PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

We Know Some Things: Parent–Adolescent Relationships in Retrospect and Prospect

Laurence Steinberg
Temple University

This article examines the most important ideas to have emerged from the last 25 years of research on adolescent development in the family context and suggests some directions for the future. Two major sets of questions organize the review. First, how can we best characterize normative family relationships during adolescence, and, more specifically, is adolescence a time of parent–child conflict? Second, how do variations in parent–child relationships affect the developing adolescent? The answer to the first question depends on what is meant by conflict and, more importantly, from whom one gathers data. There is a need for a new perspective on the family, one that emphasizes the different viewpoints and stakes that parents and adolescents bring to their relationship with each other. Special attention should be paid to studies of the mental health of parents of adolescents. With regard to the second question, it is argued that there is enough evidence to conclude that adolescents benefit from having parents who are authoritative: warm, firm, and accepting of their needs for psychological autonomy. Therefore, it would seem most beneficial to institute a systematic, large-scale, multifaceted, and ongoing public health campaign to educate parents about adolescence, one that draws on the collective resources and expertise of health-care professionals, scientists, governmental agencies, community organizations, schools, religious institutions, and the mass media.

Over the past 2 decades, no area of inquiry within the field of adolescent development has generated as much enduring interest as the study of the family. While fads and fashions in other topic areas have come and gone,

Requests for reprints should be sent to Laurence Steinberg, Department of Psychology, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA 19122. E-mail: lds@astro.temple.edu

research on parent–adolescent relationships has maintained a constant presence in the literature, dominating the scientific journals, overwhelming the review panels of funding agencies, and capturing the lion's share of popular publications on teenagers and how to ensure their health and well-being.

During the last 10 years, for example, 28% of all articles published in the *Journal of Research on Adolescence* concerned family relationships, and, of all the articles on adolescence published in the journals *Child Development* and *Developmental Psychology,* a remarkable 34% focused on the parent–adolescent relationship—twice the amount that focused on adolescents and their peers (Steinberg & Morris, in press). One would think that after a period of such focused and concerted effort, we would know some things. This article is an attempt to show that, in fact, we do.

More specifically, this article examines the most important ideas to have emerged from the last 25 years of research on adolescent development in the family context and suggests some directions for the future—if not for the next quarter century, then at least for the next several years. The rationale for using the mid-1970s as the starting point for this journey is simple: Before that time, there really was no systematic empirical literature on the family at adolescence. There were a handful of studies scattered in various journals and some widely read theoretical treatises, but it would have been a challenge, to say the least, to draw many firm conclusions about the nature of parent–adolescent relationships from the published literature, even as late as 1980. The state of our knowledge base today is remarkably different. Indeed, there are some questions that have been so conclusively answered that it seems reasonable to suggest that no further research is needed on them, and that efforts would be more fruitfully directed toward other issues.

This article is organized around the two major sets of questions that have dominated my own research agenda for the past 25 years. The first set of questions concerns the ways in which family relationships change during adolescence. Specifically, (1) How can we best characterize normative family relationships during adolescence? (2) How and why do relationships change as the child moves into and through adolescence? (3) What is the extent of individual differences in this process of transformation? and (4) What do these changes mean for parents and teenagers?

The second set of questions concerns the impact of the family on adolescent development and mental health. In particular, (1) How do variations in parent–child relationships affect the developing adolescent? (2) Are some types of parenting "better" for the adolescent than others? (3) Are there factors in the nonfamily environment that impinge on the parent–child relationship in ways that enhance or attenuate parental influence? and, (4)

What should we make of recent arguments, such as those in Judith Harris's (1998) book, *The Nurture Assumption*, that question the belief that parents have significant influence over their children's development at all?

TRANSFORMATIONS IN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS DURING ADOLESCENCE

Prior to the 1970s, the dominant view of the family at adolescence was one that emphasized the nature and function of parent–adolescent conflicts (for a review, see Steinberg, 1990). Psychological perspectives on family relationships at adolescence emphasized the need for children to separate themselves from parents, and suggested that parent–child conflicts grew out of adolescents' need to detach emotionally from parents or parental figures. Parents were told to expect oppositionalism and defiance from their teenagers and to worry if these factors were not present. The absence of conflict was seen as indicative of stunted development. Teenagers who were en route to healthy adulthood had to disengage from parents in order to forge an identity of their own.

The strong version of this view—conflict with a capital C—appears most clearly in the writings of orthodox psychoanalytic theorists such as Anna Freud (1958), but weaker versions of this perspective—conflict with a small c—can be found in many other treatises on the period, especially those written by neoanalytic theorists such as Erikson (1968) or Blos (1967). Erikson's portrayal of the adolescent "identity crisis" and Blos's notions about "individuation" both imply a certain degree of discomfort for the family, if not, perhaps, the guerilla warfare described in the more traditional psychoanalytic models. Parents were told to accept their adolescents' rebellion, identity experimentation, and drive for emotional autonomy as normal and to be supportive in their role as the object of the adolescent's disaffection.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, these ideas came under attack by a number of empirical studies that challenged the view that conflict was desirable, or even typical. Between 1966 and 1972, several studies of community samples of adolescents, drawn from schools rather than clinics, were published (e.g., Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Kandel & Lesser, 1972; Offer, 1969). These studies found that approximately 75% of teenagers reported having happy and pleasant relationships with their parents. If detachment, identity struggle, and individuation were taking place, they did not seem to be taking their toll on the family. In 1976, Rutter and colleagues (Rutter, Graham, Chadwick, & Yule, 1976) put the proverbial nail in the "storm-and-stress" coffin by showing that not only was the 75% estimate

