a modest upswing in conflict at the outset of adolescence, but disagreements typically are not a threat to relationships. Indeed, conflict during this period actually may strengthen relationships by providing a vehicle for communication about interpersonal issues that require attention. More than any other form of social interaction, disagreements offer parents and adolescents an opportunity to reconsider and revise expectations and renegotiate roles and responsibilities to be consistent with the autonomy typically accorded to youth in their culture. Most families successfully meet this challenge because they are able to draw on healthy patterns of interaction and communication established during earlier age periods. But for a small minority of families, the onset of adolescence holds the potential for a worsening of relationships. Families with histories of ineffective relationships are at risk for dysfunctional discord as they encounter pressures to realign relationships in response to the developmental demands of adolescence.

## THE ROLE OF PARENT–CHILD RELATIONSHIPS IN ADOLESCENT ADJUSTMENT

Links between parent–adolescent relationships and the development of individual adolescents have been the focus of most of the research on families as contexts of adolescent development. Because the evidence on this point has been reviewed recently and extensively (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Steinberg & Silk, 2002), this section is selective. It focuses primarily on how the recurring action patterns and emotional qualities of parent–adolescent interactions are related to key aspects of

psychosocial competence in adolescence. The section is divided into two parts. The first is an overview of findings directly linking parent–child interactions to adolescent development. The second outlines illustrative evidence that parent–child relationships also play an important indirect role in adolescent socialization by moderating and mediating the impact of influences in and beyond the family.

## Adolescent Outcomes Associated with Parent–Adolescent Relationships

Parental style, the dimension that is most closely related to the emotional tenor or quality of the parent–child relationship, is regarded as having motivational effects on the child's receptiveness to specific practices (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). It follows that the quality of parent–child exchanges and shared decision making, over and above the specific content of parental teaching, should contribute to the development of autonomous, responsible adolescent behavior by facilitating role-taking skills, ego development, and identity exploration (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Hauser et al., 1991). The evidence is consistent with this hypothesis: Mature levels of these competencies are associated with parent–adolescent relationships in which both individuation and connectedness are encouraged (Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O'Connor, 1994; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991).

Parental styles have been linked to a wide range of adjustment outcomes. In general, children of authoritative parents are most apt to excel in school and display the highest levels prosocial behavior, whereas children of neglectful or uninvolved parents tend to evince the most antisocial and health-risk behaviors and the least psychosocial maturity (Steinberg, 2001). Authoritative parent–child relationships are marked by parents' expectations of mature behavior in combination with interpersonal warmth, accepting attitudes, bidirectional communication, and an emphasis on training social responsibility and concern for the impact of one's action on others. Neglectful parenting, in contrast, consists of relatively few expectations, low involvement with the child, and a rejecting, unresponsive, parent-centered attitude. Recent evidence suggests that the advantages of authoritative parenting and the disadvantages of neglectful parenting, found in community samples across cultures, may even extend to families of youth who commit serious criminal offenses (Steinberg, Blatt-Eisengart, & Cauffman, 2006).

Practices that are typical of authoritative families are linked to indices of positive adjustment. In studies of moral development and social responsibility, prosocial behavior is correlated with clearly communicated parental expectations for appropriate behavior, and with warmth and moderate power accompanied by reasoning and explanation (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006). Adolescents' perceptions of parental acceptance and involvement are correlated positively with self-confidence, identity exploration, and empathic behavior (Jackson, Dunham, & Kidwell, 1990; Kamptner, 1988). Observational studies of parent–adolescent interaction have shown that adolescents from families marked by high encouragement for expressing and developing one's own point of view manifested higher levels of identity exploration (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). These conclusions are bolstered by longitudinal studies showing that high levels of bidirectional communication and mutual respect in parent–child relationships correlate positively with subsequent adolescent psychosocial maturity. Allen and colleagues (1994) report that parents' (especially fathers') behaviors that made it more difficult for family members to discuss their preferences were highly correlated with subsequent decreases in adolescents' ego development and self-esteem. In a similar study, Walker and Taylor (1991) found that advances in adolescents' moral-reasoning levels were best predicted by earlier parent–child interactions characterized by supportive, but cognitively challenging, discussions of moral issues. Although joint decision making is generally associated with the most

favorable adolescent outcomes, longitudinal findings suggest that additional benefits may accrue to those who are gradually accorded autonomy over personal issues (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Daddis, 2004).

