Theory and Research Pertaining to Families with Adolescents

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This book chapter covers a complex and multifaceted area of family development: families with adolescents. Following some preparatory remarks regarding definitions of terms, this chapter presents two related sections regarding our knowledge base about families facing the demands of this particular developmental period. The first section is concerned with theories that frame our understanding of families with adolescents, whereas the second section deals with family-based research findings. These two sections draw evenly from a broad cross-section of social science disciplines, providing an integrative and concise approach to the interdisciplinary nature of work being conducted in this area of inquiry.

The first section involves family-based theoretical efforts, and hence examines basic concepts about the families within which adolescents grow and develop. Particular emphasis is given to theoretical frameworks from the family science field, including most prominently family development theory and family systems theory. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this book chapter, however, theories coming from other fields, including ecological theory, attachment theory, and social learning theory, also will be explored.

The second section of this book chapter focuses on family research topics as part of an exploration of empirical results that inform the field about families with adolescents. Research articles related to this area of inquiry, spanning many decades of work, have now reached substantial proportions. As such, there literally was no way to cover this body of empirical work in its entirety within the page restrictions of a single book chapter. Because some sort of choice about what to include and what to exclude was inevitable, the decision was made to emphasize the findings of those studies on families with adolescents that have been published over the last 15 years.

The present chapter's review of the research on the linkages between family factors and adolescent outcomes was limited to aspects of adolescent problem behaviors—delinquency, mental health, alcohol, and other drug use—and two areas of adolescent's potential assets—education and social competency. This approach was necessary because the literature on the relationships among family factors and adolescent outcomes is so large and diverse; articles were chosen in order to provide the reader with a representative sample of the types of studies that have been conducted over the last decade and a half in these areas. The selected studies are thought to serve as excellent examples of the type of cutting edge work being done in the larger compendium of literature concerning family influences on adolescent development and well-being.

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G.W. Peterson and K.R. Bush (eds.), *Handbook of Marriage and the Family*,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4614-3987-5_14, © Springer Science+Business Media New York 2013

Taken together, the sections of this book chapter on theory and research are meant to embody separate yet related aspects of how well we currently understand and observe the inner working of families containing members who are adolescents. A commentary section concludes this book chapter by providing both a summary of the current accomplishments in this area of inquiry, as well as observations regarding the challenges ahead related to theoretical and empirical work focused on families with adolescent members.

Definitions of Terms

In order to investigate any type of phenomena, definitions of terms must be developed and adopted that describe the central focus of inquiry. For present purposes, the task at hand is to define what it means to study "families with adolescents." Despite the fact that this book chapter concerns family phenomena and not individual developmental issues, the fact that this family life cycle stage is predicated on the developmental phase of its offspring necessitates a delineation of what the term "adolescent" implies.

The complexity involved in defining adolescence is reflected in many books that focus on this developmental period. These texts typically contain a section that discusses the variety of ways that the adolescent developmental period can be defined. For example, Steinberg (2007) notes that there are various ways that definitions of adolescence can be constructed dependent on the biological, cognitive, and/or social context criteria that are employed. For instance, chronological age can be used, resulting in a focus on teenagers (13–19 years of ages). Alternatively, there are legal definitions, with an emphasis on 18 as the "age of majority" signifying adulthood (although the age of 21 as the legal drinking age also can be employed). Also, there are definitions that surround physical development, usually emphasizing events such as puberty, the end of physical growth, and the development of adult sex characteristics. Further, there are more psychologically based definitions that rely on markers of emotional and cognitive maturity. Finally, there are definitions that are based on social contexts and events, such as high school graduation.

Such variations in definitions also are reflected in differences of opinion regarding the period of time covered by adolescence. The general public tends to think in terms of chronological age only, making the terms "adolescent" and "teenager" synonymous. In contrast, developmental theorists and researchers employ a variety of timeframes to capture the adolescent period. For instance, some scholars divide this developmental period into early adolescence and late adolescence (Cobb, 2006; Santrock, 2008). Here, early adolescence is marked by tasks related to the establishment of a group identity amongst one's friends, whereas later adolescence concerns the development of an individual identity. Others break down this developmental period into early, middle, and later adolescence, with an emphasis on the school environment (middle school, high school, and college respectively), as well as emphasizing an additional transitional period known as "emerging adulthood" (Arnett, 2003).

As noted above, the present book chapter goes beyond the individualized focus on adolescents in order to establish and describe the larger family context. At the same time, the complexity of describing this developmental period directly impacts the definition of terms regarding families with adolescents. Because there are differences of opinions regarding the beginning and ending points of this developmental period, the reader also must expect that definitions will vary regarding what constitutes a family with adolescents. This lack of unanimity is both embraced and used as a point of comparison wherever possible, such that the scholarship reviewed throughout the chapter makes explicit reference to the ages of adolescent family members whenever available in material regarding theories and research findings related to their families.

Before turning to this material, however, some common ground must be developed regarding what our definition of family itself will be. Dictionary definitions state that the term "family" references the most basic unit of a society that has as its main function the raising of children. In most mainstream Western societies,

families traditionally are thought to be made up of two parents rearing their offspring (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2006). In other societies, there is greater emphasis on the extended generations of a family, and therefore can include any number of additional members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and the like. Even in current American society, however, the consistently high divorce rates and large numbers of children being born to unmarried parents has given rise to the need to include different combinations of members that can be regarded as comparable to the traditional family form (Olson & DeFrain, 2006). Hence, single-parent headed households, custodial and noncustodial parents following a divorce, cohabiting couples with children, stepfamilies, and gay and lesbian parents together create a virtual kaleidoscope of diversity regarding family forms.

Given this rather tremendous variation in family membership, the present chapter adopts what might best be described as an "intergenerational nurturing" definition regarding families with adolescents. The intergenerational component denotes that there is at least one adult and one adolescent present to count as a family. As well, the nurturing component of this definition implies that the adult or adults inside of this family have primary care-giving responsibilities for the adolescent.

The notion of intergenerational nurturing is thought to align well with frameworks offered by Bush and Peterson (2008) and others regarding the main influences that families have on their offspring. Here, major emphasis is placed on a family socialization process that views parents and other adult caregivers as assuming a central role in teaching their adolescents how to become useful members of the larger society in which they reside. The relative success of these parental efforts often is addressed in terms of the offspring's development of socially competent behavior (i.e., problem-solving skills, achievement orientation) as examples of positive outcomes on the one hand, and the manifestation of problematic behaviors (i.e., delinquent behavior, substance abuse) as instances of more negative outcomes.

Theories About Families with Adolescents

In the most general sense, White and Klein (2008) have asserted that there are two kinds of family theories. First, there are theories containing family concepts that are used to describe other phenomena. Second, there are theories that attempt to describe families themselves as an object of study. Extending this to our present purposes, we can see there are theories that use family concepts to describe how adolescents develop, and there are theories that describe families of adolescents as entities of their own. Often as not, the theories covered in this book chapter are utilized to accomplish both tasks; that is, these theories both describe the families themselves as well as their impact on the development and well-being of their adolescents.

Attention is directed now toward these theories. The first two theoretical frameworks covered in this section are associated mostly with the field of human development and family science: family development theory and family systems theory. Next, three additional theories that are known more broadly throughout the social sciences are covered due to their critical focus on the larger social context within which these families with adolescents are situated (ecological theory) as well as the nature of the parent–offspring relationship itself (attachment theory and social learning theory).