on target, but that most of the remaining 25% of families had histories of family difficulty that preceded their children's entry into adolescence. In other words, the evidence did not support the theory that familial storm and stress emerged in adolescence in most families. Moreover, as work by Greenberger et al. (Josselson, Greenberger, & McConochie, 1977a, 1977b) would show, adolescent mental health was found to be better in families with close, nonconflictive, parent–child relationships.

The usual explanation for the discrepancy between these studies and the earlier accounts was that the original writings had come from clinicians' reports, whereas the newer studies drew their conclusions from studies of community samples. The error was in taking findings based on observations about families of psychologically troubled teenagers and generalizing them to the population as a whole. That is, while storm and stress may be the norm in families of teenagers with depression or conduct disorder, conflict is not normative in average families. As one whose career was just starting out around the time that these notions were finding their way into the literature, this was the party line that I was taught, and that I would teach my students over the next 2 decades.

There is a parallel story with regard to theories about intergenerational conflict. By the late 1960s, the concept of the generation gap had become firmly entrenched in the collective conscious of American society. It seemed that every other issue of *Time* or *Life* featured on the cover a long-haired, dope-smoking, adolescent demonstrator glaring into the equally angry eyes of a Midwestern factory worker. We were told that a generation fascinated with sex, drugs, and rock and roll was clashing head on with an older generation dedicated to certain unalienable responsibilities: patriotism, hard work, and chastity. As with research that questioned the notion that family conflict was normative, however, research on attitudes and values questioned the notion that intergenerational conflict was pervasive. By the mid-1970s, the hyperbolic views of the generation gap promulgated by the mass media were dismissed by social scientists as overblown (Conger, 1981).

Despite scientists' uneasiness with the storm-and-stress view, the public seemed unwilling to buy this more temperate view of things. There has remained a dramatic disjunction between what is being said in academic circles and what is being sold to parents through the popular media. Authors of contemporary advice books aimed at parents of teenagers continue to portray the adolescent period as a difficult one. Teenagers are puzzling, troublesome, angry, and ungrateful. They are to be approached with fear and trepidation. The next time you visit your local bookseller, take a look at the titles in the childrearing section. You'll find dozens of books on how to love your cuddly infant alongside their companion guides on how to survive your spiteful teenager.

Social scientists say one thing, but parents say another. Is this simply the usual lag between scientific discovery and its popular dissemination, or is something else going on? In the past several years, I have given dozens and dozens of talks to nonacademic audiences, mainly parents, and have come to believe that something else *is* going on. I now question the wisdom of the assertion that the storm-and-stress view is entirely incorrect. At the very least, I think the story is a lot more complicated than this characterization. The answer to the question of whether adolescence is a time of conflict depends on what we mean by conflict and, more importantly, from whom you collect the data. This suggests the need for a new perspective on the family—one that emphasizes the different viewpoints and stakes that each member brings to the family.

We are now fairly certain that frequent, high-intensity, angry fighting is not normative during adolescence (Steinberg, 1990). But to characterize the storm-and-stress view as entirely wrong—as many writers, including myself, have done—is not entirely true.

Different members of the family have different views on parent–adolescent conflicts and are differentially affected by it. Reed Larson and Maryse Richards state it best in their book *Divergent Realities* (1994): Just as research on siblings demonstrates that two siblings can experience the same family context in very different ways (Plomin & Daniels, 1987), research on parents and adolescents shows that mothers, fathers, and teenagers may experience their interactions with each other in very different ways. It is my impression that parents are more bothered by the bickering and squabbling that takes place during this time than are adolescents, and that parents are more likely to hold on to the affect after a negative interaction with their teenagers. The popular image of the individual sulking in the wake of a family argument may be a more accurate portrayal of the emotional state of the parent, than the teenager.

Teenagers may recover from parent–child conflicts more quickly than their parents because of the different perspectives that parents and teenagers bring to their relationship. Several years ago, Wendy Steinberg and I reported on this in a book entitled *Crossing Paths* (1994), which was based on a study of approximately 200 families with early adolescents. Although the design of the study was initially limited to questionnaire data, preliminary analyses of these survey data led us to believe that there were aspects of the dynamics of parent–child relationships that warranted not only a second look, but a closer look, through structured face-to-face interviews.

Part of the impetus for this addition was some interesting findings that emerged from a part of the study designed and conducted by Susan Silverberg Koerner (Silverberg & Steinberg, 1990). She found significant relations between parental mental health and transformations in family

relationships—to my knowledge, the first systematic empirical documentation of this phenomenon. Other research noted that parents describe adolescence as a relatively more difficult time than other periods of their children's development, but it was not clear how parents were affected by the family's entry into adolescence. Our findings suggested that the day-to-day conflicts over mundane matters that psychologists had dismissed as unimportant were, in fact, unimportant to teenagers but were a significant source of distress for parents.