A large body of evidence links certain parenting practices to maladaptive adolescent outcomes. Correlational findings imply that antisocial behavior and substance use are most strongly predicted by an absence of behavioral control; self-esteem and internalizing problems have the strongest links to warmth and autonomy granting; and school grades are uniquely associated with warmth, autonomy granting, and behavioral control (Barber, Stoltz, & Olsen, 2005; Gray & Steinberg, 1999). Studies of this type have been justly criticized for their reliance on concurrent data, but recent longitudinal evidence indicates that parenting practices predict subsequent changes in adolescent outcomes. Among youth affiliating with deviant peers at age 11, externalizing behaviors increased across the next 4 years for those whose parents reported low levels of behavioral control, but there was no change in externalizing problems for those whose parents reported high levels of behavioral control (Galambos, Barker, & Almeida, 2003). Parental warmth also forecasts decreases in adolescent externalizing behaviors; psychological control anticipates increases in adolescent internalizing (Doyle & Markiewicz, 2005). Some studies have raised the prospect that the influence of different parenting practices varies as a function of the child's characteristics. For instance, harsh parenting best predicts externalizing problems for undercontrolled youth but internalizing problems for overcontrolled youth (van Leeuwen, Mervielde, Braet, & Bosmans, 2004). Findings of this sort strongly imply that greater attention must be given to the match between parenting practices and child characteristics, because some child characteristics may amplify the risks associated with deleterious parenting.

Negative and positive features of parent–child relationship are only modestly intercorrelated, and each is known to make a unique contribution to adolescent outcomes. With regard to negative features, many studies have indicated that high levels of conflict are associated with psychosocial problems during adolescence and beyond. Reciprocated hostility between parents and early adolescents predicts subsequent conduct problems and depressive symptoms during mid-adolescence and high levels of expressed negative affect toward romantic partners at age 18 (Ge, Best, Conger, & Simons, 1996; Kim, Conger, Lorenz, & Elder, 2001). High levels of parent–child conflict during adolescence have also been linked to emotional maladjustment and poor-quality relationships with romantic and marital partners at age 25 (Overbeek, Stattin, Vermulst, Ha, & Engels, 2007).

Conflict is not uniformly deleterious, however. Its impact appears to vary as a function of the perceived quality of the relationship. Evidence suggests that conflict is inversely related to well-being if the relationship is perceived to be poor, but moderate amounts of conflict may be beneficial for those whose relationships are good (Adams & Laursen, 2007). Regardless of the quality of the relationship, the worst outcomes are generally reserved for those with the most conflicts. But 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. The negative tenor of conflicts in relationships perceived to be unsupportive undoubtedly plays a central role in these deleterious outcomes. Findings that poorly managed parent–child conflict is associated with adolescent depression, delinquency, and self-esteem (Caughlin & Malis, 2004; Tucker, McHale, & Crouter, 2003; van Doorn, Branje, & Meeus, in press) suggest that dysfunctional families not only have frequent disagreements but that these disagreements are typically angry and are resolved in a coercive, unconstructive manner.

Perceptions matter. New studies indicate that adolescent views of relationship quality predict the trajectory of subsequent individual adjustment. Studies of attachment security indicate that adolescent representations of parent–child relationships predict changes in internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Allen, Porter, McFarland, McElhaney, & Marsh, 2007). Adolescent attachment security also predicts increases in social skills and constructive interactions with romantic partners (Allen, Marsh, McFarland, McElhaney, & Land, 2002; Roisman, Madsen, Hennighausen, Sroufe, & Collins, 2001). Difficulties increase over time for adolescents who initially perceive low support from parents, whereas adjustment problems remain flat or even decline for those who initially perceive high support from parents (Brendgen, Wanner, Morin, & Vitaro, 2005; Deković, Buist, & Reitz, 2004). This is not just a matter of the troubled getting worse and the well-adjusted getting better; the same findings emerge for youth with comparable levels of behavior problems at the outset of adolescence (Mooney, Laursen, & Adams, 2007).