Family Development Theory

Most generally, family development theory concerns the description of how families make transitions across time as members enter and leave through birth and death, marriage and divorce, and otherwise deal with various normative and nonnormative life events. While there is rather substantial variation among scholars in terms of the concepts that are used to discuss family development (Rodgers & White, 1993), most theoretical applications give some attention to family life

cycle stages and developmental tasks, a tradition that stems back to the inaugural work of Glick (1947) and Duvall (1957).

The "families with adolescents" stage of the family life cycle (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980) is centered on the theme of increasing the flexibility of the family's boundaries in order to both facilitate greater adolescent independence and accommodate the growing dependence of grandparents and other older family members. As such, this theme of increased family boundary flexibility is linked to a number of key developmental tasks (also discussed as "second-order changes"). These developmental tasks include: (a) the alteration of the parent–adolescent relationship in order to allow the adolescent to move more freely out of and back into the family environs; (b) a renewed focus on marital issues and parental career interests; and (c) taking on a greater role in care-giving for older family members (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989). In combination, these developmental tasks strongly suggest a perspective that accounts simultaneously for interacting needs and desires of three generations of family members: adolescents, parents, and grandparents (Ackerman, 1980).

Some of the most common issues that arise out of this multigenerational theoretical focus include issues that focus on individuality (autonomy, identity) and intimacy (dating, sexuality) concerns (Preto, 1989). As the chapter on "Adolescence in Contemporary Families" contained in this *Handbook's* previous edition has pointed out (Steinmetz, 1999), topics falling under these broad categories have become some of the more well-researched subject areas that are covered in the families with adolescents literature. More often as not, the focus on both individuality and intimacy as expressed through family interactions often seem to be balanced around the actions of the parents, who in effect become the "pivot point" for these developmental issues (Mattessich & Hill, 1979).

For instance, adolescents and parents are engaged in an almost constant renegotiation of issues that underscore the adolescent's autonomy claims at the very same time that the parents are beginning to communicate about independent living decisions with their own parents and other older family members. Likewise, parents undergoing mid-life recalibrations of their career aspirations may be returning to higher educational pursuits at the very same time that their adolescents are getting ready for their first college experience. Further, adolescents are experiencing the awakening of their sexual desires while parents may be dealing with sexual issues inside of their marriage or, if the marriage has dissolved, one or both parents might find themselves reeducating themselves about sexual expectations within the current dating scene. Taken together, there is the clear sense that family member interactions can be "felt across generations" (Preto & Travis, 1985) as adolescents, parents, and grandparents work to resolve these and related developmental issues.

Family Systems Theory

Most systems-oriented works in the social sciences have as their origin the General System Theory (GST) work of Bertalanffy (1968), whose efforts involved no less than an attempt to unify all sciences through the recognition of concepts that were common to each academic discipline. The application of this work within the family field has emphasized the use of concepts such as hierarchy, boundaries, equifinality, multifinality, and feedback (Whitechurch & Constantine, 1993) that, in combination, reflect an emphasis on understanding how families operate as open systems with properties that are of a non-summative nature (the axiomatic GST principle of "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts").

Although not typically discussed in such GST terms, the hallmark application of systems theory, as applied to the family with adolescents, is associated with the open systems property of the steady state (i.e., sometimes also referred to as homeostasis, which actually is a closed system concept in the GST tradition). Likened to a host of other dynamic processes (such as blood pressure, made up of both systolic and diastolic readings), this concept typically is used to discuss the balance of stability and change—achieving a

"dynamic equilibria" (Bertalanffy, 1968)—that must be struck in families with adolescents as members negotiate the demands of this developmental period (Koman & Stechler, 1985). One result of this emphasis in the literature on families with adolescents is a focus on distance regulation and boundary maintenance, most often discussed in terms of differentiation levels (Bowen, 1978).

Here, family differentiation is seen as the family system's ability to display both tolerance for intimacy and tolerance for individuality among its members (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1990). The combination of high individuality tolerance and high intimacy tolerance (termed high family differentiation), where family members are able to simultaneously experience themselves as both separate yet connected individuals, is associated with the highest levels of adolescent and family functioning. Conversely, low differentiation levels (both low individuality tolerance and low intimacy tolerance) have neither the experience of separateness or togetherness, and therefore are associated with the lowest functioning levels. In the middle of these polar extremes are combinations described as moderate differentiation levels that are associated with unexceptional adolescent and family functioning levels. The combination of high individuality tolerance and low intimacy tolerance is thought to reflect the sacrifice of connectedness experiences for the sake of individuality claims, while the combination of low individuality tolerance and high intimacy tolerance is the exact reverse; i.e., the sacrifice of individuality for the sake of togetherness (Gavazzi, 1993). As studies of family distance regulation in other cultures reviewed below will indicate, however, the relative balance of individuality and intimacy and its connection to healthy adolescent development very well may shift in more collectivist or otherwise non-Western societies.

Other variations on the application of steady state phenomena exist in the systems-influenced literature on families with adolescents. For instance, Stierlin (1981) discussed the family context of the adolescent as being made up of both centripetal and centrifugal processes that alternatively push and pull family members into and out of the home environment. Another example is Hauser, Powers, and Noam (1991) work on constraining and enabling processes, whereby separateness and connectedness experiences are either restricted or facilitated through interactions between parents and adolescents. Although applied more generally to all families instead of only to families with adolescents, a review of this literature would be incomplete without mention of Broderick's (1993) bonding and buffering processes as well. Here, bonding processes are equated with the centripetal pull to remain connected with other family members, while the buffering processes are thought to be those centrifugal forces that maintain some distance between members of the family.

Ecological Theory

Theoretical attempts to place the family system within its larger social context are indebted to the ecological approach developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Although various aspects of human development and the individual's interaction across time with various ecological contexts are highlighted in this body of work (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), the ecological approach perhaps is most well known for its emphasis on levels of the ecosystem. For instance, the family is characterized as the primary "microsystem" of all human development, and exists at this ecosystem level alongside other intimate social settings that involve ongoing face-to-face interaction. In turn, the "mesosystem" is meant to describe various connections between microsystems (such as the linkage between families and schools), while the "exosystem" involves the influences of larger systems such as the neighborhood and community. Finally, the "macrosystem" represents even larger social contexts such as nation and culture.

Peterson and Hann (1999) have asserted that there are three important elements of the ecological approach as applied to the study of families with children. First, the ecological framework maintains an emphasis on the mutually reciprocal influences between children and these social contexts, a departure from the unidirectional view

that youth are impacted by their environment but do not have the ability to shape it. Second, the influences of various social contexts can be both direct and indirect, generating an emphasis on potential mediating and moderating effects of these ecological levels. Third, and inclusive of the first two points, the social contexts within this ecological approach are organized in systemic fashion, translating into the notion that no one social context can be understood in isolation from the others.

Applied more specifically to the social milieu of adolescence, Antonishak, Sutfin, and Reppucci (2005) have emphasized the important influences of three contexts: peers, neighborhoods, and the media. Peers represent both microsystem (close friendships) and exosystem (cliques and crowds) influences, and are thought to have some of their greatest influence through sociometric status (Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998), meaning the degree to which someone is liked or disliked by others. The exosystem influences of neighborhood, in turn, are thought to be both proximal (direct) and distal (indirect), and are dominated by the influence of socioeconomic status and other family hardship indicators (Coulton, Korbin, Su, & Chow, 1995). Finally, the effects of the media are thought to be the most widespread across social contexts. While typically seen as part of the overall culture and therefore macrosystemic in orientation, the recent rise in social networks (MySpace, Facebook, etc.) generates evidence that these Internet-based collectives are having a more immediate microsystem impact.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory has had a long tradition as a theory in developmental psychology, going back to the pioneering work of Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978). Because this framework has maintained a dyadic orientation from its beginnings, attachment theory has been of sustained interest to family theorists and therapists alike (Minuchin, 1985). The basics of this approach involve the concept of "internal working model," which refers to the individual's early experiences with their primary caregiver and, as such, guide all present interactions within interpersonal relationships. The most well-adjusted individuals are those who are "securely attached," the result of having experienced consistent nurturance from the primary caregiver. Less well-adjusted individuals are either "anxious attached," generated from the uneven availability of caregivers, or are "avoidant attached," the result of consistent rejection from the caregiver.

