CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The transition to adolescence is extensively documented in social science literature and in popular media. Both tend to focus narrowly on the adolescent as an individual and on unidirectional influences flowing from parent to child. This study adds to a growing body of literature focusing on reciprocal influences, on what parents bring to this transition as individuals and marital partners, and what it is like for them to have their oldest or only child enter adolescence.

In this review, the literature is organized around five topics: the shifting research context; characteristics of parents (intrapsychic and developmental factors); parents' perceptions and interactions as members of family dyads (husband-wife, parent-child); parents' experience of family change across time; and the impact of sociocultural factors.

Research Context

Palkovitz (1996) pointed out that parenthood represents a context that, to the extent it is engaged in, affects adult development. How this happens, and whether developmental changes in parents might be caused by children, remains largely unexplored in the literature with regard to adolescence. There is a societal expectation that resources will flow from parent to child. This informs a research track that emphasizes unidirectional effects and neglects reciprocal and adult developmental effects (Goodnow & Collins, 1990). The impact of children on parents tends to be more fully examined in terms of parent-infant relationships and the "empty nest" stage when children leave home.

Previous emphases in research and in popular stereotypes of adolescence can be traced to the Freudian view that close parent-adolescent relationships are stunted (Baumrind, 1991; Steinberg, 1990) and analytic views of adolescence as universally marked by "storm and stress" (Hall, as cited in Gecas & Seff, 1990). Research in the 1970s and 1980s began generating evidence to refute this view. Adolescence is still perceived by parents as a difficult time, but research shows most parents and teens experience harmony and mutually satisfying relationships

(Chu & Powers, 1995; Delaney, 1996; Tubman & Lerner, 1994). Clinically, this is significant, because conflict, once considered normative, may not elicit the help that a family needs.

At the level of theory, Ambert (1995) noted that it is now widely accepted that adolescents are "social actors who have an impact on their parents" (p. 292). However, she has found that this perspective is rarely used for empirical study. Further, studies emphasizing separation and individuation at the expense of connectedness have "cast an individualistic shadow on the entire research landscape" (pp. 293-294). Some recent research still reflects the "storm and stress" view, such as Scheer and Unger (1995), who surveyed parents about whether they viewed their own adolescence as turbulent, and whether this predicted family conflict. Culturally bound and linear research has resulted in gaps in the literature on reciprocal effects, child influences on adult development, and studies with nonclinic families (Ambert, 1995).

Ambert (1995) concluded that research studies designed to examine adolescents as "co-producers of their development and co-initiators of their parents' behaviors" would bring dramatic change to both research and clinical intervention (p. 295). Demo and Ambert (1995) concluded that "the evidence to date suggests that parents find rearing, disciplining, and living with adolescents to be a highly contradictory experience in that it is burdensome, exhausting, and stressful, yet simultaneously satisfying and rewarding" (p. 4). A unidirectional bias in the literature has resulted in a wealth of studies on how parents influence child outcomes, and very little in terms of reciprocal effects or child-to-parent effects. This study attempts a contribution to the growing literature on what is happening for parents as they raise adolescent children.

Characteristics of Parents

What is it about a transition to adolescence that puts most parents on notice that something new is happening? Obvious answers include the changes occurring in the adolescent, and these are thoroughly examined in the research. Baumrind (1991) identified three developmental aspects of adolescence that affect family relationships: identity formation and alienation; cognitive and moral development; and shifts in family power and the role of peers. Steinberg (1990, 1994), in a number of empirical studies, identified four "triggers" that can put parental mental health at risk when this transition begins: pubertal development (especially

around sexual maturation), and processes of increasing autonomy (behavioral independence), detachment (emotional independence), and individuation (deidealizing the parent).

Recently, research has looked beyond traits of adolescents themselves and has begun to explore parental characteristics and relational factors that make a difference in how parents experience this stage of life. Steinberg (1994) identified four parent-related factors that increase the risk of psychological turmoil: being the same sex as the child; being divorced or remarried (especially for women); having few sources of satisfaction outside the parental role; and having a negative "cognitive set" (e.g., expectations) about adolescence (p. 231). An important perspective on this was offered by Marks (1996), who used data from the 1987-1988 National Survey of Families and Households to document a wide range of diversity among midlife parents. She identified differences and similarities in personal resources; child characteristics; health status of grandparents; and combinations of gender, age, marital status, and race/ethnicity. She cautioned that in studying these parents, describing a single variance around a total population mean is often inadequate. This concern was addressed in the study by Silverberg (1996), discussed below under the subheading, Studies on parents and on women at midlife.

The literature on characteristics of parents may be divided into studies concerned with self-perception and studies examining issues of adult development.

Parental Self-Perceptions

Current findings reported in the literature on parenting overlap a large body of research involving issues related to the "self," such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) and self-esteem (Pelham & Swann, 1989). More recent parenting studies have incorporated aspects of transition and adult development that previously have been studied in isolation from parenting issues (Silverberg & Steinberg, 1987). Three examples will be mentioned here that explore "self" concepts in a time of transition. Although they did not specifically address a parent's experience of seeing a child become an adolescent, they offered insight about adult development during a transition, and set the stage for studies examining parents of teens.

Showers and Ryff (1996) pointed out that transitions offer a context in which organizational features of the self are key. People acquire new information about themselves and use it to interpret what is happening and to select a course of action. The authors examined 120 women, aged 55 to 97, who were experiencing a transition of relocation. Participants were asked for self-evaluations, on a Likert-type scale, of five domains: health, family, friends, economics, and daily activities. Responses were coded, and step-wise regressions were used to detect correlations. The authors hypothesized that the women's self-evaluations and their perceived self-change would significantly predict mood and well-being in the year following relocation. Participants also were interviewed in their homes. Researchers found that "evaluative differentiation," or the tendency to see self-change very positively in some domains and very negatively in others, was associated with greater well-being in women whose positive domains were important to them. They considered evaluative differentiation a coping strategy: those who selectively attend to positive change in an important domain may adjust more easily. In terms of negotiating a parental transition, this research has brought into focus the relevance of asking whether parenting is an important domain, and what difference that makes.

A narrative view of transition and self-perception was offered by Viney (1992), who posited that when previous self-constructs no longer work well, anxiety ensues and personal constructs are elaborated and extended. Transition is seen as altering self-views and demanding change in assumptions and actions. Viney's article was based on personal construct psychology, which advances the view that individuals more easily change constructs that are peripheral and perceived as less important. Like Showers and Ryff (1996), Viney emphasized self-views and how they affect the ways in which people construe change and adapt to it. In terms of parenting adolescents, as the following studies will show, self-views of parents during a time of transition may be foundational to their interpretation of, and response to, physical, emotional, and social signals of change in their maturing child.