Work by both Collins (1990) and Smetana (1988) helps us understand why this may be so. Parents and adolescents have different sets of expectations and ideas about social conventions. Collins has argued that certain aspects of parent–adolescent conflicts can be understood by asking whether and how interactions between family members violate their expectations. As Smetana points out, many of the conflicts that parents and teenagers have reflect not only differences of opinion but differences in the way that issues are framed and defined. Many of the matters that parents and teenagers argue about are seen by parents as involving codes of right and wrong—either moral codes or, more likely, codes that are based on social conventions. But these very same issues are seen by teenagers as matters of personal choice. To a parent, maintaining a clean room is something that people do because it is the right thing to do (after all, cleanliness is next to godliness); to the adolescent, how one keeps one's room is one's own business. When individuals define issues in such different terms, differences of opinion cannot be reconciled. More important, the feelings that parents and teenagers have when they walk away from these types of unreconciled conflicts may differ. By defining these conflicts as moral debates, parents may view them as rejections of basic values that they have tried to instill in the teenager and, as such, as violations of their expectations—expectations that their socialization efforts would have been successful. Adolescents, in contrast, imbue conflicts with far less meaning. This is why it is the parents, and not the adolescents, who walk away upset and who stay upset.

These mildly upsetting interchanges over day-to-day issues are not relationship breakers. Their repetitive nature, however, takes a toll on parental mental health, especially among mothers, who bear the brunt of the "front-line action" in most households (Silverberg & Steinberg, 1987). The distress is more intense for (1) parents whose adolescent is actively caught up in the individuation process, (2) parents whose adolescent is the same sex, (3) parents who have invested relatively less energy in work and marriage, and (4) parents who have been divorced. About 40% of the parents we studied experienced two or more of the following over the family's transition into adolescence: lowered self-esteem, diminished life satisfac-

tion, increased anxiety and depression, and more frequent rumination about middle age (Steinberg & Steinberg, 1994). The deidealization of the parent by the adolescent is especially difficult for many parents to cope with. Part of the difficulty may inhere in the clash between the psychological issues of adolescence and the psychological issues of midlife, with which many teenagers' parents are grappling.

We now understand that early adolescence is an important period for the negotiation of autonomy-related changes in the parent–child relationship. Perhaps what is most surprising about research on families' transition into adolescence is that it looks as if negotiating this transition is not an especially difficult challenge or a significant source of stress for teenagers. To be sure, there are teenagers who are under stress or who have psychological difficulty, but these conditions can almost always be attributed to a major life event or chronic difficulty that would be stressful regardless of the individual's age, such as parental divorce, poverty, victimization, or the illness of a family member. Adolescents are remarkably resilient in the face of the normative challenges of the period, especially if they have the support of one or more caring adults and, as we shall see, their parents or caregivers practice authoritative parenting.

In the unsuccessful quest to document the storm and stress of adolescence, I believe that researchers have not paid enough attention to the mental health or psychological needs of parents with teenagers. Rather than focusing exclusively on the psychological adjustment of teenagers to adolescence, future research on transformations in family relationships during adolescence needs to examine (1) whether, why, and in what ways this transition is stressful for parents; (2) how this type of stress affects parental mental health; (3) whether parents who find the transition difficult are more likely to parent in ineffective ways; and (4) whether educational programs aimed at parents of teenagers can help alleviate some of this difficulty.

THE IMPACT OF PARENTS ON ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH

For some time, now, my colleagues and I have been studying what many psychologists refer to as "authoritative" parenting, a style of parenting initially described by Diana Baumrind (1971). Authoritative parents are warm and involved, but firm and consistent in establishing and enforcing guidelines, limits, and developmentally appropriate expectations. Although these basic elements of authoritativeness are constant across different periods in children's development, there is one added dimension that is important to assess in adolescence: the extent to which parents encourage

and permit their adolescents to develop their own opinions and beliefs, something we call "psychological autonomy granting" (Steinberg, 1990; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989). Its converse, psychological control, is experienced by children as intrusive, overprotective, and at times passive aggressive.

For many years, developmental psychologists have known that preschool and elementary age schoolchildren who are raised by authoritative parents fare better than their peers who are raised in other types of households, on virtually every indicator of psychological health studied. This work had not been systematically extended into adolescence, however, and although it was suspected that this sort of parenting would benefit teenagers as well as their younger counterparts, it was not known if this was, in fact, the case. Nor had this work systematically examined authoritative parenting and its effects among non-White, non-middle class families. Extending the earlier work into adolescence and into new populations was the impetus for much of the work my colleagues and I have done over the past decade.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to emerge from our work is that adolescents raised in authoritative homes continue to show the same advantages in psychosocial development and mental health over their non-authoritatively raised peers that were apparent in studies of younger children (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). Adolescents from authoritative homes achieve more in school, report less depression and anxiety, score higher on measures of self-reliance and self-esteem, and are less likely to engage in antisocial behavior, including delinquency and drug use. In our own work, we have typically employed self-report measures of parenting provided by adolescents, but our findings have been replicated repeatedly by researchers in different parts of the world using different methods, measures, informants, samples, and labels for what they are studying. I know of no study that indicates that adolescents fare better when they are reared with some other parenting style.