Attachment theory has continued to develop, as evidenced by contributions of Talbot and McHale (2003), who proposed that the internal working models offered by attachment theory can be greatly enhanced by attention to "whole-family or polyadic relationship representations." As support for these ideas, they point to the work of Belsky (1981) and others who have maintained that child–mother–father triads are the most appropriate units of analysis for understanding the reciprocal influences of family members. Of particular interest here is the flexibility of the internal working models, which are thought to be demonstrably influenced by co-parenting processes and marital dynamics, and not only the dyadic level relationships with each primary caregiver.

Applied to families with adolescents, Cretzmeyer (2003) focuses attention on the role that attachments play in perceptions of family emotional support, and reviews a wide range of studies that highlight the malleability of the adolescent's internal working model through a focus on present family functioning levels, and include references to the use of the attachment perspective in clinical efforts (cf. Lopez, 1995). Others have made a related call for the use of an attachment perspective in understanding parent–adolescent relationships (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2005), including its theoretical pairing with the family systems perspective (Benson, 2005; Caffery & Erdman, 2000).

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory, another theory covered in the present chapter that claims psychological

origins, also is based as much on relationships as it is on individually oriented concepts. Developed in large part by Bandura (1977), this theoretical framework focuses attention on how learning takes place through the observation of others' behavior, and especially those behaviors that are perceived as rewarded within the social context. Thus, imitation plays an important role in the learning process as individuals attempt to recreate the behaviors that are modeled and reinforced by the actions of others.

Theorists, researchers, and intervention-based professionals have long maintained an interest in the applicability of social learning theory in efforts to understand and work with families. For instance, Crosbie-Burnett and Lewis (1993) utilized the social learning concept of "reciprocal determinism"—with its emphasis on the circular influence that occurs between the individual and her/his social context—as a way of describing the learning that is gained through family member interactions. Similarly, Pinquart and Silbereisen (2005) have asserted that social learning theory provides assistance in understanding how similarities among siblings are the result of shared experiences within the family environment.

The efforts of Patterson (1982) and his colleagues at the Oregon Social Learning Center are among the most recognized bodies of work that have applied social learning theory concepts to the study of families. Focusing on the family environment as the most important context in learning antisocial behavior, Patterson's approach involved the recognition of what he termed coercive family processes. Here, parents who employ coercive tactics with their children and adolescents (such as bribing or threatening behaviors) initiate a process whereby the offspring learn how to use aggressive behaviors (flying into a rage or otherwise throwing temper tantrums) in order to avoid compliance. Over time, these behaviors are thought to generalize to other situations involving adult authority figures, as well as within friendship groups (Patterson, Bank, & Stoolmiller, 2005). Prosocial peers generally do not tolerate coercive behavior, leading to greater associations with delinquent peer groups who do reinforce displays of antisocial behavior. These patterns are thought to persist into adulthood, leading to an intergenerational cycle of antisocial behavior, unless and until certain "turning points" can be established that interrupt the modeling and reinforcement processes (Granic & Patterson, 2006).

Research on Families with Adolescents

If White and Klein's (2008) classification of family theories (discussed above) were to be extended into the empirical realm, research efforts surrounding families with adolescents also could be divided into two similar kinds of categories. First, there are efforts to use family concepts as independent variables in order to explain dependent variables associated with adolescent development and well-being. As well, there are efforts to study families with adolescents as the central theme of the empirical effort (where the family variables themselves often as not serve as the de facto dependent measures). In practice, many of the research studies in this area of inquiry represent a blend of both efforts, such that families with adolescents are both described and are used to explain variations in adolescent development and well-being.

This section on research studies that focus on families with adolescents begins with a discussion of "unit of analysis" issues, used here to describe different focal points that researchers can adopt when seeking to generate family-based data. This discussion gives way to a review of studies that focus on families of adolescents, covering empirical work that concerns such areas as parenting (including parent–adolescent communication and parent–adolescent conflict) and family processes and family structure. Finally, this section offers a description of studies that use family factors to explain a variety of outcome variables associated with adolescent development and well-being. As noted above, the present chapter's review of such material was limited to three aspects of adolescent problem behaviors—delinquency, mental health, and alcohol and other drug use—and two areas of potential adolescent assets—education and social competency.

Unit of Analysis Issues

In general, issues concerning the "unit of analysis" are thought to provide assistance in helping to define exactly what we are attempting to think about, study, or impact (Sabatelli & Bartle, 1995). Regarding families with adolescents, there are at least two units of analysis that we could consider beyond the focus on any individual family member. One of these units of analysis concerns the various dyads within the family, including the parent–adolescent dyad, the marital dyad, and sibling dyads. The second unit of analysis would include triads and larger constellations of members (polyads) that are labeled as "family level" variables.

All of the dyads mentioned in the previous paragraph potentially exist within a family, and certainly are considered to be a part of the larger family system; however, typically they are not considered to be fully representative of the family unit itself. At the same time, the parent–adolescent dyad is thought to be a distinctive dyad inside of the family. Unlike others mentioned, it is both intergenerational and is based on caring activities, thus satisfying the "intergenerational nurturing" definition of family adopted within this chapter. As well, the parent–adolescent dyad has been extensively studied, and often has been given the label of "family" research by others. Finally, not being able to label certain household compositions (i.e., a single parent and his/her adolescent offspring) as representing a family unit is fraught with all kinds of political and policy difficulties.

Overall, there are four types of studies that have made contributions to the field's empirical understanding of families with adolescents. First, there are those studies that have focused on a single intergenerational dyad. Second, there are empirical efforts that have centered on the adolescent's relationship to both parents. Third, there are studies that have focused on the adolescent's family as a totality. Fourth, there are empirical efforts that have conceptualized the family with adolescents as the combination of various dyads.

Studies that have focused on an intergenerational dyad typically concern a single-parent–adolescent relationship, but could include the adolescent's relationship to other caregivers such as a grandparent or a foster parent. Empirical work classified as focusing on the adolescent in relation to both parents concerns studies that do not make a distinction between the two care-giving adults (i.e., parents are treated as a single entity with questions such as "My parents…"), or that ask about relationships to both parents, but conduct separate analyses for data pertaining to the mother–adolescent and father–adolescent relationships. Research findings generated from these first two types of studies will be reviewed below under the heading of "dyadic research on families with adolescents."

Studies focusing on the family with adolescents as a totality would involve research that makes no distinction among various members (i.e., family members are treated as a single entity with questions such as "My family…"). Finally, those studies that conceptualize the family with adolescents as being comprised of various dyads that exist within the family involve the combination of at least two reciprocal relationships such as adolescent–mother, adolescent–father, and/or adolescent–sibling. In these cases, data pertaining to the dyadic relationships are handled as "relational family data" (Fisher, Kotes, Ransom, Philips, & Rudd, 1985), meaning that the appropriate statistical analyses are employed in order to examine the interrelated nature of the dyads. Research from these latter two types of studies will be reviewed below under the heading of "polyadic research on families with adolescents."