The qualities and consequences of parents' ideas are considered in two book chapters on theory by Goodnow and Collins (1990). The consequences of parents' ideas were considered in terms of affect and action, and seen to be reciprocally related to both. Goodnow and Collins viewed affect as a *condition* influencing parental perceptions of children as well as an outcome

of particular expectations (e.g., those of a depressed mother). In terms of affect as a *consequence*, they noted that high satisfaction is associated with generous attribution patterns (assigning the cause of positive outcomes to stable, internal traits); lower satisfaction is associated with seeing causes of positive events as situational and unstable, and causes of difficulties as global and stable.

Many studies specific to the self-views of parents have focused heavily on the transition to parenthood and the parents' response to an infant. Others have examined the "empty nest" stage of the life cycle, when grown children leave home. Examples of both of these "alpha and omega" studies (Hagestad, as cited in Thornton, et al., 1995) are included here, because more recent studies have built on this literature to explore the transition to adolescence, which in most cases is a much longer period of the parenting experience than either of the other two.

Studies on parents of infants. Hooker, Fiese, Jenkins, Morfei, & Schwagler (1996) compared 108 parents of infants and 120 parents of toddlers with regard to "possible selves," a construct involved in goal-setting and motivation based on imagined scenarios for the future. Balance between a "feared self" and a "hoped for" self was seen as the most powerful motivator. The researchers administered questionnaires to each parent, asking them to list their three most important hoped-for selves and three most important feared selves. Additional questions were asked about each possible self. Responses were coded into 17 categories previously established by the developers of the questionnaire. Chi square analyses compared the frequencies of both types of possible selves in the realm of parenting, and the results of the comparison confirmed other research (Cowan, 1991) showing parenting as a key component of current and expected future adult identity. The researchers expressed surprise at finding that new parents had fewer feared selves in the parenting domain than more experienced parents. They suggested that as parents evaluate their "works in progress" (their children), this evaluation process will powerfully affect self-images in the future. Whether parents with an impoverished sense of parenting selves are less skilled or have children with adjustment problems deserves future study, the authors conclude.

"Possible selves" among parents of infants were also considered at length in a literature review by Antonucci and Mikus (1988). They equate it to Galinsky's (1981) first stage of parenting, called the "image-making" period. Empirical studies comparing possible selves with actual parenting selves suggested that a gap between real and ideal, and the way parents cope with this, may influence the parent's experience and self-worth. There has also been empirical evidence to suggest that a moderate, rather than strong, sense of efficacy among mothers of young children may be a more adaptive response to parenting demands. Research is cited that shows how roles that require a great investment become merged with the person. With regard to parenting, Antonucci and Mikus suggested that "the struggles and worries inherent in childrearing may heighten the salience of the role rather than diminish its significance" (p. 64). The authors did not consider the implications of their findings for other stages of parenting. To the extent that role definitions and ideal versus real self-perceptions change for parents when their children reach adolescence, the research on early parenting suggests that significant changes in adult self-perception may occur.

Studies on parents of adolescents. In a quantitative study, Bogenschneider, Small, and Tsay (1997) reported on parents' perceived competence in parenting. To explore the link between perception and action, they hypothesized that parents who perceive themselves as more competent have adolescent children who report higher levels of parental monitoring and responsiveness and lower levels of psychological control. They found this to be the case, based on questionnaires and other measures administered to a cross-sectional sample of 666 mother-adolescent pairs and 510 father-adolescent pairs.

In addition, Bogenschneider et al. (1997) found the strongest correlates of perceived competence were adolescent openness to socialization, and the stress associated with parenting a particular child. Further, building on Belsky's (1984) work, they hypothesized that competent parenting is multiply determined by child characteristics, parent characteristics, and contextual sources of support; and that parent characteristics are "the most potent predictors of perceived parenting competence" (p. 350). Bogenschneider et al. raised the issue of "goodness of fit" between parent and child, and noted that few studies have focused on normative populations,

particularly among families with adolescents. They viewed perceived competence not as a stable, enduring trait, but as a reflection of a parent's ability to adapt to changing demands.

Goodness of fit was also explored empirically in a study by Kawaguchi, Welsh, Powers, and Rostosky (1998). They pointed out that it is rare to read about "a difficult parent," although parental temperament may place demands on children and require adaptive responses. Further, they suggested that parental temperament (defined as a set of relatively stable behavioral and emotional reaction patterns) may influence parents' awareness and response to cues from their children. These authors hypothesized that parental temperament is significantly associated with the quality of parent-adolescent relationships; that difficult parental temperament predicts adolescent perceptions of their family relationships; and that adolescent gender moderates the relationship between adolescent temperament and relationship quality. They recruited 82 adolescents, ages 14 to 18, as well as 82 mothers and 50 fathers. Two scales were used during in-home visits by researchers: the Revised Dimensions of Temperament Survey (DOTS-R) and the Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI). Items on the DOTS-R consist of statements describing general behavioral tendencies, and a Likert-type scale. The dimensions it measures include activity level; sleep patterns; approach/withdrawal; flexibility/rigidity; mood quality; and three temperamental types, marked by rhythmicity, distractibility, and persistence. The QRI measures support, conflict, and depth across 25 items. Findings concerning parental temperament showed that mothers with less difficult temperaments had more supportive relationships with their sons. One temperament dimension, mothers' flexibility, was significantly related to depth in the mother-daughter relationship. Fathers' difficult temperament scores were not significantly correlated with sons' or daughters' reports of their relationships. The researchers point out that mothers' difficult temperament had the most predictive power in their results, in terms of predicting adolescent reports of less support (sons) and more conflict (daughters).

Research on grown children. A study that looked at the next stage of the family life cycle (grown children leaving home) provided insight on role salience and parental well-being after adolescence (Ryff, Lee, Essex, & Schmutte, 1994). Interviews and surveys completed with 215 randomly selected parents explored how they thought their children had "turned out," and these

17

assessments were related to parental self-perceptions. The authors predicted that seeing a positive "product" from their parenting efforts would influence parents' sense of mastery, their continued adult development, and self-realization. Results of multiple regression analyses showed that perceived adjustment of children was positively correlated with parents' well-being. Perceived adjustment significantly predicted six out of seven well-being outcomes.

