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CHAPTER 8: FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

In this chapter, we report our findings for two aspects of the parent-adolescent relationship: (a) parental control, which includes attitudes and practices concerning adolescents' compliance with, and maintenance of, parental rules and regulations and (b) parental support and closeness, which includes positive aspects of the parent-adolescent relationship. Results are shown in Tables 15 and 16 and Figure 5.

Parental Control

Rather than merely conceptualizing parental control as high or low, consistent with other developmental psychologists (e.g., Barber, Stolz, Olsen, Collins, & Burchinal, 2005), we distinguish between two dimensions of parental control: psychological and behavioral control. On the one hand, parents' use of psychological control involves attempting to control adolescents' thoughts and feelings by psychological manipulation; it has been shown to undermine adolescents' psychological development at all ages (Barber 1996; 2002; Gray & Steinberg, 1999). Parental control includes manipulating the love relationship between the parent and adolescent and gaining compliance through the use of love withdrawal, guilt, and shame through criticism (Barber, 1996; Schaefer, 1965).

On the other hand, parents' use of behavioral control, such as monitoring, rules, management, and supervision, involves the degree to which parents attempt to control their adolescent's behavior or the manner in which such control is exercised (e.g., rule

setting, consequences) (McElhaney, Allen, Stephenson, & Hare, 2009). Behavioral control allows parents to keep track of their adolescents' activities while granting them greater autonomy (Smetana et al., 2006). In general, use of behavioral control has positive associations with adolescent development during early adolescence (Eccles et al., 1993; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). We examined two measures of psychological control (i.e., Intrusive Parenting and Negative Interactions with Parents) and one measure of behavioral control; namely, Strict Parenting.

Intrusive Parenting. Our measure of intrusive parenting focuses on adolescents' perceptions that their parent exerts high levels of control concerning how the adolescent should feel and act. On average, these adolescents reported a relatively stable and low trajectory of intrusive parenting (see Figure 5). Neither the linear nor quadratic slopes were significant, where $p < .01$ (see Table 15).

At age 14, these African American adolescents reported slightly higher levels of intrusive parenting than did these European American adolescents. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that adolescents from African American families report higher levels of authoritarian parenting – a parenting style that focuses on control, obedience, and conformity among children – compared to adolescents from European American families (Dornbusch et al., 1987; Steinberg et al., 1991). In terms of the mean levels, however, the average adolescent reports of intrusive parenting were low, between (2) “rarely” and (3) “occasionally” on a 5-point scale, with 5 = “almost always.”

Negative Interactions with Parents. This construct measures adolescents' perception that their parent engages in harsh, critical parenting. There was a significant negative linear slope and a significant positive quadratic slope (see Table 15). On average,

these adolescents' reports of negative interactions with their parents declined from 12 to 15 years and then increased from 17 to 20 years. The linear and quadratic slopes were both moderated by race/ethnicity. As shown in Figure 5, African American adolescents experienced a decrease in negative interactions with their parents from 12 to 15 years followed by a slight but significant increase from 17 to 20 years. European American adolescents, however, experienced a fairly stable and very low trajectory.

At age 14, there were no significant differences in negative interactions with parents according to the demographic variables. In terms of mean levels, the rates were quite low across the entire age period. On average, the adolescents reported negative relations with their parents about 1-2 times in the previous month (controlling for the covariates). These rates were highest at ages 12 and 20 and were lowest for all groups around age 16. Contrary to the stereotype of adolescence as a time of increasing negative relationships in the family, these data suggest that adolescents themselves think that negative interactions with parents occur relatively infrequently and change very little in frequency over the adolescent years.

Strict Parenting. This measures parents' use of restricting privileges as a punishment for breaking rules. As we might expect during adolescence, there was a significant linear decrease in strict parenting from early to late adolescence (see Figure 5). Adjusting for the covariates, this decrease represented a drop from a frequency of a little more than "about half of the time" to a frequency of slightly more than "not too often."