In a recent article (Gray & Steinberg, 1999), Marjorie Gray and I "unpacked" authoritative parenting, in an effort to see whether each component of authoritativeness—warmth, firmness, and psychological autonomy granting—makes an independent contribution to healthy adolescent development. We found that their effects are overlapping but somewhat different. Psychosocial development, in general, is enhanced by all three aspects of authoritative parenting. These three aspects also contribute to academic competence, although it appears that excessive strictness has some disadvantages. Firmness is most important as a deterrent against

problem behavior, such as drug and alcohol use and delinquency. Psychological autonomy granting functions much like warmth in that it provides a general protective factor, but seems to also have special benefits as a protection against anxiety, depression, and other forms of internalized distress.

Students often ask about the impact of having two parents whose parenting styles differ. The brief answer is that this does not happen terribly often by the time the child has reached adolescence. The few studies that have looked at this find that mothers and fathers are in agreement about 75% of the time (e.g., Baumrind, 1991), because individuals with similar values are more likely to marry, parents influence each other over time, and those parents who experience serious disagreements may be more likely to divorce (Fletcher, Steinberg, & Sellers, 1999). Nevertheless, interparental inconsistency is frequent enough to investigate its effects.

Of course, the prevailing wisdom is that it is important for parents to agree on matters of discipline—to present a united front. This may not always be the case, however (Fletcher, et al., 1999). While it is true that having two authoritative parents is slightly better than having one, having one is better than having none, even if having one means having parents who do not see eye to eye. In fact, the differences among adolescents with one versus two authoritative parents are much smaller than the differences among adolescents with only one authoritative parent versus those with two parents who agree, but who are permissive, authoritarian, or neglectful. We have probably overstated the importance of parents presenting a united front, at least in homes with teenagers. Perhaps it is important for parents to be consistent when children are younger, but in adolescence, parental consistency is less important than having at least one parent who is authoritative.

We have also examined the over-time impact of authoritative parenting in longitudinal studies (Steinberg et al., 1989, 1994). This research is important because it helps to solidify the notion that adolescent competence is influenced by authoritative parenting, rather than the reverse. The disadvantages of nonauthoritative parenting accumulate over time. During each year of high school, adolescents from homes in which parents are neither responsive nor demanding—parents we call indifferent—lose ground to their authoritatively reared counterparts. Thus, we can view authoritative parenting in preadolescence as a process that guides young people along a trajectory that leads toward increasing competence and psychological well-being over the adolescent period.

Why does authoritative parenting work? To answer this question, it helps to think of authoritative parenting as an emotional context rather than a compilation of specific parenting practices (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Parenting practices are best viewed not as instantiations of authori-

tativeness, but as specific actions that often have different meanings depending on the emotional climate in which they occur, a climate that is determined by the style of parenting. Authoritative parenting works because it does three things: The nurturance and parental involvement make the child more receptive to parental influence, enabling more effective and efficient socialization; the combination of support and structure facilitates the development of self-regulatory skills, which enable the child to function as a responsible, competent individual; and, the verbal give and take characteristic of parent–child exchanges in authoritative families engages the child in a process that fosters cognitive and social competence, thereby enhancing the functioning outside the family. Adolescents whose parents encourage their psychological autonomy, for example, are relatively more competent than other youngsters in their interactions with peers (Allen, Boykin, & Bell, 2000).

Perhaps the most interesting thing about authoritative parenting is the way in which it changes the impact of parents' practices. We tested this notion by looking at what is more or less considered to be a given in the study of adolescent development—that parents' academic encouragement and involvement in adolescents' schooling is beneficial to their school achievement (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). In the aggregate, this turned out to be true—students whose parents attended school functions, monitored course selection, stayed on top of children's school performance, and encouraged achievement did better in school than their peers whose parents were less actively involved. But parental encouragement and involvement had a much stronger impact when parents were authoritative than when parents were not. In fact, within nonauthoritative families, parental encouragement and involvement were unrelated to students' school performance. In other words, it is not just what parents do that matters, but the emotional context in which they do it. Thus, researchers interested in socialization need to study not only *what* parents do, but *how* they do it.

In her book, *The Nurture Assumption* (Harris, 1998), Judith Harris claims that much of what we attribute to parental influence is actually genetic, and that when adolescent development *is* influenced by the environment, it is peers, not parents, who have the strongest influence. In a recent article, Collins and colleagues (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000) provide a detailed critique of Harris's argument. To summarize, this article notes that Harris downplays many well-documented limitations of the behavioral genetics research she lauds (e.g., the failure of most studies to examine gene-by-environment interactions or to take into account gene–environment correlations and the inconsistencies in heritability estimates derived from observational versus self-report studies of

parenting); ignores experimental studies of humans and other primates that show that changes in parenting produce changes in child behavior; and erroneously interprets similarity between adolescents and their peers as conclusive evidence for peer influence.

While I agree with Harris's basic argument that we have underemphasized both the role of genes and the role of socialization agents other than parents in shaping young people's development, it seems highly unlikely that parents have no or little impact on their adolescents' values, attitudes, and personality. Indeed, the basic logic behind Harris's position is puzzling, to say the least: How could it be that adolescents' development is influenced by the people with whom they interact—as Harris admits, by pointing to the importance of peer influence—but not affected by the people who have lived with them, raised them, and tried to influence them since the moment they were born? Is it conceivable that evolution would have led to the development of human organisms that are influenced by everyone *other* than their parents? Given what we know about modeling, observational learning, and social influence, this proposition is preposterous.