Directionality of results was a problem in this study, because it is possible that well-being influences how parents perceive their children. This study also looked for gender effects, and found a high degree of convergence between how mothers and fathers evaluated their children. The authors pointed out that their study extends literature on parenting experiences, which in the past has documented negative mental health consequences for parents while focusing on the early childhood years. They concluded that their results point to a need to balance indicators of parental distress with measures of potential rewards of parenting.

Adult Development and the Transition to Adolescence

Beyond self-perceptions, other parent characteristics related to adult development may typify parents of adolescents. These involve midlife transitions, career reassessments, and caring for aging parents as well as adolescents. This stage of life, for many parents of adolescents, is often framed by developmentalists as a time when adults strive for generativity (Erikson, as cited in Snarey, 1993), and parenting is viewed as one way this is achieved. This literature also has explored gender differences, which are marked in terms of developmental trajectory and parental experience. This review will highlight studies of men in midlife transition, studies of women, and studies of both parents together to illustrate findings relevant to parents of adolescents.

Fathers and the midlife transition. An exploratory study of 36 professional men (Julian, McKenry, & Arnold, 1990) found that men who communicate more effectively with adolescent children appear to experience less stress at midlife. The authors reviewed previous research findings that were mixed in terms of relating the well-being of middle-aged men to their fathering role. They emphasized role adjustment and sex role convergence at midlife as adaptive for men, who may experience emotional expressiveness as a new and satisfying part of themselves. Sex role convergence theory, according to Julian et al., hypothesizes that men at

midlife begin to incorporate feminine characteristics such as nurturance, affiliation, and expressiveness, and that this is adaptive for them. This study measured three role adjustment variables: marital satisfaction, quality of the parent-teen relationship, and job orientation. It examined two sex role convergence variables: androgynous characteristics and emotional expressiveness. Participants were selected nonrandomly and asked to complete a questionnaire and seven instruments. The one related to parenting was the Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale, which assesses parental perception and experience of communication with the child. The father-teen relationship was a much stronger predictor of stress than marital satisfaction. The multiple regression analyses used in this study did not determine directionality or cause, but the authors detected important phenomena related to fathers' parenting experiences at the time of adolescence.

Building on this study, Julian, McKenry, and McKelvey (1991) found that a father's preoccupation with his own developmental processes may impede his responsiveness to adolescent children. Based on a family stress model, the authors administered a variety of instruments to a sample of 39 men. They used multiple regression to relate four independent variables (emotional expressiveness, marital satisfaction, midlife stress, and testosterone level) to the dependent variable: the quality of the father-adolescent relationship. The results indicated an inverse relationship between the quality of the marital relationship and the quality of the father-adolescent relationship. This finding is interesting in light of studies that focused specifically on marital adjustment, detailed in the next section of this review. In spite of the limitations of a nonrandom sample and the use of correlational design and self-report, this study was the only one known to the authors that applied a stress model to this subject; they viewed their work as exploratory.

Snarey (1993) reported at length on a four-generation study of 240 fathers, based on Erikson's generativity construct. The subjects were originally part of a control group for empirical research on delinquency in the 1940s. They were reinterviewed at ages 25, 31, 47, and 52. A portion of this study explored whether parental generativity predicts career adjustment, marital satisfaction, and psychosocial development. Regression analyses showed that a father's care for his teen's social-emotional development made a significant, positive contribution to the

variance in upward mobility at work. A total of 14% of the variance in fathers' societal generativity at midlife was explained by their childrearing participation. The latter finding was consistent with the research of Heath and that of Vaillant, both cited in Snarey. Snarey pointed out that the dynamics of how this happens are complex and not fully understood.

Studies on parents and on women at midlife. In terms of midlife transition and parenting, fewer studies examined what is happening with mothers. Bialeschki and Michener (1994), in a qualitative study, examined 53 mothers at midlife from a life-span and feminist perspective (meaning they view women as individuals rather than "components of or anchors to the social structure of family" [p. 58]). The women were interviewed at the point of launching grown children, and the mothers' average age was 46. A predominant theme that emerged from constant comparative analysis was that these women felt they had come "full circle." They viewed this period of life as one of "reentering leisure" and having an opportunity to focus more on themselves and less on meeting the needs of others, and this was a change they welcomed. An "ethic of care" (p. 67), meaning social expectations that women will subordinate their own needs to care for other family members, guided these mothers' approaches to focusing on themselves, both positively and negatively. While this study did not directly address the mothers' experience of the transition to adolescence, it offered a helpful frame for taking a new look at individuals within the family and how they experience a normative stage of life.

A cross-cultural study of mothers' parenting efficacy was reported by Allen, Aber, Seidman, Denner, and Mitchell (1996). Most of the data on parents of adolescents has come from studies based on white, middle-class participants. This study used data from the Adolescent Pathways Project, a longitudinal study of low-income, ethnically diverse adolescents. It examined parenting efficacy among African American and Latina mothers at the time their children entered middle school. A total of 54 Black and 106 Latina parents, whose children were also in the study, participated. Semi-structured in-home interviews were conducted, either in Spanish or English. Predictor variables included parent's age, education, marital status, involvement with work and family, parenting style, and youth risk. Criterion variables included child-family efficacy and efficacy outside the family. Multiple regression analysis was used to establish relationships. The whole group as well as subgroups were analyzed. Findings showed

that school transition influences maternal efficacy depending on the mothers' access to particular resources, such as education. None of the predicted efficacy outside the realm of family accounted for significant amounts of variance. The study also found that parenting style may bring psychological benefits for the mothers. For instance, authoritative parents (who use high nurturance and high control), reported high efficacy across all levels of risk.

A number of empirical studies by Steinberg (1994) and Silverberg and Steinberg (1987, 1990) examined the midlife transition and its relationship to adolescence. Their work has supplied perhaps the richest analysis of gender differences and the most targeted work relating parental development to the adolescent transition. In this review, Steinberg's work and his collaborative work with colleagues is considered in detail in the section below on Parents' Experiences in a Family Change Process, so with regard to adult midlife development, this section will briefly note research findings. In 1987, Silverberg and Steinberg found parents'experience of midlife issues to be positively related to how much autonomy their same-sex children reported; that the well-being of mothers, but not fathers, was inversely related to the intensity of conflict between parent and teen; and that the relationship between parental well-being and parent-adolescent relations was moderated by socioeconomic status.

Silverberg and Steinberg (1990) went on to examine whether parents' reports of midlife identity concerns and psychological well-being are related to their adolescents' pubertal status, dating behavior, and reasoning skills. With a sample of 129 intact families having a firstborn child between 10 and 15, the authors conducted interviews and administered a questionnaire. They measured parental "sense of self and well-being" and adult role orientation, and found that the extent of and way in which parental well-being related to their adolescent depended on the parents' orientation to their role as a paid worker. This study noted clear gender differences. Signs of girls' physical maturity were related to mothers' reports of lower self-esteem and more intense midlife concerns.