Adolescent reports are most likely to be indicative of positive adjustment when they converge with parent reports. Regardless of who sees the relationship in better terms, large discrepancies signal poor adolescent functioning. Specifically, divergent reports of relationship quality and parenting practices are associated with concurrent academic and behavioral problems (Feinberg, Howe, Reiss, & Hetherington, 2000; Mounts, 2007) and prospective declines in adolescent self-esteem (Ohannessian, Lerner, Lerner, & von Eye, 2000). Perceptions also matter in terms of whether adolescents see themselves as receiving the same treatment as a sibling. After accounting for absolute levels of each, differential warmth and control uniquely predict adolescent outcomes (Tamrouti-Makkink, Dubas, Gerris, & van Aken, 2004). Not surprisingly, effects are stronger for the sibling who perceives himself or herself to be the recipient of poorer treatment (Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001; Sheehan & Noller, 2002).

The increasing use of longitudinal designs bodes well for conclusions concerning parent influences. However, the largely correlational nature of findings from longitudinal data leaves open the question of process: What is the origin of associations between variations in family relationships and adolescent adjustment? Several possibilities have been proposed (Collins et al., 2000). One is that parents' child-rearing behaviors provide models of different patterns of social responsibility and concern for others. A second possibility is that different parenting styles engender differentially effective skills for autonomous, responsible behavior. In this respect, parent–child relationships provide continuities between childhood and the new demands of adolescence that facilitate the integration of past and future roles. Third, sensitive, responsive parental treatment of children and adolescents promotes positive emotional bonds that make the values and behaviors of parents more salient and attractive to adolescents. These three possibilities are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, multiple plausible mechanisms imply a more complex causal process than does a view that emphasizes the simple transmission of parents' values to the next generation (Kuczynski, 2003; Grusec, Goodnow, & Kuczynski, 2000). Adolescent adjustment clearly is facilitated by certain parental behaviors, but the operative processes almost certainly include dynamic properties of relationships between parent and child that foster the adolescents' desire or willingness to be influenced.

The debate on parental monitoring and child disclosure is instructive in this regard. Parental monitoring has long been assumed to be beneficial for adolescent development. Many scholars have reported that monitoring predicts concurrent and prospective adolescent outcomes. Although monitoring is conceptualized as an active process whereby parents solicit information about children and keep track of their activities and whereabouts, the conflation of measures of parental control and knowledge with measures of child disclosure

calls into question the mechanisms of parent influence, raising the prospect that a family climate that encourages disclosure may be more important than parent monitoring efforts. Initial reports by Stattin and Kerr (2000; Kerr & Stattin, 2000) and a recent longitudinal replication (Kerr, Stattin, and Burk, in press) indicating that parental knowledge from child disclosure predicted concurrent adolescent adjustment more strongly than did knowledge gained by tracking and surveillance launched a flurry of empirical work. The finding that parental monitoring is of secondary importance in the prediction of adolescent outcomes has not been consistently replicated (Fletcher, Steinberg, & Williams-Wheeler, 2004; Waizenhofer, Buchanan, & Jackson-Newsom, 2004), which has stimulated an ongoing search for potential moderating variables.

One important distinction to emerge is that between voluntary disclosure and active attempts to keep secrets from parents (Frijns, Finkenaur, Vermulst, & Engels, 2005). Adolescents from authoritative homes and those who report high levels of trust and acceptance in relationships with parents are more apt to disclose information and refrain from lying and keeping secrets than adolescents who report low levels of trust and acceptance (Darling, Cumsille, Caldwell, & Dowdy, 2006; Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006). These findings raise the possibility that some parents find monitoring more effective and rewarding than others. We know that parents tend to decrease their monitoring of deviant youth, even though this results in a subsequent escalation of antisocial behavior (Dishion, Nelson, & Bullock, 2004; Jang & Smith, 1997; Laird, Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 2003). Perhaps the parents of deviant children (for whom trust and acceptance are in short supply) respond to secretive and nonresponsive youth by reducing efforts to solicit information, which widens the gulf between them and diminishes the parent's potential for positive influence (Kerr, Stattin, & Pakalnaskiene, in press). Thus, family climate dictates the degree to which parental knowledge is effective in shaping adolescent outcomes by creating conditions that foster or inhibit honest disclosure and effective supervision.