Viewing parenting as a process that guides adolescents along a particular trajectory helps to identify the flaws in Harris's argument about the relative importance of peers. She focuses on the end of a long trajectory and takes a snapshot of adolescents and their social world, mistaking observed similarity among adolescents and their friends as evidence that peer influence has been operating. Friends are similar, but for many different reasons, and Harris overlooks the substantial literature that indicates the main reason: adolescents and their friends share various inclinations and attitudes in common because adolescents choose as their friends people who are similar to themselves (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest, & Gariepy, 1988; Epstein, 1983; Hogue & Steinberg, 1995; Kandel, 1978), Moreover, there is a growing body of literature that demonstrates that children's peer relations are often actively managed by their parents (e.g., Parke & Bhavnagri, 1989). For example, during childhood, parents propel their children toward certain peers by managing their youngsters' social activities (which has the effect of increasing contact with some peers and diminishing it with others); and during both childhood and adolescence, parents actively steer children toward certain friends and away from others. What may appear to be the direct influence of peers is often the indirect influence of parents.

I subscribe to a more dynamic model of parenting and child development than that posited by Harris. The traits, values, and inclinations she attributes to peer influence are largely in place before teenagers' friendships have been established, if not as fully developed entities, then as strong predispositions, and it is these predispositions that lead adoles-

cents to choose to affiliate with certain peers (see Brown, Mounts, Lamborn, & Steinberg, 1993). These predispositions are in place not solely because of genes, but as a result of the interactive forces of genetic and familial influence, set in motion long before adolescence. Peers undoubtedly play a role in strengthening these pre-existing characteristics, which is precisely why peers are important (Steinberg, 1995). But it is unlikely that peer influence leads to the initial emergence of these traits.

As noted earlier, one limitation of previous work on authoritative parenting was its focus on White, middle-class families. One of the most important questions we have asked in our body of work is whether the benefits of authoritative parenting transcend the boundaries of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and household composition (Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991). The brief answer is that they do. Studies of American samples show that, as a general rule, adolescents fare better when their parents are authoritative, regardless of their racial or social background or their parents' marital status (Steinberg, 1990). This finding has been confirmed in samples from countries around the world that have extreme diversity in their value systems, such as China, Pakistan, Hong Kong, Scotland, Australia, and Argentina (Feldman, Rosenthal, Mont-Reynaud, Lau, & Leung, 1991; Shek, 1996; Shucksmith, Hendry, & Glendinning, 1995; Stewart, Bond, Zaman, Dar, & Anwar, 1999). Measures of parenting derived from Baumrind's (1991) model perform comparably across different ethnic and socioeconomic groups, and patterns of relations between parenting variables and adolescent outcomes look remarkably similar across diverse groups as well (e.g., Knight, Virdin & Roosa, 1994; Mason, Cauce, Gonzales, & Hiraga, 1996; Steinberg et al., 1991). The data from these studies provides ample evidence that the benefits of authoritative parenting transcend many boundaries. Those who contend that authoritative parenting has different effects in different populations now need to demonstrate that this is in fact the case.

It is often asserted that certain groups of adolescents—African Americans and Asian Americans—fare better with authoritarian parents than with authoritative parents. In reviewing the studies that have been cited as demonstrating this fact, I have found that, in general, the evidence does not support this proposition (cf. Baldwin & Baldwin, 1989; Baumrind, 1972). What these studies, and some of our own work, show is that African American and, to a lesser extent, Asian American, teenagers are not as negatively affected by authoritarian parenting as are White adolescents. This is not to say that Black and Asian adolescents benefit from authoritarianism. In fact, our data show that minority children raised in authoritative homes fare better than their peers from nonauthoritative homes with respect to psychosocial development, symptoms of internalized distress,

and problem behavior (Steinberg et al., 1991). The one exception to the overall pattern favoring authoritative parenting is in the area of school performance, where we find that authoritativeness does not particularly benefit African American and Asian American students (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). Even in this area, however, the data do not indicate that young people achieve less when they are raised authoritatively or more when they are raised in some other way.

I believe that we have enough evidence to conclude that adolescents benefit from having parents who are authoritative: warm, firm, and accepting of their needs for psychological autonomy. Moreover, the same constellation of traits has been shown to characterize effective teachers, school principals, coaches, work supervisors, and organizations (see, e.g., Moos, 1978; Rutter, 1983). We can stop asking what type of parenting most positively affects adolescent development. We know the answer to this question. The challenges ahead involve finding ways to educate adults with regard to how to be authoritative, and help those who are not authoritative to change.

There are some who believe that any attempt to define parental effectiveness according to some absolute standard—either in the behavior of the parent or in the development of the child—is arrogant and insensitive to issues of cultural diversity. Given the diversity in parental attitudes and values in today's society, is it possible to talk about what is, and what is not, "good" parenting? I think it is. At the least, it is possible to specify some broad parameters of effective parenting and desirable child outcomes that accommodate cultural diversity without being paralyzed by cultural relativism.