Silverberg (1996) extended this work, using the same sample, by examining parents' well-being at their children's transition to adolescence in light of moderating variables that address issues of individual differences. Her study attempted to examine whether parent-teen

conflict led to parental reports of greater midlife concerns and lessened psychological well-being over the course of one year. Moderating variables included gender of child and parent, degree of investment in the parenting and work roles, and socioeconomic status. Participants were surveyed twice, 12 months apart, and they completed measures of midlife identity, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and psychological symptoms. Measures of adolescent development were scaled by researchers, and other measures were taken of parent-adolescent relations, parental perceptions of change in the relationship, and adult role orientation. Findings showed a few significant relationships between parental sense of self and well-being, and indicators of their child's development. The researchers went on to examine individual differences in parental sensitivity to their children's development. Separate analyses for each well-being variable showed that the relationship between parental well-being and teen development varied due to parents' work-role orientation, gender, and socioeconomic status.

With regard to midlife "crisis," Steinberg's (1994) conclusions departed from earlier research by positing that a crisis is not inevitable (only 25-33% of his sample exhibited intense, overt symptoms of a "crisis"). Instead, he found most adults' midlife struggles involved some distress, but for many, middle age was a time of security, satisfaction, power, and stability. Men in close, communicative marriages had fewer midlife complaints. More distressed men reported that home life was as much a crisis trigger as work; many men felt distant from their wives and dissatisfied with marriage. Similarly, for women, traditional research has focused on the empty nest as source of emotional turmoil. Steinberg found this not to be the case; that mothers looked forward to having time to themselves. For both parents, the intersection of physical maturity in the teen and early signs of physical decline in parents form a "crossing path" that confronts parents, often for the first time, with the reality of their own mortality and loss of youthfulness.

Dyadic Perceptions and Interactions

Marital Satisfaction Research

Much of the empirical data concerning child effects on marriage has focused on the transition to parenthood (Lindahl et al., 1997). These authors stated there is virtually no empirical research on the impact the transition to adolescence has on marriage. There is a considerable amount of research in the other direction, showing that marital adjustment and

satisfaction is related to children's well-being and capacity to manage stress (Feldman et al., 1990; Papini & Roggman, 1993).

Belsky (1990) has been frequently cited for his work on the transition to parenthood. He noted that the question of how children influence marriage remains unanswered. In previous research, child effects have been inferred by comparing childless spouses to couples with children. He noted that just two longitudinal studies examine marital change across the transition to adolescence: Menaghan (1983) and Steinberg and Silverberg (1987), and neither one found that pubertal change in itself affected marital satisfaction. Belsky pointed out that unless children could be randomly assigned to married couples, pure effects are impossible to measure; and mediating variables such as parental motivation to have children in the first place are often neglected. He called for research to be systemic and focus on reciprocal influence.

Steinberg and Silverberg (1987), using the same set of data discussed in the last section, examined marital satisfaction in relation to adolescent development, features of the parent-teen relationship, and psychological characteristics of parents. They reported that marital satisfaction is negatively influenced by distance in same-sex parent-child dyads (father-son and mother-daughter), and by wives' midlife concerns. They framed diminished marital satisfaction, known in the literature as "the U-shaped curve," as expectable and perhaps inevitable due to midlife issues and increasing autonomy of adolescents in the family. They noted that the relationship between the variables they considered and marital satisfaction is probably reciprocal and they did not make any causal claims.

Papini and Roggman (1993) offered empirical evidence that is consistent with Steinberg and Silverberg, but they posited a different explanation for it: based on resource and exchange theory, they stated that parents may sacrifice marital closeness and satisfaction in order to provide strong attachment relations to children transitioning to adolescence. The authors examined 47 intact families with an early adolescent son or daughter, assessing them three times at six-month intervals. Parents completed a series of questionnaires designed to measure perceived attachment to the child as well as emotional and marital adjustment. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale was used to assess marital quality. Correlational analyses showed fathers and

mothers who perceived greater attachment to their child report less marital closeness and less dyadic adjustment. Results also showed that stronger attachment relations were associated with better emotional adjustment and less distress for both parents individually.

Menaghan (1983), in a longitudinal study, used data collected from 1,106 adults aged 22 to 49, who were interviewed in 1972 and 1976 about social stresses, life events, and adaptation. Her study population consisted of adults married to the same partner from 1972 through 1976, and who could be categorized as belonging to a "transitional" or a "stable" group. Total sample size for her study was 259 stable and 380 transitional respondents. Menaghan compared these two groups to examine possible links between certain transitional events and changes in marital experience. The ten transitional experiences used as independent variables included school starts and seeing the oldest or the youngest child enter adolescence. The marital experiences used as the dependent variables included equity (the sense of balance or give-and-take) and affection fulfillment. She found significant differences between stable and transitional groups at two stages: when the youngest child left home, equity increased; and when the oldest child became a teen and the youngest started school, equity decreased. Other comparisons showed no overall differences between the two groups. Menaghan noted that studies on stress tend to omit children's school starts and adolescence as key events. She concluded that family transitions in themselves may not be as important in shaping marital experience as has been previously assumed. It is also possible that ambiguous results in her data were due to examining the groups at two time periods, just four years apart. She acknowledged that this time frame may not be sufficient for couples to register change in a long-term relationship.

Parent-Adolescent Research

Literature about how parents perceive their adolescents has encompassed at least three areas relevant to this study: attachment, expectations/attributions, and research on parents' and teens' shared perceptions. These studies are significant because previously, healthy individuation for adolescents was seen as occurring in a context of increasing emotional detachment from parents. More recent research has shown just the opposite: that healthier adolescent outcomes are strongly associated with continuity in their relationships with parents and with sustained parental supportiveness. For example, Hauser, Borman, Jacobson, Powers,

and Noam (1991) studied two groups of early adolescents—68 from a public high school freshman class, and 65 from a psychiatric hospital—to examine the relationship between parental ego development and adolescent coping. Parents with higher levels of ego development were defined as having greater self-awareness and a greater appreciation of individual differences. They expressed more nurturance, trust, and interpersonal sensitivity. Participants completed tests, interviews, and family discussion tasks, and data were scored and coded. Results showed a number of significant associations between high parental ego development and more adaptive adolescent coping. Mothers' ego development was found to be more salient than that of fathers.