Overview: Dyadic Research on Families with Adolescents

Historically, the literature pertaining to the impact of parents on adolescents has been based on Baumrind's (1978) original conceptualizations of authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and indifferent parenting styles. These styles are comprised of a two-dimensional view of parenting (Maccoby & Martin, 1983) that recognizes variation in both parent responsiveness (warmth, affection) and parent demandingness (rule-setting, discipline).

Authoritative parents, the style of parenting most often associated with positive adolescent outcomes (Darling & Steinberg, 1993), represents the combination of high responsiveness and high demandingness. While authoritarian parents also are high in demandingness, this style of parenting is characterized by low responsiveness. Permissive parents are low on demandingness but high on responsiveness. Indifferent parenting styles, as the label implies, are low in both demandingness and responsiveness.

In addition to research pertaining to parenting styles, Peterson's (2005) review of literature relevant to the influence of parents on adolescents recognizes the important contributions made regarding parental behavior on adolescent outcomes, beginning with the recognition that "the closest thing to a general law of parenting is that warm, supportive, nurturant, and accepting behavior by mothers and fathers is associated with the development of social competence by adolescents" (p. 40). Hence, research on parenting factors related to support, use of reasoning/induction, monitoring, supervision, knowledge, granting of psychological autonomy, and discipline strategies all must be recognized as additional important areas of inquiry regarding the impact of parents on adolescent development and well-being (Cox & Harter, 2003).

Dyadic Research on Families with Adolescents: Selected Studies from the Last 15 Years

More recent studies that have focused on parenting styles continue to underscore the belief that an authoritative parenting style is associated with the most positive adolescent well-being outcomes (Weiss & Schwartz, 1996). One more recent twist on this body of findings has been a greater focus on the specific parenting styles of both mothers and fathers. Noting that much of the literature to date has focused on mothers only, Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, and Carrano (2006) found that an authoritative style of parenting displayed by fathers was significantly associated with positive outcomes for adolescents (average age 15.3 years) even after a number of mother-related variables (including mother's own parenting style) were controlled. In addition, as hypothesized these researchers found that father impact was greater for male adolescents than for female adolescents. This latter finding also can be seen as a contribution to another emerging set of studies that look as the relative importance of mothers' and fathers' contributions to adolescent development and well-being (cf. Stolz, Barber, & Olsen, 2005).

The newer emphasis on obtaining information from both mothers and fathers has led to efforts to examine the uniformity of parenting styles. For instance, Fletcher, Steinberg, and Sellers (1999) reported that "interparental parent consistency" (inferred from the reports of high school students on the parenting styles of their mothers and fathers) was less important than the presence of at least one authoritative parent. Additionally, few differences in adolescent outcomes were identified between families with two authoritative parents vs. those containing only one authoritative parent. Extending this type of research through use of both self-report and observational ratings (thus examining both the "insider" reports of adolescents and the "outsider" views of observers), Simons and Conger (2007) examined parenting styles of both parents with seventh grade adolescents (followed longitudinally with measures taken in the eighth and ninth grades). In addition to findings that marked notable differences between inside and outside perspectives, these researchers reported that mothers and fathers most often shared a common parenting style. Further, it was reported that the most positive adolescent outcomes were associated with having both parents displaying authoritative parenting styles.

Beyond parenting styles, researchers continue to make contributions to the field's understanding of the specific behaviors that comprise competent parenting of adolescents. For instance, Bogenschneider, Small, and Tsay (1997) examined the relationship between parents' perceptions of their own parenting competence and eighth through twelfth grade adolescents' reports of parenting behaviors. Findings indicated that higher perceived levels of competence by parents were

associated with adolescent reports of greater monitoring, higher levels of responsiveness, and less psychologically controlling behaviors by their parents. Newcomb and Loeb (1999) also have examined the association between less competent parenting behavior and more general adult problem behaviors in a sample of mothers of seventh through ninth grade adolescents. Poor parenting behaviors (defined here as lack of warmth, and frequent aggression, rejection, and neglect) were associated with mothers' socially deviant attitudes and more direct engagement in both drug use and property crimes.

Overview: Polyadic Research on Families with Adolescents

Research efforts that focus on the family with adolescents as a totality or as the combination of multiple dyads are dominated by studies of family processes. Day, Gavazzi, Miller, and Langeveld (2009) define family processes as "the dynamics of the relationships among the multiple family members and across boundaries to those outside the system" (p. 120). Extending the teleological argument of general systems theory, Day, Gavazzi, and Acock (2001) posited that family processes were those strategies used by families to accomplish certain core goals that would enhance outcomes for its members. These scholars identified certain "compelling family processes" in the research literature that were thought to form the backbone of empirical work in this domain, including distance regulation (family differentiation, boundary maintenance, expressed emotion, triangulation), flexibility (adaptability, problem-solving, coping strategies), supervision (monitoring, behavioral control), and caring (support, affection, acceptance, companionship).

Some of the studies in this area of inquiry concurrently focus on issues related to family structure, which largely has to do with the marital status of parents and their biological relationships with youth in the household. Although some researchers continue to maintain that there is a dominant effect of family structure, most scholars insist that any distinction made between family processes and family structure is "somewhat artificial" (Peterson, 2005; Teachman, 2000). This sentiment is perhaps best expressed by the distinguished researcher Heatherington (2006), who recently wrote that "happy, well adjusted children can be found in diverse types of families… it is family process rather than family structure that is critical to the well-being of children" (p. 232).

This contention is based on the notion that any type of disturbance to the family's structure (separation, divorce, remarriage, etc.) will only impact youth well-being in a negative way if core family processes are disrupted, including marked declines in father involvement (Carlson, 2006; Scott, Booth, King, & Johnson, 2007; Stewart, 2003) and alterations in the mother–adolescent relationship (Arditti, 1999; Koerner, Jacobs, & Raymond, 2000). These disruptions can be further aggravated by the overall increase in cumulative risks (Cavanagh, 2008; Matjasko, Grunden, & Ernst, 2007), especially with regard to economic disadvantages (Manning & Lamb, 2003), and/or by new relationship issues brought on through one or both of the parents' remarriages (Halpern-Meekin & Tach, 2008; King, 2006; Yuan, Vogt, & Hayley, 2006).

Polyadic Research on Families with Adolescents: Selected Studies from the Last 15 Years

As noted above, this area of research has been dominated by studies that have focused on distance regulation concepts, and especially those empirical efforts that use the family differentiation construct. While many earlier studies of this construct relied solely on the adolescents' perspective, the use of multiple family member perspectives in the assessment of family differentiation levels was initiated by Bartle-Haring and Gavazzi (1996). Using two samples of families with adolescents (ages 11–19) and families of college students (average age 19.8 years), these researchers demonstrated how mother, father, and adolescent perspectives on family differentiation levels converged onto a

latent variable that represented the family system as a single unit (i.e., the family as the unit of analysis). Furthering this line of research, Bartle-Haring, Kenny, and Gavazzi (1999) used a sample of families with college students (average age 19.6 years) and generated evidence that both supported the operationalization of differentiation as a family system variable and at the same time underscored the importance of understanding variation in agreement about what was happening inside of the multiple dyads of these families. Yet another study conducted by Cohen, Vasey, and Gavazzi (2003) used a sample of families with college students (average age 18.6 years), and generated support for the bi-dimensional structure of family differentiation (as both individuality tolerance and intimacy tolerance), as well as establishing the predictive influence of higher individuality tolerance levels on reduced adolescent internalized distress (as trait anxiety, depression, and worry).