There is no question that authoritative parenting is associated with certain developmental outcomes, not all of which are adaptive in all contexts. But in present-day, contemporary, industrialized societies, the characteristics fostered by authoritative parenting—self-reliance, achievement motivation, prosocial behavior, self-control, cheerfulness, and social confidence—are highly desired and highly desirable. Unless these characteristics become maladaptive in our society (a highly unlikely possibility) parents who do not raise their children with these goals in mind are placing their children at a disadvantage. Indeed, oversensitivity to issues of diversity may actually be impeding our ability to help adults be better parents. We have become so immobilized by political correctness that we have been unwilling to provide the sort of clear-cut direction that parents want and need. As professionals and practitioners who are familiar with the scientific literature, we should be able and willing to take a stand as long as we have a strong research foundation for it.

This does not mean that we should abandon the study of parent–

adolescent relationships. It does suggest, however, that we move our research beyond the immediate family. Now that we have a firmer understanding of how parenting affects adolescent development, we should look at parenting within a broader context, and turn our attention toward understanding how forces outside the family accentuate or undermine the impact of authoritative parenting on adolescent development. The following three examples serve to illustrate this type of analysis.

The first example concerns the power of the peer group (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). As noted above, previous research has found that among African Americans, teenagers who are raised authoritatively do not perform any better in school than their peers who are raised in non-authoritative households. In light of the fact that many studies have shown that authoritative parenting has a strong and consistent positive effect on school performance among White adolescents, the absence of this effect among Black adolescents is puzzling. How could this be? The answer is that for many Black adolescents, the influence of their peer group, against academic achievement, offsets the potential positive influence of parental authoritativeness in Black homes. Parental authoritativeness is important, but these data show that it is possible for peers to undermine parental influence. Therefore, the focus of future research should not be on the benefits of authoritative parenting, but rather on how parent and peer influences work together.

A second example comes from research on adolescents' social networks (Fletcher, Darling, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1995). The focus of this study was on whether adolescents benefited from having friends whose parents were authoritative. The results showed that this was in fact the case—not surprising, perhaps, because the friends themselves had many of the characteristics that are associated with authoritative parenting, and adolescents are influenced by the company they keep. Another interesting question asked in this study was whether having authoritatively reared friends compensates for having nonauthoritative parents, or whether it strengthens what is already taking place at home. The answer was that the efficacy of authoritative parents was amplified when their children had friends who reported that they have been raised in a similar fashion. Thus, while it may not be necessary to do more research on the impact of authoritative parenting, it would be beneficial to study why exposure to authoritatively reared peers is more likely to make the psychologically rich richer than it is to compensate for less-than-optimal parenting at home.

The final example comes from a series of analyses on authoritative parenting and neighborhood effects (Cauffman & Steinberg, 1995; Darling, Steinberg, & Gringlas, 1993). These studies looked at a question similar to that in the study of adolescent social networks, but broadened the focus to

include the impact of the type of parenting practiced in the community. The question asked was whether the efforts of authoritative parents are strengthened by living in a neighborhood in which there are large numbers of other authoritative parents. Findings from these studies were similar to those regarding adolescents' social networks: Authoritative parenting works even better when other parents in the community are also authoritative, probably because this fosters the development of a more positive peer culture. Indeed, parents' involvement in their children's schooling has nearly twice the effect on student performance in neighborhoods where other parents are also involved in school than it does in neighborhoods where they, for the most part, are not.

In general, then, the behavior of persons outside the family—adolescents' friends, parents of their friends, and other parents in the neighborhood—can all undermine or strengthen the impact that parents have on their teenagers. How and why these processes occur are important, but understudied, questions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Over the past 25 years, our understanding of adolescent development and the family's role in promoting adolescent health and well-being has expanded at a rapid pace. Much is known about the normative changes of the period, and what parents need to do to facilitate healthy adolescent development, as well as the ways in which the family system changes during adolescence.

Unfortunately, this significant increase in knowledge about adolescence has not, for the most part, benefited those who might profit from it most—parents. Parents state that they want information on how to keep their teenagers healthy, but they often do not have access to the best and most scientifically grounded advice. Much of the information that parents receive about raising teenagers is conflicting and confusing. Misinformation and erroneous stereotypes about adolescence fill bookstores, flood the Internet, and dominate portrayals of teenagers and their parents in the news, on television, and in film. If we are to increase the capacity of parents and other caregivers to improve adolescent health, we must start by providing these adults with accurate and user-friendly information. Parents need to know what healthy adolescence is, how to assess whether their children are on healthy trajectories, how to facilitate their adolescents' healthy development, and how to get help when problems arise.

My focus on the family in this article is not intended to minimize the importance of influences outside the family, such as the peer groups, schools, neighborhoods, or the mass media. Nor do I believe that the influence of par-

ents over their children's development is limitless. I do feel, however, that it is this very exposure of our adolescents to the influences of so many individuals, institutions, and forces outside the family that makes parents more important today than ever before. We need to change the way in which parents of teenagers view themselves and their role in their adolescents' development, and counter the misleading claims in the popular media that parents do not matter. Indeed, the most important message we can convey is that what parents do *does* matter, even after their children have entered adolescence.