A study based on longitudinal data found that most parent-teen relationships remain intact from early adolescence through early adulthood, in terms of affection and interaction (Tubman & Lerner, 1994). Further, the study supported the idea of a gradual process of individuation, marked by balance and renegotiation rather than discord or detachment. The researchers studied 133 middle-class children from a New York sample that was 99% white and 78% Jewish. They are part of a larger sample that has been studied at regular intervals since 1962. For this study, data from three interviews were used: when children were between 16 and 17; 18 and 23; and 25 and 31. Nearly 8,000 statements were generated from transcripts and rated by three out of five raters. Results showed that in adolescence, relationship ratings varied little across parents', mothers', and fathers' statements about their children. Stability across time was measured for both interaction and affection, and a total of 67% of these reached significance, although they were moderate. This suggested, according to the authors, "neither stasis nor dramatic change" (p. 93).

Similarly, Chu and Powers (1995) posited that synchronous interaction between adolescent and parent reinforced early secure attachment and created an environment that enhances the teen's social competence. These authors reviewed attachment theory based on mother-infant research (e.g., Bowlby, as cited in Chu & Powers, 1995) and various extensions of it to other periods of the life span. They proposed a model that further extends attachment research to the transition to adolescence, noting that at this juncture, attachment patterns established in early childhood become crucial in terms of emotional and social development. They identified several characteristics of synchrony that are relevant to a parent's experience of

life with an adolescent, such as frequent turn-taking, mutual problem solving and decision making, harmonious and sensitive communication, frequent contact, and displays of enjoyment and pleasure. To the extent that parents felt they were "in step" with their child's development, this model suggested, family harmony and better outcomes can be expected.

Studies on attachment. One attachment study examined 42 families, each with two high-school-age siblings (Kobak, Ferenz-Gillies, Everhart, & Seabrook, 1994). Like Chu and Powers (1995), this study built on attachment studies conducted with infants and focused on emotion regulation by mothers. Specifically, they looked at how mothers' attachment strategies influenced the way they regulated emotion during a conversation about teen autonomy, and how the attachment strategies affected mothers' perceptions of their teen's ability to regulate emotion. Attachment strategies were defined as sets of rules for processing information about attachment. Participant families were interviewed, participated in a videotaped discussion task, and completed four scales. Findings showed mothers with preoccupied attachment strategies (meaning insecure attachment marked by excessively detailed memories of ways their child angered them in the past) were more anxious and intrusive toward their older teens, and these older teens were less likely to sustain a discussion about leaving home. No significant differences were found between mothers' relationships with sons and daughters.   Mothers seen as having preoccupied attachment strategies were described in this study in a way that seemed similar to the systemic construct of enmeshment: their orientation to the relationship focused excessively on staying connected, and may have led mothers to view a child's bid for autonomy as a threat to the relationship.

Delaney (1996) reported an inductive study that identifies different parent-adolescent relationship types and assessed them over a one-year period. She used the Emotional Autonomy Scale, developed by Steinberg and Silverberg in 1986, to measure adolescent autonomy and individuation. Her participants consisted of 133 early adolescents and their parents. The study was premised on the theory that autonomy means something different in the context of a close (attached) relationship than in an emotionally distant (detached) one. Delaney used a statistical method called confirmatory cluster analysis to identify subgroups of parents and teens, according to which levels of autonomy and closeness tended to occur together, and whether these

constructs changed over time. Results showed teens who have detached relationships with either parent scored lowest on indicators of well-being and reported more anxiety. Teens reporting connected relationships scored higher on measures of self-worth. Delaney noted that these results are consistent with other recent work showing that, contrary to early, analytic research, most adolescents pursue autonomy in close and connected relationships with parents.

      Studies on expectations and attributions. Another subset of the literature involves what parents expect of their children and how they attribute (assign cause and effect to) teen behaviors or traits. The ways in which these parent characteristics interact with sociocultural factors, such as media stereotypes, is particularly interesting and may negatively affect parents' views (Freedman-Doan, Arbreton, Harold & Eccles, 1993). In turn, parental expectations and attributions may bring about the very teen behavior parents dread. The sociocultural tie-ins are considered in the last section of this literature review. The studies considered below are especially relevant to parents' experience of the transition to adolescence, because empirical results suggest these cognitive processes predict parental affect, cognition, and conflict.

      In a survey of 105 parents of sixth graders, Freedman-Doan et al. (1993) asked about parents' expectations in terms of influencing children, pubertal development, and what their relationship would be like during adolescence. Results supported other research showing parent-teen relationships are affected less by pubertal development per se and more by the child's and parent's socially mediated responses to puberty. "Perceived current influence" (also called "self-efficacy") predicted "anticipated future influence." Self-efficacy was defined as a person's belief in his or her capability of acting in ways that will lead to desired outcomes. Perceived current influence was also related to increased expectations that the child would be mature and responsible. Building on other research showing that a history of family conflict predicts poor parent-adolescent adjustment, these authors observed that expectations may be grounded in current realities of the parent-child relationship. They noted the congruence of their findings with Bandura's (1986) self-efficacy work. Unlike Steinberg and others, they did not find that pubertal status was related to degree of conflict, but it was significantly related to parental worry. Gender differences in terms of the children and the parents were slight. These researchers noted the interaction of expectations and self-efficacy, saying that even though parents may worry,

their confidence level in terms of being able to influence their children permits optimism about the future relationship through adolescence.

In a widely cited study, Dix, Ruble, Grusec, and Nixon (1986) tested an attributional model and found that parental assessments of their children are closely tied to child development. The study looked at whether parents attribute behavior to a child's intentions and disposition, or to constraints from situational pressures or developmental limitations. Participants included three groups of parents: those with 4 to 5 year olds; 8 to 9 year olds; and 12 to 13 year olds. The parents were given narrative descriptions of child misconduct to read, matched to the ages of their children. They were then asked to make inferences regarding the misconduct, in terms of six measures, including disposition, intention, external causation, lack of self-control, lack of behavioral knowledge, and lack of rule knowledge.

Results showed that as children aged, parents saw their children's behavior as being increasingly intentional. Further, parents' negative affective reactions to misconduct were related to their assessment of its cause, but positive affect was unrelated to attributions. The authors theorized that positive emotional responses of parents are less contingent on their assessment of its cause than negative ones. The study noted that how parents' affective reactions and assessments of child behavior relate to parental behavior is not yet known, although the results support findings that parents' negative or inaccurate attributions regarding their children's behavior contribute to abusive patterns (Azar, Robinson, Hekimian, & Twentyman; Larrance & Twentyman, as cited in Dix, et al., 1986).