## Parent–Child Relationships as Moderators and Mediators of Influence

Contemporary approaches to research on parenting have moved beyond the exclusive reliance on the global analyses of parental influence that dominated the field in the last century (Collins et al., 2000). Among the insights emerging from these more complex models of parenting is the recognition that, in addition to their direct impact on adolescent development, relationships with parents also may be significant as intervening mechanisms. In this section, we consider instances in which parent–adolescent relationships serve as *moderators* of relations between other sources of influence and adolescent outcomes and as *mediators* that help to account for or explain why a predictor is related to the outcome of interest.

The complex interplay between genetic and environmental influences on adolescent development is illustrated by recent findings indicating that parenting moderates the heritability of adolescent adjustment difficulties. The first example concerns the role of parental monitoring on adolescent cigarette smoking (Dick, Viken, Purcell, Kaprio, Pulkkinen, & Rose, 2007). A genetically informed twin design revealed that parental monitoring had a very modest direct influence on smoking (accounting for less than 2% of the variance), but the effects for monitoring as a moderator of genetic influence were dramatic: Genetic factors accounted for more than 60% of the variance at the low end of the parental monitoring continuum and less than 15% of the variance at the high end. A related study indicated that parental warmth similarly moderates genetic influence on adolescent antisocial behavior but not depression (Feinberg, Button, Neiderhiser, Reiss, & Hetherington, 2007). At low levels of warmth, genetics accounts for 90% of the variance in antisocial behavior, but

at high levels of warmth, the contribution of genetics approaches zero. These findings render discussions about the relative importance of genes and parenting practices obsolete: child outcomes clearly depend on both.

As one set of relationships in a larger network of close relationships, parent influences moderate and are moderated by peer relationships and relationships with other family members. Most adolescents are embedded in networks of relationships that are similar in their perceived quality. Longitudinal evidence indicates that the majority of adolescents describe all of their parent and friend relationships as either high quality or low quality; fewer than one in four adolescents report diverging support from peers and parents (Laursen, Furman, & Mooney, 2006). Good relationships with friends can ameliorate some of the detrimental impact associated with poor relationships with parents (Gauze, Bukowski, Aquan-Assee, & Sippola, 1996), but there are limits to this buffering. Adolescents reporting a positive relationship with a parent or a friend (but not both) had somewhat better outcomes than adolescents with no positive relationships, but adolescents with uniformly positive relationships almost always had the best school grades, the highest self-worth, and the fewest behavior problems (Laursen & Mooney, 2008).

Parenting quality moderates extrafamilial stressors. Mid-adolescents experiencing high levels of school hassles demonstrated more competent functioning and less evidence of psychopathology if they rated their familial relationships as high quality rather than lower quality (Garber & Little, 1999). Moreover, the link between after-school self-care and involvement in problem behaviors was found to be buffered by parental acceptance and firm control, which are the dual hallmarks of relationships in authoritative families (Galambos & Maggs, 1991). The potential complexity of moderation is evident in research showing that the perceived quality of relationships with parents facilitated adolescents' modeling of parents' substance use. Adolescents who had a relatively good relationships with parents tended to follow their parents' example more than if the relationship was relatively poor (Andrews, Hops, & Duncan, 1997), implying that positive relationships with antisocial parents may be a source of risk.