It is not sufficient to just tell parents that they matter, however. It is also important to identify a small number of basic messages about the parenting of adolescents on which there is widespread agreement among researchers, examine the unintentional and erroneous messages about adolescence that are communicated through the mass media, and perform systematic research on how best to disseminate this information to parents of teenagers.

Parents and other primary caregivers need three types of information. First, they need basic information about the normative developmental changes of adolescence, so that they can better understand and respond to their children's behavior. Second, they need basic information on the principles of effective parenting during the adolescent years, so that they can adapt to the changing needs and characteristics of their teenagers. Last, they need some understanding of how they and their family, in addition to their child, are changing during the adolescent period. Parents from different cultural and socioeconomic groups will incorporate this information into their family life in different ways, but the need for this information cuts across ethnic and economic lines.

The next step should be the development of a systematic, large-scale, multifaceted, and ongoing public health campaign to educate parents about adolescence that draws on the collective resources and expertise of health care professionals, scientists, governmental agencies, community organizations, schools, religious institutions, and the mass media. It is time to be as vigorous and serious in our efforts to educate parents of teenagers as we have been in past efforts to educate parents of infants. The wealth of knowledge generated over the past quarter century has provided the scientific foundation to realize this important goal. It is now up to us to bridge the gap between research and practice.

After all, we know some things.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

REFERENCES

Allen, J., Boykin, K., & Bell, K. (2000, March). *Autonomy in discussions vs. autonomy in decision-making as predictors of developing close friendship competence.* Paper presented at the Biennial Meetings of the Society for Research on Adolescence, Chicago, IL.

Baldwin, C., & Baldwin, A. (1989, April). *The role of family interaction in the prediction of adolescent competence.* Paper presented at the meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Kansas City, MO.

Baumrind, D. (1971). Current patterns of parental authority. *Developmental Psychology Monographs, 4* (1, Pt. 2).

Baumrind, D. (1972). An exploratory study of socialization effects on black children: Some black-white comparisons. *Child Development, 43*, 261–267.

Baumrind, D. (1991). Parenting styles and adolescent development. In J. Brooks-Gunn, R. Lerner, & A. C. Peterson (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of adolescence.* New York: Garland.

Blos, P. (1967). The second individuation process of adolescence. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, 1*, 183–198.

Brown, B., Mounts, N., Lamborn, S., & Steinberg, L. (1993). Parenting practices and peer group affiliation in adolescence. *Child Development, 64*, 467–482.

Cairns, R., Cairns, B., Neckerman, H., Gest, S., & Gariepy, J. L. (1988). Social networks and aggressive behavior: Peer support or peer rejection? *Developmental Psychology, 24*, 815–823.

Cauffman, E., & Steinberg, L. (March, 1995). *Moderating effects of neighborhood parenting on family socialization processes.* Paper presented as part of a symposium entitled "Community Effects on Adolescent Development: New Approaches to the Study of Neighborhoods and Their Impact" at the biennial meetings of the Society for Research in Child Development, Indianapolis, IN.

Collins, W. A. (1990). Parent–child relationships in the transition to adolescence: Continuity and change in interaction, affect, and cognition. In R. Montemayor, G. Adams, and T. Gullotta (Eds.), *Advances in adolescent development: Volume 2. The transition from childhood to adolescence.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Collins, W. A., Maccoby, E., Steinberg, L., Hetherington, E. M., & Bornstein, M. (2000). Contemporary research on parenting: The case for nature *and* nurture. *American Psychologist, 55*, 218–232.

Conger, J. (1981). Freedom and commitment: Families, youth, and social change. *American Psychologist, 36*, 1475–1484.

Darling, N., & Steinberg, L. (1993). Parenting style as context: An integrative model. *Psychological Bulletin, 113*, 487–496.

Darling, N., Steinberg, L., & Gringlas, M. (March, 1993). *Community integration and value consensus as forces for adolescent socialization: a Test of the Coleman and Hoffer hypothesis.* Paper

presented as a part of a symposium entitled "Community and Neighborhood Influences on Adolescent Behavior" at the biennial meetings of the Society for Research in Child Development, New Orleans.

Douvan, E., & Adelson, J. (1966). *The adolescent experience.* New York: Wiley.

Epstein, J. L. (1983). The influence of friends on achievement and affective outcomes. In J. L. Epstein & N. Karweit (Eds.), *Friends in school* (pp. 177–200). New York: Academic Press.

Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis.* New York: Norton.

Feldman, S. S., Rosenthal, D. A., Mont-Reynaud, R., Lau, S., & Leung, K. (1991). Ain't misbehavin': Adolescent values and family environments as correlates of misconduct in a cross-national study of Chinese, Australian, and American youth. *Journal of Research in Adolescence, 1*, 109–134.

Fletcher, A., Darling, N., Steinberg, L., & Dornbusch, S. (1995). The company they keep: Relation of adolescents' adjustment and behavior to their friends' perceptions of authoritative parenting in the social network. *Developmental Psychology, 31*, 300–310.

Fletcher, A., Steinberg, L., & Sellers, E. (1999). Adolescents' well-being as a function of perceived inter-parental consistency. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 61*, 599–610.

Freud, A. (1958). Adolescence. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, 13*, 255–278.