A meta-analysis of eight empirical studies added to an understanding of attribution processes by differentiating child-centered versus parent-centered inferences. This study looked at the relationship between child-centered attributions and parental satisfaction or child adjustment, using several studies involving parents of adolescents (Joiner & Wagner, 1996). The authors looked at whether the same processes that have been well-documented in marital research are also present in parent-child dyads, in terms of negative attributions being associated with dissatisfaction and depression. Procedures included converting the eight studies' results to standard normal deviations (Zs), averaged across studies and multiplied by the square root of the

number of studies. Results showed that stable and global dimensions of parents' child-centered attributions robustly predicted parental satisfaction and child adjustment. To the extent that parents attribute their children's negative behavior to internal, stable traits, these authors concluded, problems may ensue.

One of the eight studies included in Joiner and Wagner's (1996) meta-analysis merits special attention in this review. Attributions made by 115 randomly selected mothers and their 122 adolescents were the subject of a study on conflict by Grace, Kelley, and McCain (1993). Pearson correlations showed that, as attributions grew more negative, conflict increased. Most consistently, the attribution that predicted self-reports of conflict involved a belief that negative behavior was globally determined and pervasive (not situational). Attributions of "blame" predicted conflict reported by the other (e.g., mothers' blame predicted their adolescents' report of conflict frequency and intensity, and vice versa). No causal implications are possible from the study, and directionality of influence is questionable (so, conflict may spur more negative attributions).

Studies on shared perceptions. Another approach to understanding how perceptions relate to experience among parents of adolescents is to examine "shared perceptions," or ways in which family members report similar or dissimilar accounts of themselves and their relationships. This construct is similar to "synchrony," considered above, but tends to take on a more cognitive, and less affective, connotation. Theoretical treatment of this topic puts it in perspective for this study, and descriptions of three empirical studies on shared perceptions follow. Collins (1991) noted that early theorizing pictured parent-teen disagreement as monolithic; contemporary researchers construed shared and divergent perceptions as varying across topics and dyads, and across developmental phases. His research suggests divergent perceptions may stimulate family adaptation to the adolescent's physical, cognitive, and social changes. Collins took a transformational, rather than disjunctive, view of the transition to adolescence, and a systemic view positing that pubertal and social changes lead to discrepancies in perceptions; discrepancies bring conflict; and conflict realigns perceptions. Papini and Micka (1991) noted research on shared perceptions showing that the family's ability to establish and maintain accurate and consistent beliefs about each member is crucial to the development of

family organization and individual self-regulation. Papini and Micka cite Reiss and colleagues, who called this process "developing a family paradigm," and noted that without it, problem solving is more difficult.

Papini and Micka (1991) related general theory to specific concerns surrounding the transition to adolescence, and pointed out that few studies have examined the role that faulty beliefs may play in this transition. They emphasized the importance of understanding shared perceptions of the teen's pubertal status, especially at the transition into early adolescence. They also cited Collins, who in several chapters and articles has noted that parents' perceptions of teen development are related to attributions, ratings of social maturity, and realignments in patterns of family interaction. In their empirical study, Papini and Micka predicted that lower parent-adolescent agreement reflected different perceptions of the teen's physical maturity, which may lead to differing behavioral expectations and faulty beliefs. Second, they provided a longitudinal assessment of whether faulty beliefs change depending on adolescent gender or parent-child agreement over time.

Participants consisted of 47 two-parent families with sixth-graders, averaging 12.6 years old. The families participated in two 2-hour sessions six months apart, involving an interactional problem-solving task as well as a number of questionnaires. These included a "faulty belief" measure that examined constructs such as ruination, expectations of obedience, perfectionism, malicious intent, and self-blame on the part of parents. No differences based on gender of the parent were found, although both mothers' and fathers'endorsement of faulty beliefs was significantly related to the adolescents' gender, with parents of sons having more faulty beliefs than parents of daughters. Among adolescents, males endorsed more faulty beliefs when shared parent-adolescent perceptions were low. These findings, according to the authors, contributed to other research, such as Steinberg's, in showing that it may not be pubertal development per se that affects parents' experiences during this transition, but ways in which teen and parent evaluations of pubertal development converge or diverge.

Thornton et al. (1995) studied parents and adolescents from a life-course perspective in terms of how they conceptualize, perceive, and report on their relationships. They documented

generally positive and supportive relationships with an improvement after age 18. Data for this study came from an intergenerational panel study using a probability sample of children born in July 1961, in Detroit. From the larger data pool, these authors used 867 families for their study. Mothers and children were interviewed about the quality of the relationship in 1980 and 1985, when the children were ages 18 and 23. Children were asked about how they perceived their relationships with both mother and father. The authors hypothesized that parents and teens have different perspectives on the same relationship.

Results showed approximately half the mothers reported "usually" having a good relationship, characterized by mutual respect, understanding, and enjoyment in shared activities. Fewer than one-third said these qualities existed "some of the time," and even fewer said they "never" were present. A similar pattern is evident in children's reports of the same relationship, with the exception of enjoying shared activities: 29% of children reported "always" enjoying shared activities. Also, 40% of child respondents reported communication difficulties with their mothers. Children reported less favorable relationships with fathers, except in the areas of respect and enjoyment. Data showed a marked improvement in parent-child relations between the ages of 18 and 23. The authors concluded that the relationship quality that is established during adolescence persists into later adulthood.

Another study on perceptions built on research that indicates frequent disagreement over minor issues between parents and adolescents may emerge from differing perceptions. Discrepancies in perceptions were examined in 74 sixth and seventh grade students and parents by Ohannessian et al. (1995). Previous research showed adolescents tend to overestimate, and parents to underestimate, the number of differences in how they perceive family functioning. This has been interpreted by developmentalists as a necessary step in the process of individuation. Ohannessian et al. stated it is important to keep in mind that discrepancies are not due solely to distortions by the changing adolescent, but may also reflect the parents' "stake" (p. 492) in preserving a positive view of family functioning. Problems with earlier research included a lack of empirical focus on gender differences; the use of cross-sectional sampling; and neglect of the relationship between discrepancies in perceptions and teen emotional adjustment.

Participants for the Ohannessian et al. study came from a longitudinal study following two cohorts of sixth graders through middle school. Responses to measures were taken at two times (beginning and end of the school year) from children, mothers, and fathers. Pearson correlations showed mothers' and fathers' perceptions were much more similar than parent-teen perceptions. Adolescents perceived significantly lower levels of family cohesion and adjustment than their parents, but only slight differences emerged in terms of family adaptability. Further, the results suggested discrepancies in perceptions may predict adolescent emotional adjustment; and for girls, emotional adjustment may predict discrepancies in perceptions.