Family differentiation levels also have been studies cross-culturally, although regrettably using only adolescent perspectives to date. For instance, Chun and MacDermid (1997) used a sample of Korean adolescents (average age 15.7 years) in order to examine the associations among variables related to family differentiation and adolescent individuation and self-esteem. Interesting same sex pairings resulted, including the findings that father–adolescent differentiation levels were the strongest predictors of male adolescent individuation, whereas female adolescent individuation levels were most strongly related to mother–adolescent differentiation levels. Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia, and Scabini (2006) employed two samples of older adolescents (ages 17–21) from Italy and the United Kingdom in order to examine the relationships among variables related to family differentiation (operationalized here as the combination of family cohesion and enmeshment, building off of earlier work done with these concepts by Barber and Buehler (1996)) and a host of adolescent adjustment variables. These researchers reported both the usual and typical association between greater family cohesion and positive adolescent well-being found in American samples, as well as the somewhat unusual (by US standards of research) findings regarding the lack of relationship between enmeshment and adolescent adjustment in the Italian sample, which may well indicate a more collectivistic family pattern of relating that values very high levels of togetherness.

Other distance regulation concepts employed in the study of families with adolescents include the notion of triangulation, whereby third family members are pulled into the conflicts that erupt between two parties within the family (Kerr & Bowen, 1988), often as not with negative effects on the triangulated adolescent (Bell, Bell, & Nakata, 2001). Franck and Buehler (2007) used a sample of families with sixth grade students in order to examine the relationship between triangulation, marital hostility, and adolescent outcome variables associated with problematic behavior. The findings reported on the deleterious effects on adolescents who become "caught in the middle" of parental conflict, especially with regard to the adolescent's increased susceptibility to internalizing problem behaviors. Similar findings using only adolescent perspectives (ages 14–19) were reported by Grych, Raynor, and Fosco (2004), who also noted some interesting results regarding sibling relationships. Contrary to stated expectations, those adolescents who reported greater closeness to siblings also reported feeling more threatened by parental conflict.

Triangulation and adolescent well-being also has been studied in relation to marital conflict, marital love, and co-parenting conflict by Baril, Crouter, and McHale (2007). Using a sample of married parents and their adolescents (where outcomes were measured at 16 and 18 years of age), these researchers reported a significant association between greater co-parenting conflict reported by parents and more risky behaviors as reported by adolescents, as well as the mediating effect that greater marital love had on this relationship over time. Interestingly, triangulation was not strongly associated with adolescent risky behavior (although problems in the detection of this systems construct were discussed as one possible explanation of this finding). Another concept related to triangulation—"parentification," defined as the assumption of a parent role by the youth in order to provide such things as emotional

support to a parent—also has been associated with greater marital conflict and poor outcomes for 14–18-year-old adolescents (Peris, Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Emery, 2008).

Variation in parenting behaviors exhibited to adolescent siblings has emerged as another important topic within this empirical area (O'Connor, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1998). Feinberg and Hetherington (2001) used a sample of same-sex paired sibling adolescents (between the ages of 9 and 18 years) and their parents in order to examine the impact of "differential parenting," defined in this study as the parental display of different levels of warmth and negativity to their offspring. These researchers reported on the unique if somewhat modest contributions of the differential parenting construct regarding its impact on adolescent well-being after parenting behaviors themselves were taken into account. Here, greater differences in terms of how parents treated siblings corresponded to more negative outcomes for the less-well-treated adolescent, even after the level of poor treatment was taken into account. Kan, McHale, and Crouter (2008) examined a similar construct labeled "interparental incongruence" in a longitudinal study of parents and their first-born and second-born adolescents (average ages were 17.3 and 14.8 years respectively at the sixth and final year of this study). Among other things, the findings indicated that youth perceptions of interparental incongruence (measured as differing levels of intimacy and conflict shown to the adolescent offspring) at the beginning of this study were predictive of parent reports of marital quality levels (measured as the levels of intimacy and conflict shown between the parents) a full 6 years later.

Conflict itself has emerged as an important topic of interest in studies of families with adolescents (Adams, & Laursen, 2007; David, Steele, Forehand, & Armistead, 1996; Gerard, Buehler, Franck, & Anderson, 2005), especially regarding the ways that interaction patterns are replicated across subsystems. Van Doom, Branje, and Meeus (2007) reported that the ways that parents handled their conflicts with one another were significantly related to how those parents and their adolescents (average age 13.2 years) resolved conflict. In a similar vein, Reuter and Conger (1995) employed a longitudinal observation study of parents and adolescents (over a 4-year period from the time the youth were 12–13 years of age) and reported that more disruptive and hostile family interaction styles were significantly related to less parent–adolescent agreement over time.

Summary of Research on Dyadic and Polyadic Relationships

Baumrind's (1978) original work on parenting styles maintains a strong influence on the most recent research that focuses on dyadic relationships in families with adolescents, and the vast majority of these studies underscore the linkage between healthy adolescent development and an authoritative style of parenting. Newer studies have extended this work to now examine potential differences between mothers and fathers, including the impact of parenting style *consistency* within the family, as well as expanding the definitions of *competent* parenting to include such variables as monitoring, responsiveness, warmth, and psychological control.

In turn, research efforts focused on polyadic relationships in families with adolescents largely have paid attention to family processes such as family differentiation, triangulation, and conflict levels. Of particular note is the rising interest in making cross-cultural comparisons between families living in different cultures. As well, the increased attention given to siblings and the degree to which parents treat them in a *congruent* manner represents an important and innovative advancement in this empirical area.

Overview: Family Influences on Adolescent Outcome Variables

Masten and Shaffer (2006) presented six basic models for understanding how families matter in terms of their impact on children and adolescents.

Most simple and straightforward of all is the "direct family effects" model, where the influence of a given family variable has an immediate and undeviating impact on some factor related to the youth. The "mediated indirect family effects" model assumes that a third variable plays an intermediary role regarding the impact of the family variable, and the "complex mediated family effects" model elaborates how multiple variables might be employed to understand the indirect influences of family factors on youth outcomes. The "family as mediator" and the "family as moderator" models hold that certain family factors can either mediate or moderate the influence of other variables on factors related to youth. Finally, the longitudinal and reciprocal impact of family and youth factors is represented by the "transactional family-child effects" model, whereby the bidirectional influence that parents and their offspring can have on each other are taken into account as they impact both present and future family member interactions.

Employing such models, studies have documented the critical role that family factors play in explaining a variety of outcome variables associated with adolescent development and well-being. In total, these studies have served to emphatically counter some recent arguments that the family environment plays a relatively inconsequential role when compared to the impact of other predictor variables such as peer groups and genetic susceptibilities (Clarke-Stewart, 2006). As well, this body of compelling evidence has given rise to many forms of family-focused treatment for families with adolescents that are evidence-based and contain objectives founded on the results of this body of family-focused research (Werner-Wilson & Morrissey, 2005). Overall, this literature base is thought to have been sufficiently well-developed for Hinde (2006) to pose the question: "are we not getting near to knowing enough for framing policies that will permit interventions where they are most needed and ameliorate the most urgent issues, and indeed for framing any policy that is likely to be implemented?" (p. 363).