Gray, M., & Steinberg, L. (1999). Unpacking authoritative parenting: Reassessing a multidimensional construct. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 61*, 574–587.

Harris, J. R. (1998). *The nurture assumption: Why children turn out the way they do.* New York: Free Press.

Hogue, A., & Steinberg, L. (1995). Homophily of internalized distress in adolescent peer groups. *Developmental Psychology, 31*, 897-906.

Josselson, R., Greenberger, E., & McConochie, D. (1977a). Phenomenological aspects of psychosocial maturity in adolescence. Part I: Boys. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 6*, 25–56.

Josselson, R., Greenberger, E., & McConochie, D. (1977b). Phenomenological aspects of psychosocial maturity in adolescence. Part II: Girls. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 6*, 145–167.

Kandel, D. (1978). Homophily, selection, and socialization in adolescent friendships. *American Journal of Sociology, 84*, 427–436.

Kandel, D., & Lesser, G. (1972). *Youth in two worlds.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Knight, G., Virdin, L., & Roosa, M. (1994). Socialization and family correlates of mental health outcomes among Hispanic and Anglo American children: Consideration of cross-ethnic scalar equivalence. *Child Development, 65*, 212–224.

Lamborn, S., Mounts, N., Steinberg, L., & Dornbusch, S. (1991). Patterns of competence and adjustment among adolescents from authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful homes. *Child Development, 62*, 1049–1065.

Larson, R., & Richards, M. (1994). *Divergent realities: The emotional lives of mothers, fathers, and adolescents.* New York: Basic Books.

Mason, C., Cauce, A., Gonzales, N., & Hiraga, N. (1996). Neither too sweet nor too sour: Problem peers, maternal control, and problem behavior in African American adolescents. *Child Development, 67*, 2115–2130.

Moos, R. (1978). A typology of junior high and high school classrooms. *American Educational Research Journal, 15*, 53–66.

Offer, D. (1969). *The psychological world of the teenager.* New York: Basic.

Parke, R., & Bhavnagri, N. P. (1989). Parents as managers of children's peer relationships. In D. Belle (Ed.), *Children's social networks and social support* (pp. 241–259). New York: Wiley.

Plomin, R., & Daniels, D. (1987). Why are children in the same family so different from one another? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 10*, 1–60.

Rutter, M. (1983). School effects on pupil progress: Research findings and policy implications. *Child Development, 54*, 1–29.

Rutter, M., Graham, P., Chadwick, F., & Yule, W. (1976). Adolescent turmoil: Fact or fiction? *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 17*, 35–56.

Shek, D. T. (1996). Mental health of Chinese adolescents. In S. Lau (Ed.), *Growing up the Chinese way.* Chinese University Press: Bejing.

Shucksmith, J., Hendry, L., & Glendinning, A. (1995). Models of parenting: Implications for adolescent well-being within different types of family contexts. *Journal of Adolescence, 18*, 253–270.

Silverberg, S., & Steinberg, L. (1987). Adolescent autonomy, parent-adolescent conflict, and parental well-being. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 16*, 293–312.

Silverberg, S., & Steinberg, L. (1990). Psychological well-being of parents at midlife: The impact of early adolescent children. *Developmental Psychology, 26*, 658–666.

Smetana, J. (1988). Concepts of self and social convention: Adolescents' and parents' reasoning about hypothetical and actual family conflicts. In M. Gunnar (Ed.), *21st Minnesota symposium on child psychology* (pp. 79–122). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Steinberg, L. (1990). Autonomy, conflict, and harmony in the family relationship. In S. Feldman and G. Elliot (Eds.), *At the threshold: The developing adolescent* (Pp. 255–276). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Steinberg, L. (1995). Commentary: On developmental trajectories and social contexts in adolescence. In L. Crockett and N. Crouter (Eds.), *Pathways through adolescence: Individual development in relation to social contexts* (Pp. 245–253). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Steinberg, L., Dornbusch, S., & Brown, B. (1992). Ethnic differences in adolescent achievement: An ecological perspective. *American Psychologist, 47*, 723–729.

Steinberg, L., Elmen, J., & Mounts, N. (1989). Authoritative parenting, psychosocial maturity, and academic success among adolescents. *Child Development, 60*, 1424–1436.

Steinberg, L., Lamborn, S., Darling, N., Mounts, N., & Dornbusch, S. (1994). Over-time changes in adjustment and competence among adolescents from authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful families. *Child Development, 65*, 754–770.

Steinberg, L., Lamborn, S., Dornbusch, S., & Darling, N. (1992). Impact of parenting practices on adolescent achievement: Authoritative parenting, school involvement, and encouragement to succeed. *Child Development, 63*, 1266–1281.

Steinberg, L., & Morris, A. (in press). Adolescent development. *Annual Review of Psychology.*

Steinberg, L., Mounts, N., Lamborn, S., & Dornbusch, S. (1991). Authoritative parenting and adolescent adjustment across various ecological niches. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 1*, 19–36.

Steinberg, L., & Steinberg, W. (1994). *Crossing paths: How your child's adolescence triggers your own crisis.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Stewart, S., Bond, M., Zaman, R., Dar, R., & Anwar, M. (1999). *Perceptions of parents and adolescent outcomes in Pakistan.* Manuscript submitted for publication.