Parents' Experiences in a Family Change Process

For the adolescent, passage through puberty marks an important developmental transition, in that it brings a predictable set of physical, cognitive, and socioemotional changes. The classic view of transition characterizes it as a time of disequilibrium and internal conflict that occurs between periods of relative stability (Levinson, cited in Cowan, 1991). In terms of adolescence, theorists have begun to wonder about what pubertal change means for the family system, and they have raised questions about the nature of any transition.

Process Orientation

Research examining the family dynamics associated with this period has shifted toward process views as opposed to linking transitions with discrete events. It is as concerned with family meaning-making ("transformation") as it is with changes in family structure ("reorganization"). Steinberg (1994) defined the transition to early adolescence as a transformation from a state of comfortable routine into a region of uncharted territory. Developmentalists have looked primarily at transition in terms of an individual's journey, while family systems theorists have examined multiple levels of transition occurring within the family, such as the co-occurrence of adolescence and midlife reevaluation (Cowan 1991). Cowan called for a focus on processes of transformation that are both internal and external. He illustrated this by portraying two hypothetical men who both become fathers on the same day. One has completed a transition to fatherhood already, by experiencing an external change in routine and responsibilities as well as an internal shift toward deeper engagement in his family. The second

does not experience a "transition," even though he has a new child, because he continues his same life pattern and does not experience a significant internal transformation.

This view of transition as process is not entirely new. One of the earliest studies to examine family processes across several transitions was reported by Hoffman and Manis (1978). Using a national sample of married couples, they looked at child effects at different life cycle stages. They expected that children would evoke differential feedback from parents as a consequence of how they affect family functioning. The authors noted the complexity of the topic as well as wide family variation and many variables that enter into considerations of how teens affect parents. Hoffman and Manis also reported that parental evaluation of child impact is mostly positive. Parents of teens were most likely to cite loss of privacy as an issue; and mothers with adolescents chose the marital relationship as the most important aspect of their lives. Some of these findings have been replicated in recent literature, and references to this study appear frequently.

A process model of the determinants of parenting (Belsky, 1984) was also a landmark conceptualization that has been tested empirically and is often cited. Belsky built on findings showing that, throughout childhood, parents who are "sensitively attuned" (p. 85) to children's capabilities and developmental tasks raise well-adjusted individuals. Parental sensitivity was defined as being able to empathize, adopt another's perspective, and take a nurturing orientation. This suggested that parents' intrapsychic characteristics are key, and Belsky noted that linkages to family of origin are important too. Other determinants included the child's temperament and social support (including the marriage relationship, social networks, and employment). Belsky suggested that the relative contribution of these three factors—parent characteristics, child characteristics, and support—matters, and he posited that marital support is most influential. His model set parental functioning on a continuum from highest to lowest, with highest showing positive conditions in all three areas and lowest showing negative conditions in all three. In between, positive parent characteristics are followed by support and child characteristics in order of influence.

Belsky's model was tested empirically on 451 two-parent families with seventh grade children (Simons, Lorenz, Wu, & Conger, 1993). Participating families were visited twice in their homes. During the first visit, each family member completed questionnaires about family processes, individual characteristics, and economic circumstances. The second visit consisted of a videotaped, structured interaction task. A depression scale was used to control for the effect of psychological well-being on social network support. Findings showed that for both mothers and fathers, spousal support influenced competent parenting more than social network support. Further analyses examined moderating effects, and found economic pressure disrupts competent parenting because it boosts psychological distress and gets in the way of access to social support. Social support was seen as an indirect influence, and the authors concluded that even in the case of single parents, friends and relatives exert little influence if they do not live in the parent's household.

A compelling reason to focus on normal family processes during a time of transition has to do with clinical relevance. Belsky (1984) pointed out that it is not known whether processes operating in abusive families (which have been extensively documented) also function in nonabusive families, along a continuum of influence, and in his model discussed above, he assumed that this was the case. A number of researchers have noted that families having difficulties with their teens tend to have a history of problems from the time children were younger (Freedman-Doan et al., 1993; Steinberg, 1990). Collins (1990) also pointed this out and called for research examining changes in parent-teen relationships in conjunction with previous stages of the family life cycle. Specifically, he framed a need to understand the processes that account for transformations in relationships so that parents' functional impact is sustained.

Family Conflict

A process orientation that considers family dynamics in all their complexities may also enhance understanding of family conflict, an issue that is widely treated in the literature but usually in isolation from considerations of normative parent-adolescent relationships. Popular stereotypes, and older research based on analytic views, have taken for granted that conflict will be inevitable. As this review indicates, process and developmentally oriented research has shown that this is not the case: Steinberg (1994) estimated between 5% and 10% of families

with adolescents experience a marked deterioration in family harmony; Montemayor (1986), in a review of literature, stated 15% to 25% of parents complain about increased conflict. Montemayor documented wide variation in family conflict across topics and dyads as well.

A crossectional study by Flannery, Montemayor, Eberly, and Torquati (1993) reinforced Steinberg and others in terms of finding that generally positive parent-adolescent relationships are maintained even when there is increased conflict and negativity; family realignment occurs without a diminished affective bond. They used a nonclinic sample of families with children in grades five through nine to establish a link between observed behavior in interactions and more global perceptions, for example, of family conflict. Regression analysis showed parents and adolescents express more negative and less positive affect as adolescents mature; and adolescents' perceptions of conflict were consistently related to parents' expressed emotion.

Stress and Coping

Family processes around the transition to adolescence are also examined from a stress and coping perspective. Kidwell, Fischer, Dunham, and Baranowski (1983) noted that it has long been assumed that high stress in the family at adolescence is due to teen pathology. They agreed with other researchers in offering a different view: that it is normative and culturally bound, not universal. The development of formal operational thought makes it much more likely for the adolescent to suggest alternatives, see parents as fallible, and to challenge rules. As early parent-child symbiosis fades, parents may react by being challenged to rethink their values, to worry "where we went wrong," or to feel threatened and become more authoritarian. Even if families have clear rules for maintaining family stability, they still need to deal emotionally with an adolescent's changed developmental and family role status. This can set off internal inconsistencies in the parents' rule system. Kidwell et al. concluded that stress precedes growth and change, which cannot happen without it.