Family Influences on Adolescent Outcome Variables: Selected Studies from the Last 15 Years

Delinquency and Conduct Disorders

The impact of parenting variables continues to dominate the literature concerning adolescent delinquency and conduct disorders. Simons, Wei, Conger, and Elder (2001) examined the impact of parenting on delinquent behaviors in a longitudinal study of parents and their adolescents (seventh graders at the initiation of this study). While the strongest associations between more "inept" parenting behaviors (i.e., defined as low monitoring, harsh, and inconsistent discipline, and less use of inductive reasoning evidenced in the aggregated reports from parents, children, and observer ratings) and greater amounts of self-reported youth delinquency were seen in the early adolescent years, results also indicated that more functional parenting practices over time did serve to reduce antisocial behavior. Deković, Janssens, and van As (2003) examined a variety of parenting, marital, family, and demographic indicators in a sample of parents and three age groups of adolescents (12–13, 14–15, and 16–18 years). These researchers found that more positive parenting behaviors (more responsiveness, more involvement, less punishment, more monitoring, and greater consistency) and a more positive parent–adolescent relationship (greater attachment and less rejection and conflict) were strongly associated with less self-reported adolescent delinquent acts across these age groups.

There also has been sustained interest in the role that siblings play in the development of delinquent and antisocial behavior. Snyder, Bank, and Burraston (2005) conducted a 10-year longitudinal study using parents, older brothers (average age 19.5 years at the end of the study) and their younger siblings (average age 16.3 years at the end of the study). The impact of more ineffective parenting (i.e., defined as lack of supervision and higher parental conflict) was significantly related to the older siblings' greater exposure to delinquent peers, and in turn both greater sibling conflict and

more sibling co-participation in deviant behaviors substantially increased the younger siblings' delinquent behavior. Slomkowski, Rende, Conger, Simons, and Conger (2001) included both brother–brother and sister–sister pairs in their 4-year longitudinal study of adolescent (ages 11–15 years at the outset of the study) delinquent behavior. Similar results were found for both brother and sister sibling pairs, such that greater older sibling delinquent behavior and more hostile and coercive sibling relationships predicted greater younger sibling delinquent behavior over time.

Some important gender differences have been noted in the literature connecting family factors with delinquent behavior. Cashwell and Vacc (1996) examined associations between family level variables (i.e., family cohesion) and delinquent behavior as reported in a sample of sixth through eighth grade adolescents. These researchers reported gender differences in the sense that family cohesion was negatively related to delinquent behavior for females but was positively related to delinquency for males. Gavazzi (2006) used a sample of court-involved adolescents (average age 14.9 years) to examine the impact that "disrupted family processes" (more conflict, lack of monitoring, inconsistent discipline) had on self-reported delinquent behavior. Results indicated that a gender X race interaction was significant, such that females in general and African American girls in particular reported the strongest associations between greater amounts of disrupted family processes and higher levels of delinquency. In a similar fashion, the important interplay of race/ethnicity and family factors has been highlighted in research concerning adolescent violence and aggression as well (cf. Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Zelli, & Huesmann, 1996).

Adolescent Mental Health

Family factors have been characterized as retaining both protective and risk factors in terms of mental health issues for adolescents, and especially adolescent depressive symptoms. Slesnick and Waldron (1997) used a sample of depressed and nondepressed adolescents (average age 15.1 years) and their parents in an interaction study of the association between family problem-solving and adolescent depression. Parents of depressed adolescents were reported to engage in greater amounts of incongruent communication, leading the researchers to conclude that depressive symptoms may be an adaptive response to confusing parent behavior. Herman, Ostrander, and Tucker (2007) used a sample of adolescents (ages 12–17 years) to examine the associations among variables related to family cohesion, family conflict, and adolescent depression. These researchers reported a significant interaction between adolescent race and family factors, greater depression by African American adolescents being related to lower family cohesion, while white adolescent depression was associated with higher family conflict. These researchers note that the primacy of family cohesion in the lives of African American youth has been reported by others (cf. Sagrestano, Paikoff, Holmbeck, & Fendrich, 2003), whereas "reducing family conflict may be the critical leverage point in alleviating child depressive symptoms" (p. 329) for White youth.

Other researchers have taken a more global view of adolescent mental health through an examination of both internalizing (depression, anxiety, and other emotional disorders that are experienced "inside" the adolescent) and externalizing (aggression, conduct disorders, and other psychological concerns that are "acted out" on others) problem behaviors. Forehand, Biggar, and Kotchick (1998) conducted a 6-year longitudinal study that examined the linkage between family risk factors and internalizing and externalizing difficulties in a sample of adolescents (ages 11–15 at the start of the study). This study found significant associations between family risks (more interparental conflict, lack of two parents in the home, greater parent–adolescent relationship problems, and more parent physical and mental health problems as reported by mothers) and both types of adolescent mental health concerns, such that increased amounts of these family risk factors predicted greater amounts of both short-term and long-term adolescent problem behaviors. Gavazzi, Bostic, Lim, and Yarcheck (2008) examined the influence of adolescent gender and race on the association between disrupted family processes (more conflict, lack of monitoring, inconsistent

discipline) and adolescent mental health concerns. Among other results, this study generated evidence that disrupted family processes mediated the impact of gender on both internalizing and externalizing problems for the African American adolescents (but not the white adolescents), a striking contrast to the long-held notion that girls are more likely to display internalizing problems while boys are more likely to externalize their mental health issues. While these researchers noted some consistency of findings when compared to other studies examining the impact that family factors have on internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors among African American youth (cf. Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, Diaz, & Miller, 2000), the lack of similar findings for the White youth prompted the authors to call into question the possibility that race was serving as a proxy for socioeconomic status, something that was not controlled for in this study.

Another body of studies has sought to examine the combined impact of both family and friends on adolescent mental health concerns. Deković, Buist, and Reitz (2004) conducted a 3-year longitudinal study of adolescent (average age 13.4 years) reports of both family and peer relationships and adolescent internalizing and externalizing problems. Parent–adolescent relationship quality (measured as greater communication quality, greater trust, and less alienation) was associated with higher levels of both dimensions of adolescent mental health, whereas friendship relationship quality (also measured as greater communication quality, greater trust, and less alienation) was associated with higher amounts of only internalizing problems. Rubin et al. (2004) examined the associations between family, peer, and adolescent mental health variables in a sample of adolescents (average age 10.3 years), their mothers, and their best friends. More positive family factors (i.e., measured as adolescents' perceptions of greater parental support) and more positive peer factors (i.e., measured as greater friendship quality) were associated with less internalizing problems, whereas only greater parental support was a predictor of less externalizing difficulties.

Alcohol and Other Drug Use

The family environment also is a known predictor of adolescent use of alcohol and other substances. Brody and Ge (2001) examined the associations between parenting behaviors and adolescent (ages 11–12 years) alcohol use in a three-wave longitudinal study. Interestingly, these researchers noted that the significant association between more positive parenting (i.e., defined as both being more "nurturant-responsive" and less "harsh-conflicted" reports of parent behaviors by mothers, fathers, and adolescents) and less adolescent alcohol use was mediated by adolescent self-regulation, supporting the notion that parents best shield their adolescents from substance use by teaching them how to control their own behavior. Barnes, Reifman, Farrell, and Dintcheff (2000) conducted a six-wave longitudinal study regarding the influences of the family on the alcohol use of adolescents (average age 14.5 years at the initiation of the study). Results using adolescent reports indicated that greater parent monitoring and more support were associated both with less initial adolescent involvement with alcohol as well as predicting lower rates of misuse over time.