These instances broaden simplistic cause-and-effect models of the impact of parent–adolescent relationships. Rather than focusing only on the assumption that parenting styles and practices *cause* the outcomes to which correlational findings have linked them, compelling evidence shows that parent–adolescent relationships contribute to adolescent development by modifying the impact of other sources of influence and by transmitting them to adolescents through moment-to-moment exchanges between parents and children. The next section includes examples that illustrate the process whereby parenting mediates associations from familial and extrafamilial stressors to adolescent adjustment outcomes. We know that children are active participants in the socialization process and that parents react to their children's behavior. Thus, parenting practices may buffer against or exacerbate child tendencies, as in findings where inept parenting mediates links between oppositional behavior in early adolescence and the subsequent trajectory of adolescent delinquent peer affiliation (Simons, Chao, Conger, & Elder, 2001). It is fitting, therefore, that scholars devote more effort to understanding and elaborating the various bidirectional models of parent–child relationship influence.

## THE INTERPLAY OF CONTEXT AND RELATIONSHIP PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES

Although the significance of parent–adolescent relationships and influences is surprisingly consistent across social, economic, and cultural contexts (Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005; Steinberg, 2001), forces outside of the parent–adolescent dyad nevertheless help to shape the nature and impact of interactions and their impact on adolescent behavior and adjustment.

Links between adolescent adjustment and differing contexts are well documented (e.g., Fuligni, Hughes, & Way, this volume). Recently, researchers have begun to examine the processes that account for these associations. In general, their findings have shown that, although differing contexts each exert certain direct influences both on parenting and on adolescent behavior and adjustment, it is often the case that parent–adolescent interactions serve as conduits by which contexts impinge on adolescent development or as buffers of the potential impact of contexts.

This section briefly outlines illustrative instances of parent–adolescent interactions as moderators and mediators of contextual influences. The first concerns changes in the family system associated with marital difficulties. The second focuses on links between adolescent–parent relationships and parents' work experiences and socioeconomic circumstances. The third considers the opportunities and constraints in parent–adolescent relationships associated with ethnic and cultural variations.

## Characteristics of Family Systems

Adolescent development occurs within family systems, and apparently direct effects of features of, and especially changes in, the systems are well documented. Most prominently, differences between parent–adolescent relationships in generally harmonious families versus those marked by high levels of conflict and disruption in one or more of the relationships in the systems are frequently associated with sharply contrasting behavior and adjustment of adolescents (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992).

### *Impact of Parental Conflict*

Children and adolescents who witness frequent, angry, unresolved conflicts between mothers and fathers become distressed and manifest depressive symptoms and behavior problems (Cummings & Davies, 1994). In addition, marital conflict is associated with increased conflict between parents and adolescents (Almeida, Wethington, & Chandler, 1999). This heightened conflict is associated with more negative adolescent behavior and poorer adjustment, even in cases where the parent–adolescent relationship is generally positive (Erel & Burman, 1995).

The accumulated evidence implies that marital conflict and other stressors may undermine parents' ability to maintain an authoritative parenting style. In many families links between marital conflict and adolescent internalizing and externalizing problems are mediated by high parent–adolescent conflict and associated harsh discipline (Buehler & Gerard, 2002; Low & Stocker, 2005). Moreover, according to longitudinal evidence, the nonconstructive resolution strategies that typify conflictful marital relationships are effectively transmitted to parent–adolescent relationships (van Doorn, Branje, & Meeus, 2007). Relations between children and fathers are particularly vulnerable to high levels of marital troubles (Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000), suggesting that mediated effects may occur more frequently in father–adolescent relationships than in mother–adolescent relationships.

### *Divorce and Remarriage*

High levels of marital conflict commonly eventuate in divorce, which can exacerbate the stress and emotional disruption that stem from the multiple physical, cognitive, and social changes of adolescence. Moreover, the transitions necessitated by divorce may entail other stressors, such as economic need and changes in domicile, neighborhoods, and schools, as well as continuing emotional distress for parents and reorganization of family roles and relationships (Hetherington, 1999). These multiple stressors contribute to temporary disorganization and disruption of parent–adolescent relationships. Mother–adolescent relationships in divorced families manifest higher levels of both conflict and harmony than do relationships in never-divorced families. Divorced mothers monitor their children's activities less closely and demand greater responsibility for family tasks than do married mothers. Divorced

mothers also use more peremptory and coercive techniques to discipline and otherwise influence adolescents' behavior. For their part, adolescents in recently divorced families tend to feel anger and moral indignation toward their parents. Some adolescents react by pulling away from the family and behaving with aloofness toward both parents, a withdrawal that may help them adjust to the divorce. These changes in parent–adolescent relationships and influences, rather than direct effects of the divorce or remarriage, likely account for the links between transitions in family systems and negative behavior and adjustment in the adolescent (for review, see Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002).