At age 14, African American adolescents reported higher levels of strict parenting than did European American adolescents. There were no other significant demographic differences at the intercept. These findings thus suggest that, on average, most parents

decrease their use of strict parenting strategies as their children move through adolescence.

Closeness and Support

We included several measures that are commonly used as indicators of family closeness and support; including Family Social Support, Parent-Adolescent Communication, and Positive Identification with Parents (Laursen & Collins, 2009).

Family Social Support. On average, these adolescents reported stable perceptions of their family social support from early to late adolescence (see Figure 5). The linear and quadratic slopes were not significant (see Table 15) and did not differ by any of the demographic groups.

At age 14, females reported more family social support than did males. On average, taking into account the covariates, adolescents rated their parental social support halfway between 4 (“often”) and 5 (“almost always”). This demonstrates that these adolescents, on the whole, had a stable perception of their parents as very positive and supportive throughout their adolescent years. These findings are consistent with the work of Smetana and others who have repeatedly demonstrated that adolescents maintain quite positive relationships with their family during their teen years (Smetana, 1988; Steinberg, 2001).

Parent-Adolescent Communication. There were no significant differences in the linear or quadratic slopes for adolescents’ perceptions of their communication with their parents, with the exception of intact families (see Table 15). As shown in Figure 5, the average adolescent experienced a relatively stable and high trajectory of parent-adolescent communication from early to late adolescence. However, adolescents from intact, married families experienced a convex-shaped pattern, with a decrease in family communication from 12 to 15 years and then an increase from 17 to 20 years. In contrast, adolescents

from non-intact-parent families experienced a slight decrease in family communication over the adolescent years.

At age 14, there was a significant difference according to gender: Females reported more frequent communication with their parents than did males. This gender difference is consistent with other studies that have found greater communication between young women and their parents than between young men and their parents (Noller & Callan, 1990).

In terms of the mean levels, on average, these adolescents reported talking with their parents about their future plans and what was going on with their friends almost “once a week” (taking into account the covariates). Overall, these levels suggest that a substantial amount of parent-adolescent communication about these important issues goes on throughout this period. As shown later, these levels are about the same as the frequency of such communications with peers. Thus, consistent with the findings of Smetana and her colleagues (Smetana et al., 1996), communication with parents remains very important, as important as communication with peers, during adolescence.

Positive Identification with Parents. This construct measures how much adolescents respect and feel close to their parents. There was a significant negative linear slope, moderated by the interaction of gender by race/ethnicity, and a significant positive quadratic slope (see Table 15). On average, these adolescents reported a decline in positive identification with their parents from 12 to 16 years that stabilized from 16 to 20 years (see Figure 5). These results are consistent with other studies indicating that middle to older adolescents are much less likely to idealize their parents compared to younger adolescents and preteens (Beyers & Goossens, 1999; Levpuscek, 2006). The significant

moderating effect of gender by race/ethnicity reflects the fact that European American males showed the steepest decline that levelled off between ages 17 to 20. African American males also showed a steady decline from ages 12 to 20. In contrast, the African American and European American females showed the shallowest decline over time. In line with our hypothesis, these findings support research that females have closer relationships with their parents than do males from middle to late adolescence (De Goede et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2015), although our results show that this gender difference may exist for European American adolescents only.

At 14 years, there was a significant gender by race/ethnicity interaction with African American males reporting the highest levels of positive identification with their parents and European American males reporting the lowest levels. African American and European American females reported similar levels of identifying with their parents.

In terms of mean levels, controlling for the covariates, on average these adolescents reported identifying with their parents between (3) “some of the time” and (4) “often.” Although there was a significant decline across time, it was quite small (less than .5 on a 5-point scale). Adolescents’ positive identification with their parents remained on the positive side of the midpoint of the scale for all four groups throughout adolescence.