As in other studies of adolescent outcomes reviewed above, there also has been increased interest in the combined impact of family and peer factors. Barnes, Hoffman, Welte, Farrell, and Dintcheff (2006) extended their earlier effort discussed in the previous paragraph by examining the impact of peer characteristics on adolescent alcohol use as well as other substances. While greater amounts of peer deviance (i.e., measured as the youth's reports of their friends' involvement in delinquent behaviors) were reported to be significantly associated with greater adolescent misuse of alcohol and other drugs, parental monitoring also was reported to have an important role in buffering these peer influences. Dorius, Bahr, Hoffmann, and Harmon (2004) examined adolescent marijuana use through the reports of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 19 years. One interesting nuance within this study involved making the distinction between adolescent closeness to each parent,

leading to the finding that greater closeness to fathers but not mothers attenuated the relationship between more peer involvement with drugs and greater adolescent marijuana use.

Another important line of research that has its parallel in other outcomes-based studies discussed above involves the effects of siblings. Rende, Slomkowski, Lloyd-Richardson, and Niaura (2005) employed a "social contagion" approach to the study of sibling effects on adolescent (seventh through 12th graders) smoking and drinking behaviors. The results of this study presented a strong argument that shared environment factors (including sibling contact and mutual friendships) were much stronger influences than genetic factors regarding adolescent substance use. Here, greater amounts of contact with substance-using siblings and their friends were more strongly associated with increased adolescent substance use than genetic relatedness. East and Khoo (2005) conducted a 5-year longitudinal study of Latino and African American adolescent older sisters (15–19 years of age at the initiation of the study), their younger male and female siblings (11–16 years of age at the initiation of the study) and their mothers. Findings from this study indicated that greater warmth/closeness in the sibling relationship and older sister's greater drug and alcohol use predicted higher levels of younger sibling drug and alcohol use in the full sample of male and female younger siblings. In addition, sibling warmth/closeness mediated the impact of family structure (i.e., single vs. married mothers) on adolescent substance use (i.e., siblings with single mothers displayed greater warmth and closeness), while mothers' monitoring behaviors were unrelated to this adolescent outcome variable.

Development of Socially Competent Behaviors

There has been increased interest in documenting the role that family factors play in the development of adolescent social competence. Research on adolescent social competence—those behaviors associated with positive outcomes in the lives of youth—serve as an important counterbalance to the widespread examination of adolescent problem behaviors. Henry, Sager, and Plunkett (1996) conducted a study on adolescent (average age 14.7 years) perspectives regarding parent and family factors and how they were linked to adolescent social competence as measured by both emotional and cognitive dimensions of empathy. Results were reported indicating that greater adolescent emotional empathy was associated with more family cohesion and higher levels of parental support, while greater amounts of the cognitive dimension of adolescent empathy was related to more parental inductive behaviors.

Other studies have examined the reciprocal influences of family factors and adolescent social competence. O'Connor, Hetherington, and Clingepeel (1997) reported on a study of adolescents (average age 11.4 years) that used the combined reports of adolescents, both parents, teachers, and trained observers on various measures of social competence. These researchers reported strong support for the bidirectional influence of variables that tapped into parent-to-adolescent and adolescent-to-parent behaviors, whereby greater "positivity" (as reflected in family member enjoyment of the relationship, affection displayed, and positive communication) was related to such indicators as social competence, cognitive competence, physical competence, prosocial behavior, and global self-worth. Some gender differences also have been reported as well. Schoenrock, Bell, Sun, and Avery (1999) collected data from male and female adolescents (ages 17–19) in order to examine the impact that parent and family factors had on a global measure of social competence. For male adolescents, greater social competence was associated with higher levels of family support and family autonomy, while greater female adolescent social competence was related to higher levels of family support only.

Potential differences in the relationships between family factors and adolescent social competence have been studied in terms of race/ethnicity and cultural variation, as well as the potential intermediary nature of these variables. Prelow, Loukas, and Jordan-Green (2007) conducted a longitudinal study of Latino adolescents (average age 11.9 years at the initiation of the study) and their mothers. These researchers

reported that both family routines (measured as the regularity of family events in the home) and adolescent social competence mediated the impact of socioenvironmental risk (operationalized as the accumulation of risks associated with family financial strain, neighborhood problems, and maternal psychological distress and parenting stress) on adolescent externalizing problems. Garcia and Gracia (2009) used the reports of adolescents (average age 14.9 years) from Spain in a study of parenting styles and self-perceptions of social competence. Results indicated that authoritative and permissive styles of parenting both were associated with the highest levels of social competence. Carson, Chowdhury, Perry, and Pati (1999) used the reports of adolescents (average age 13.7 years) from India along with their fathers and teachers in order to examine the associations between a number of parent and family variables and adolescent social competence in school. Findings revealed that the most socially competent adolescents come from families that display lower enmeshment styles in terms of family cohesion, employ more democratic family styles, and score lower on a measure of external locus of control within the family.

Educational Issues

A growing number of studies have documented the impact of parental and family factors on a variety of adolescent educational issues, an area of inquiry that can reflect both competent and problematic behaviors (Vazsonyi & Flannery, 1997) in school in addition to variables associated with academic abilities and actual performance. Melby and Conger (1996) conducted a four-wave longitudinal study to examine the associations between mothers' and fathers' parenting behaviors and adolescent (average age 12.6 years at the initiation of the study) academic performance. The findings of this study indicated that mother and father parenting behaviors (i.e., measured as greater involvement and less hostility as reported by mothers, fathers, adolescents, and trained observers) were associated both with earlier grade point average and with more positive changes in this indicator of academic performance over time. Amato and Fowler (2002) used a two-wave longitudinal design to consider the connection between parenting behaviors (i.e., measured as support, monitoring, and use of harsh discipline) and adolescent (12–18 years of age at the initiation of the study) school success. These researchers reported significant associations between both greater parent support and less harsh discipline in terms of greater adolescent school success, but no such relationship regarding the parental monitoring variable in the overall sample. These results did not vary as a function of race (white vs. African American), but differences in family structure were detected in that parent monitoring did seem to matter more in single-parent-headed households.

Other studies have reported results indicating academic differences related to both race and family structure. Heard (2007) used a longitudinal database containing reports from white, African American, and Latino adolescents (average age 14.9 years at the initiation of the study) and their parents to examine the impact of both the duration of time spent in various family structural situations and the total number of family constellation changes on grade point average. African American adolescents were reported to have been less negatively impacted by exposure to single parenthood and Hispanic adolescents less negatively impacted by time lived with nonparents; however, these race/ethnicity differences in grades were due to variables related to social support, stress levels, and school-related difficulties. Demo and Acock (1996) conducted a longitudinal study of family structure and family process variables in a sample of adolescents (ages 12–18) and their mothers. While adolescents residing with never-divorced parents fared best in terms of mother reports of academic performance, less mother–adolescent disagreement itself was the strongest overall predictor of better grades.

Conflict within the parent–adolescent relationship also has been linked to academic performance. Dotterer, Hoffman, Crouter, and McHale (2008) reported on findings from a 2-year longitudinal study of adolescents (average age 14.9 years) and their mothers and fathers. A number of interesting bidirectional associations were discussed, including how greater parent–adolescent

conflict as reported by both parents predicted lower grades (from student report cards) at the end of the study, as well as how lower grades in math at the onset of the study predicted greater parent–adolescent conflict 2 years later. Other studies have generated more detailed information about the subject matter of these disagreements and whether or not potential gender differences exist. Allison and Schultz (2004) compared the reports of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade adolescents regarding the amounts and types of conflict they experienced with their parents. Homework and school performance were among the most frequent domains of conflict endorsed by adolescents, especially in parent–son relationships.