Whether perturbed parent–adolescent relationships imply higher levels of parent–adolescent conflict in divorced than in never-divorced families is unclear. Some researchers found more conflict in divorced families in the 2-year period of adjustment, with a gradual return to levels similar to those of never-divorced families (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Others report that initial increased levels are sustained beyond the first 2 years (Baer, 1999), and still others found fewer arguments in single-parent families than in married households (Smetana, Yau, Restrepo, & Braeges, 1991). Two studies suggests that overall rates of parent–adolescent conflict in intact two-parent households and divorced single-parent households are similar, but that mother–adolescent conflict differs across households because mothers in single-parent households are engaged in disputes that otherwise fall to fathers in two-parent households (Laursen, 1995, 2005).

Custodial parenting arrangements vary. Disruptions in relationships with noncustodial fathers appear to be more extensive and long-lasting than in mother–adolescent relationships, showing links to adjustment and relationships of offspring a decade later during young adulthood (Burns & Dunlop, 1998; Hetherington, 1999). Regardless, adolescents who have regular, supportive contact with their noncustodial parent have different experiences than those for whom the noncustodial parent is rarely, if ever, in contact. Moreover, having support from an extended family member, such as a grandparent, is linked to single parents' success in maintaining authoritative parenting practices: extended family support is notably less important for sustained authoritative parenting in intact households (Taylor, Casten, & Flickinger, 1993). These differences in the significance of postdivorce arrangements vary to some extent with the recency of divorce and the number of ancillary changes that accompany divorce (Steinberg & Silk, 2002).

Are the implications of apparent disruptions in relationships unique to recently divorced parents and adolescents? Some evidence suggests that parental conflict and lack of harmony in the family have negative effects much like those observed in studies of the impact of divorce (Fauber, Forehand, Thomas, & Wierson, 1990). Moreover, the nature and extent of disruptions vary among divorced families, with more pronounced links for boys than for girls, especially when the mother is the custodial parent (Needle, Su, & Doherty, 1990). Adolescents who have experienced divorce tend to be somewhat less well adjusted than those who have not. A meta-analysis of parental divorce and child adjustment revealed modest differences between divorced and intact families in terms of secondary school student outcomes in the domains of academic achievement, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-concept, and parent–adolescent relationships (Amato, 2001).

The impact of remarriage on parent–adolescent relationships likewise varies considerably from family to family and adolescent to adolescent (Amato, 2000). Adjustment to remarriage appears to be more difficult initially for daughters than for sons (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002). Whereas warmth and intimacy characterize mothers and daughters in divorced, single-parent families relative to intact, two-parent families, closeness in

the former group declines somewhat when the parent remarries. In contrast, sons sometimes benefit from the introduction of a stepfather into the family. Their relations with mothers often improve, and stepfathers also report more positive relationships with boys than with girls. Findings from one study imply that some African American adolescents benefit more from remarriage than European American adolescents (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). In the final analysis, adolescents' relationships with parents and stepparents depend on several factors. Continuing tensions and conflict between an adolescent's biological mother and father generally make it more difficult for the adolescent to adjust.

In general, noncustodial parents who put the welfare and adjustment of their children before their own personal difficulties foster positive parent–adolescent relationships and high levels of authoritative parenting during family transitions. Recent findings show that adolescents who perceive little conflict between their parents and close relationships between themselves and their parents have fewer adjustment problems than do those whose parents are in conflict with one another (Brody & Forehand, 1990). One reason for this is that adolescents often feel caught between warring parents and have attendant fears of breaching their relationship with one parent or another (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991).