The Work of Steinberg and Colleagues

Steinberg, a prolific and frequently cited researcher on the dynamics of parenting adolescents, deserves extended consideration in this review of the literature. In his 1994 book, *Crossing Paths: How your child's adolescence triggers your own crisis*, he popularized

empirical, longitudinal research findings that paint a complex picture of family dynamics during this transition. His "Families at Adolescence" project used a random community sample drawn from fifth, sixth, eighth, and ninth graders in a midwestern city.   A total of 204 families, with varying levels of socioeconomic status and family structure, agreed to participate. Steinberg and his staff used multimethods of data collection, including questionnaires, standardized tests, and interviews, over a three-year period.

His data, contrary to popular wisdom, showed that for the most part, the adolescents were "coasting through their teenage years smoothly and with little self-consciousness" (p. 28). Their parents, however, were expending enormous amounts of time and energy on the business of parenting, and were experiencing changes in their mental health such as lower self-worth, rejection, depression, anxiety, and dissatisfaction with work and marriage. He attributed this to the process of parents "letting go," which they may experience as an involuntary divorce.

His results showed that 40% of participating parents experienced psychological difficulty during their child's transition to adolescence. Another 20% "thrived," or saw their mental health take a turn for the better in terms of self-esteem and life satisfaction. The remaining 40% neither declined nor improved dramatically. How parents felt about their child did not seem to influence their personal well-being. He noted, "Not everyone with an adolescent child experiences psychological unrest, and even among those who do, there are important differences in the form and intensity that the turmoil takes" (p. 254).

The parents' psychological discomfort, detailed in Steinberg's book, was not the result of squabbling over minor irritants, but rather "the unrest had something to do with watching a child become an adult and the thoughts and feelings this triggered about oneself" (p. 59). Data analysis showed that regardless of parent-child relationship quality, parents' mental health worsened as their firstborn child moved from childhood to adolescence: self-esteem declined, and this spilled over into marriage, work, and feelings about the child and about themselves. The drop was especially noticeable among mothers of daughters and fathers of sons. Steinberg's findings predicted a parent's psychological state more accurately by looking at the child's development rather than the parent's age. He discussed changes in parents based on their

response to pubertal changes, but in empirical studies (including his own) this has not accounted for much variance in adult well-being (e.g., marital adjustment, as noted above).

Steinberg examined processes of autonomy (behavioral independence), detachment (emotional independence), and individuation (deidealizing the parents) as significant triggers for parental change. Parents can accept teen autonomy intellectually, but they have more difficulty coping with it emotionally, he suggested. Most parents are nervous and ambivalent about permitting the freedom the teenager wants. Steinberg concluded, "The paradox, then, is that the very thing that parents are supposed to be helping their child toward—growing up and becoming independent—is precisely what they deep down don't really want to happen" (p. 67).

Detachment may leave parents feeling lonely and rejected. What makes it hard on parents is that they seldom feel free to express it. The persistent cultural stereotype is that parents and teens are supposed to be at war, and parents are expected to complain to one another about their battle wounds. But when loss of closeness with one's child goes unacknowledged, it can lead to depression, according to Steinberg. Mothers and daughters are closest and tend to be affected most by this.

In terms of individuation, one of the best predictors of parents' mental health in Steinberg's study is the extent to which a child had deidealized them (come to see them as fallible). Parents get used to the admiration they receive from elementary age children, and enjoy it. And just when their children become hypercritical, parents may find themselves at a midlife transition that brings heightened vulnerability to any experience that fosters self-doubt. In summary, Steinberg concluded that parents who experienced their child's maturation as a *loss* dealt with loss of a role and the self-definition it brought (p. 101). Parents who experienced maturation of their child as *abandonment* experienced loss of a relationship, not a role.

Steinberg's work complements other research, such as Belsky's, by demonstrating that parents' behaviors are influenced by other domains of life, such as work and marriage. He concluded that "positive experiences in one of the three domains—work, marriage, and

parenting—tend to have positive reverberations in other domains. Conversely, distressing experiences in one domain tend to have negative reverberations in other domains" (pp. 215-216).

Sociocultural Context

One area not examined thoroughly in Steinberg's work is the sociocultural context of adolescence and how this compares with the experiences of parents when they were adolescents. This bears on parents' experiences as well, and is noted in other literature.

The current sociocultural context for teen development is seen as more hazardous, but also as presenting a wider variety of opportunities, according to Cornwell et al. (1996), in a study based on census data, 1940-1990. Also, pubertal change is occurring earlier for many children, catching them and their parents by surprise (Larson & Richards, 1994).

Baumrind (1991) noted that American culture has no rite of passage to mark a shift in status from child to adult, as many other cultures do. Navigating adolescence and realizing growth and development, therefore, occurs through personal commitment to change and accommodation by parents and other adults. Further, Baumrind pointed out that instead of offering clear guidelines for behavior, American culture overwhelms adolescents with contradictory values, increased mobility, and little consistent support. She suggested these social factors may prolong adolescence or provoke a crisis (e.g., anorexia, bulimia).

The results of social changes mean parents often have a longer period of responsibility for their children than in the past, and greater uncertainty about what to do as parents. Sociocultural change and departures from their own experience may lead to confusion about how to prepare children for the future, may evoke worry, and may isolate parents from family and social support networks at this time (Small & Eastman, 1995).

Summary

Studying parents whose children are experiencing a transition to adolescence is complex, as this review of the literature demonstrates. Generally, these parents are approaching or experiencing a midlife transition of their own, but beyond that, few generalizations—if any—can

be made. It is apparent, from research cited here, that parents vary markedly in terms of life experience, individual characteristics, marital status and satisfaction, and sources of support. In addition, variations in ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and employment play important roles in determining parental perceptions and behaviors.

Past research on parenting tended to focus on influences flowing from parent to child. More recent research has taken a bidirectional view, exploring how parenting affects the parents. By illuminating these influences, particularly in normally stressed families, researchers may begin to reshape the clinical environment as well as the academic environment. A process view of families experiencing a normal transition may enhance understandings of when families need professional mental health assistance, and when they do not. More clarity may emerge in terms of how normal processes go awry in families that abuse or in those who experience severe child misbehaviors.

A convergence of research that points toward sustained harmonious family interactions over the course of a transition to adolescence is especially significant. Along with research that highlights individual differences and parental diversity, the contribution of attachment studies and investigations of "synchrony" enlarges the frame for anticipating, understanding, and assessing family functioning. These studies have linked the transition to adolescence with what has come before in the parent-child relationship and what may come later as parents relate to adult children, providing a systemic underpinning for future study.

The literature that undergirds the present study has been drawn from several theoretical frameworks and approaches. It features a view of the transition to adolescence that is interactional, not isolated, and offers many useful guideposts for future research.