Possible linkages between family factors and relationships outside of the home also have been highlighted within this area of inquiry. Crosnoe and Elder (2004) conducted a longitudinal study of adolescents (average age 16.0 years at the initiation of the study) and their parents. Results indicated that greater parent–adolescent emotional distance as reported by parents was associated with more academic difficulties (being held back, suspended/expelled, skipping classes, homework trouble, and low grades). Although variables related to friendship (lower numbers of friends and less peer support) and lower levels of teacher–adolescent bonding also predicted greater academic difficulties, these variables generally were not shown to buffer the effects of the parent–adolescent relationship. Using a similar sample from the same database, Crosnoe (2004) examined the impact of indicators of both family social capital (measured as emotional distance between parents and adolescents) and school social capital (student–teacher bonding, parent educational attainment, and parent educational aspirations for their adolescents) on self-reported adolescent grades. In addition to the replicated findings regarding the main effects for the family and school factors employed in the previously discussed research effort, this study also generated evidence of "mesolevel interactions" indicating that those students with the most social capital at home were more likely both to have greater social capital at school and to take advantage of those resources.

Summary of Research Regarding Family Influences on Adolescent Outcomes

The research literature regarding the linkage between family factors and various aspects of adolescent outcomes share some very important similarities. First and foremost, these studies uniformly underscore the critical role that families play in adolescent adjustment and well-being. Quite simply put, whether the particular empirical focus is delinquency, mental health, substance use, education, or social competency, parent and family factors matter a great deal. As well, many of these studies provide compelling evidence regarding the longitudinal significance of these dyadic and polyadic variables, as well underscoring the critical role that sibling relationships can play. While a bit less commonplace, nevertheless it is important to note that studies in this area also are beginning to examine the critical role that both gender and race can have on our understanding of the associations between family factors and adolescent outcomes.

Commentary

The theoretical and empirical efforts described above indicate that substantial gains have been made in the field's understanding and observation of the inner working of families containing members who are adolescents. The present chapter now ends with an overall summary of the highlights of this work, as well as making observations regarding some of the issues and challenges ahead that are related to theoretical and empirical work focused on these families.

The theoretical frameworks used to understand families with adolescents reviewed within this chapter included family development theory, family systems theory, ecological theory, attachment theory, and social learning theory. Certainly, other theories from the family field such as social exchange theory and symbolic interaction theory also have been used to describe families with adolescents in past scholarly efforts. However, these theories rarely if ever receive mention in any of the empirical studies published over the

past 15 years. Because these and other family-based theories not reviewed in the present chapter could offer rich insights about families with adolescents, scholars with an affinity to these frameworks are urged to renew their efforts to provide both explanatory and predictive guidance to researchers who are studying these families. As well, theorists and researchers alike should redouble their efforts to build and test theoretical propositions that are directly applicable to families with adolescents.

Empirically, the present chapter regarded empirical efforts to be family-based under any of four circumstances described in the "unit of analysis" section above: the single intergenerational dyad, the adolescent's nonspecific relationship to both parents, the adolescent's family as a totality, and the family with adolescents as the combination of various dyads (adolescent–father, adolescent–mother, adolescent–sibling, etc.).

The difficulty with a single intergenerational dyad approach is axiomatic; by definition, it does not reflect the family as a whole (unless the empirical effort is meant to describe the more atypical case where a given household contains only one adult and one adolescent). The main problem with the nonspecific parent–adolescent relationship and the family as a totality is what can be described as the possibility of "regression to the mean." For instance, when researchers do not discriminate between parents, how do we account for such effects on an adolescent's answers about relationships with parents when they view their mothers as extremely warm but their fathers as slightly cold? Moreover, when measuring the family as a totality, besides the possibility of different relationships existing between the adolescent and each parent, how do adolescents judge the overall emotional climate of their family when relationships with siblings might vary as much or more?

In fact, it is only when the families are seen or measured as the combination of various dyads that the researchers are able to acquire that specificity of measurement, and therefore gain more precise ways of describing what is occurring within the various dyads of families. Studies that employ a social relations model to the measurement of family dyads serve as excellent examples of this type of work. In addition to the Bartle-Haring et al. (1999) study reviewed above, the reader's attention is drawn to other studies that use a social relations model in research on families with adolescents. Two important illustrations of this approach can be found in studies conducted by Cook (2000) and Buist, Dekovic, Meeus, and van Aken (2004), whereby a social relations model was used to examine attachment relationships in families with adolescents. From a methodological standpoint the most sophisticated studies have been contained within this kind approach, and thus preference should be given to this particular way of framing research on families with adolescents.

The review of the research literature regarding the linkage between family factors and adolescent outcomes was limited to three aspects of adolescent problem behaviors (delinquency, mental health, and alcohol and other drug use) and two areas of potential adolescent assets (education and social competency). A variety of topics related to adolescent outcomes were not covered, and could be given consideration in future research efforts that seek to understand how families impact adolescent development and well-being. These issues include, but are not limited to, outcomes such as risky sexual behavior, pregnancy and teen parenthood, stress, obesity and other eating disorders, and sleep disturbance. Also, while educational issues and social competency were covered in the present chapter, future studies should give further consideration to more positively oriented adolescent outcomes, as well as focusing on family strengths that may be related to these outcomes.

Owing to page considerations, the present review offered a selection of articles that were meant to provide a representative sample of the types of studies that have been conducted over the last decade and a half within selected outcomes areas. Several themes can be discerned from these articles that are related to the field's general progression toward more complex and sophisticated approaches to the study of families as a collection of dyads, including attention being given to the impact of siblings, the overlapping

influences of marital and parent–adolescent conflict, and the interactive effects of family and peer variables. In addition, some of the studies reviewed in this chapter paid attention to potential variation as a function of adolescent gender, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and culture. Future studies should pay greater attention to these and other important demographic characteristics, including religious background, family mobility, migration, adoption, foster care, and the impact of other nontraditional family constellations (such as grandparent-headed households) on family processes and adolescent outcomes.

Further, it is important to note that there has been a considerable rise in the number and types of longitudinal studies that have been conducted, including the use of large and nationally representative databases containing information about families with adolescents. Clearly, the field has profited from these efforts, as the results are more generalizable and can come closer to having consequential, long-term implications. At the same time, the families with adolescents literature has yet to benefit from studies that are more qualitative in nature, something that would provide a helpful parallel effort to these quantitative studies, which tend to lack the complexity of description often necessitated in interpreting results for practitioners. Excellent recent examples include qualitative work on such diverse topics as parent–adolescent communication about sex (Afifi, Joseph, & Aldeis, 2008; O'Sullivan, Meyer-Bahlburg, & Watkins, 2001), family dynamics among immigrant families (Qin, 2008), and father–daughter relationships in low-income minority families (Way & Gillman, 2000).

This last point serves as a segue to a cautionary note that precious little attention was paid to any of the issues surrounding the *application* of the theoretical and research efforts covered in this chapter. Opportunely, a new book just released (Gavazzi, 2011) not only extends the literature review of family processes and adolescent outcomes as proscribed above, but also provides critical linkages between this expanded theoretical and empirical base and the realms of family therapy, family education, and other family-based prevention and intervention efforts. The new book also gives needed attention to those topics that touch on policy issues relevant to families with adolescents.

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