### Economic Status

In cases where parents either are unemployed or income is insufficient for the family, adolescents face well-documented developmental challenges. Among the multiple risks associated with economic strain are difficulties in familial relationships, including those between parents and adolescents. As with the effect of family system stressors, the operative factor appears to be deterioration of the parents' ability to maintain nurturant, authoritative parenting (Grant, Compas, Stuhlmacher, Thurm, McMahon, & Halpert, 2003).

Strong evidence indicates that the impact of family economic strain on adolescents is mediated by a rise in negativity and a deterioration of nurturant and involved parenting, which in turn is associated an increase in adolescent academic and behavior problems (Gutman & Eccles, 1999). Familial conflicts serve a similar mediating role in the link between family economic hardship and adolescent aggression and anxiety–depression (Wadsworth & Compas, 2002). Both chronic poverty (McLoyd, 1998) and sudden economic loss (Conger et al., 1992, 1993) are associated with greater parent–adolescent conflict, more negative behaviors, harsh, punitive parenting, and adverse adolescent outcomes in domains ranging from prosocial behavior to academic achievement.

Recent findings specify one process by which parent–adolescent relationships may exacerbate or buffer the impact of economic strain on adolescent behavior and adjustment. Early adolescents who experience chronic stress from family turmoil, poverty, and crowded, substandard living conditions generally manifest higher allostatic load (a physiological marker of cumulative wear and tear on the body) than adolescents with lower cumulative risk. This effect is most pronounced for adolescents whose mothers are low in responsiveness, implying that having a responsive mother is a resource for adolescents in stressful circumstances, whereas low maternal responsiveness is an additional risk factor (Evans, Kim, Ting, Tesher, & Shannis, 2007).

It should be noted that stressors and developmental challenges emanate not only from economic loss and disadvantage. As a group, children and adolescents from affluent families manifest problems such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse to a greater extent than those from less affluent families (Luthar & Latendresse, 2005). This link between affluence and developmental risk is mediated by achievement pressures and isolation from parents. In many affluent families, material wealth appears to be accompanied by reduced contact between parents and their offspring, possibly

resulting in poorer quality parent–adolescent relationships (Luthar & Becker, 2002).

### Parental Work Roles

Parent–adolescent relationships often reflect the nature of parents' work roles and the stresses associated with them. Kohn (1979) argued that parents whose work requires conformity rather than individual initiative tend to value obedience over autonomy in their children's behavior. In addition, parents' work schedules—whether they are required to travel extensively, and even the distance between workplace and home—often influence what adolescents are expected or allowed to do (Gottfried, Gottfried, & Bathurst, 2002).

Until recently, researchers focused almost exclusively on maternal employment. Today, few studies show differences in closeness or other qualities of relationships for working and nonworking mothers (Galambos & Maggs, 1991; Keith, Nelson, Schlabach, & Thompson, 1990). Indeed, both sons and daughters of working mothers appear to have less stereotyped views of masculine and feminine gender roles than children with nonworking mothers (Hoffman & Youngblade, 1999).

In response, researchers have broadened their inquiries to address the impact that parents' work-related stressors have on their family lives. Findings show that work-related stressors may exacerbate marital and parent–adolescent conflicts. In one study, mothers and fathers were more likely to experience tense interactions with their adolescents when they also had experienced work overloads or home demands (Almeida et al., 1999). Tension spillover was more likely for mothers with adolescents than for mothers with younger children. Other findings have revealed that the link between parents' work pressures and adolescent well-being are mediated by parents' sense of role overload (Crouter et al., 1999). Having documented these problems, we still lack research that describes the processes by which parents and adolescents adjust to the competing demands of parents' work and family roles.

### Ethnic and Cultural Variations

Little is known about variations in closeness among adolescents and parents who differ in socioeconomic status or ethnic background. One issue in comparing diverse groups is the best method for equating the degree of closeness associated with different norms and cultural forms of relating. The suggestion that closeness be operationalized as interdependence may provide a partial solution to this quandary by allowing for members of cultural groups to specify and report on the frequency, duration, diversity, and salience of activities that denote closeness in their respective contexts (Reis et al., 2000). Variations among families also reflect differences in ethnic and cultural heritages. Different cultures foster sometimes contrasting views of parent–adolescent relationships (Feldman & Rosenthal, 1991). For Korean adolescents, strict parental control signifies parental warmth and low neglect, whereas middle-class adolescents in North America typically regard the same behavior from parents as repressive (Rohner & Pettengill, 1985). Adolescents from European backgrounds report similar or greater closeness, compared to their peers from families with Mexican or Chinese backgrounds, yet those from the latter two groups experience a stronger emphasis on family obligation and assistance than do adolescents from European backgrounds (Hardway & Fuligni, 2006). Cultural comparisons generally show sizable overlaps in descriptions of relationships across differing cultural groups and equal or even greater diversity within than between these groups (Harkness & Super, 2002).

Cultural gaps in the nature and significance of parent–adolescent interactions are especially apparent in immigrant families. Parent–adolescent relationships vary across immigrant families and between immigrant families and those of the host culture, reflecting parents' varied cultural and normative patterns. For

example, Asian American families in California reported more formal communication with their parents than did either Hispanic American or European American adolescents (Cooper, 1994). Asian American youth also expressed higher levels of familistic values, emphasizing the importance of respect for and duty toward parents and family. Some cultures foster relatively more attention to duty and filial piety than others (Hofstede, 1980), and these differences may affect the degree to which adolescents evaluate their relationships with parents and siblings in terms of the quality of interaction. Research findings suggest that patterns of parent–adolescent conflict differ between immigrant and nonimmigrant families in the United States (Fuligni, 1998), but not between different nonimmigrant subgroups (Smetana & Gaines, 1999). Similarly, Greek Australian adolescents reported more tolerance and acceptance of conflict than did Greek adolescents reared in Greece, but Greek Australian parents viewed conflict with their children much as the parents living in Greece did (Rosenthal, Demetriou, & Efklides, 1989).

Despite cultural and ethnic differences in the perceived qualities of relationships, several studies have documented consistent correlations between the characteristics of parental behavior toward adolescents and adolescents' behavior and development. In one multiethnic sample, adolescents' perceptions that their parents were authoritative, rather than authoritarian or neglectful, were correlated with personal maturity, school achievement, and low levels of behavioral and psychological problems (for an overview, see Steinberg, 2001). This correlation held for African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and European Americans alike. Similarly, perceptions of parental rejection have been found to be correlated with poor individual outcomes in a number of different cultures (Rohner & Pettingill, 1985; Rohner & Rohner, 1981). In other words, although typical patterns of parental control may vary across cultures, family environments that emphasize mutuality, respect for the child's opinions, and training for maturity seem to be most effective in helping adolescents develop attitudes and behaviors appropriate to their society. A recent study of the impact of racial identity and parent–adolescent relationships on adolescent functioning illustrates the complexity of these links. A sample of African American high school seniors revealed that correlations between racial identity and maternal support, on one hand, and depressive symptoms and anxiety, on the other, were mediated by perceived stress (Caldwell, Zimmerman, Bernat, Sellers, & Notaro, 2002).

It is clear that direct and indirect influences of relationships with parents extend to families in all cultures. However, the enterprise of amassing information on variations in the nature of these links is still in its infancy. Knowledge of indirect links is especially meager. The next phase of research incorporating ethnic and cultural diversity must attend to the more complex models of parenting that encompass multiple possible pathways of influence.

## CONCLUSION

Contemporary research with parents and adolescents challenges traditional theoretical and methodological approaches to adolescent development. Conceptually, the growing body of findings on adolescents' close relationships implies that adolescent development can be understood more fully in the context of relationships with significant others and that relationships with parents remain central to these contexts. Methodologically, the findings imply the need for broadening the construct of adolescent outcomes to incorporate interpersonal competencies and developmental changes in them and also to adopt more complex models of the processes through which parent–adolescent relationships have an impact. The key task is to understand not only the developing individual, but also the interplay between individual growth and change in the nature and developmental significance of relationships with others.

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## THIRD EDITION

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