Summary of Family Relationships

Contrary to our predictions based on previous research (Conger & Ge, 1999; Larson et al. 1996; Steinberg, 1988; Wang et al., 2011), adolescents’ perceptions of their relationship with their parents changed relatively little and remained quite positive over their adolescent years. This was true for the extent to which they talked with their parents about important issues and their perceptions of their parents’ support. The extent to which

adolescents positively identified with their parents showed a somewhat different pattern: Adolescents reported decreases in identification with their parents from early to middle adolescence that then stabilized in later adolescence. This is in line with our expectations based on previous studies suggesting that positive relationships with parents decline from early to middle adolescence and then increase or stabilize from middle to late adolescence (Shanahan et al., 2007). For positive identification with parents, this may reflect the process of separation when adolescents begin to redefine themselves and their parents as autonomous individuals in a relationship (Meeus et al., 2005). Together, our findings suggest that, for most adolescents, positive emotional aspects of family relationships do not undergo severe transformations during adolescence. These results are consistent with studies showing positive, well-functioning relationships, with most parents and adolescents reporting frequent supportive interactions and a low incidence of communication difficulties across the adolescent years (see Laursen & Collins, 2009; Steinberg, 2001, for reviews).

In contrast, and as predicted from previous research (De Goede et al., 2009; Rubin et al., 2011), aspects of parental control *did* change across adolescence. Parents gave their adolescents more autonomy, in the form of less strict parenting, as their child approached middle and late adolescence. Adolescents also reported a decrease in their perceptions of negative interactions with their parents from early to middle adolescence, with a slight increase during late adolescence. This latter finding contradicts our own predictions, but makes sense developmentally, as adolescents are in the process of forming their own identities and may spend more time away from home and assert themselves more with their parents, particularly in late adolescence. As adolescents mature, they become more

self-assertive and less willing to accept parental authority (Fuligni, 1998). As a result, they may begin to view discipline techniques such as power assertion more negatively (Paikoff, Collins, & Laursen, 1988) and become less accepting of parental directives than younger teens (Perkins & Turiel, 2007). However, these shifts were quite small, and the overwhelming pattern was reflective of continually strong and very positive relationships between these teens and their parents.

The race/ethnicity and gender differences in these patterns were generally consistent with our expectations. In line with other findings (e.g., Smetana et al., 2004; McAdoo, 1993), African American adolescents reported having less autonomy from, but a closer relationship with, their parents than did European American adolescents. The African American youth reported that their parents engaged in more intrusive parenting than did the European American youth. At the same time, African American adolescents reported higher levels of positive identification with their parents and a greater linear decline in negative interactions with their parents than did European American adolescents. These two sets of findings suggest that R/E differences are not so much about authoritarianism, *per se*, as they are about greater parental involvement in their adolescents' lives – what one might call cultural differences in the developmental timing associated with the shift from parental control to adolescent autonomy. Given the racial context in the U.S. at this time, it is understandable that African American parents might maintain stricter control of their teens.

As hypothesized, females reported higher mean levels in their relationships with parents, including more support and communication, than did males. Other research has also found gender differences in the slopes of parental closeness and support (De Goede et

al., 2009; Kim et al.; 2015). Our findings also show a gender by race/ethnicity interaction in the slope of positive identification with parents. European Americans males, in particular, had the least close relationships with their parents compared to the other three groups. European American males had both the steepest decline and lowest mean level in their reported closeness with their parents of all four groups, suggesting that they may be at risk of having especially poor relationships with their parents.

Contrary to the emphasis that has been placed on SES and parents' marital status in many studies on human development, we found no evidence of such differences in our set of indicators. For parents' marital status, adolescents from intact, married families experienced an increase in communication with their parents from 17 to 20 years, whereas adolescents from non-intact families experienced a decrease throughout adolescence. But, again, this difference was quite small.

Overall, around one-third of the variance in these measures existed between adolescents. Between 6% (Family Social Supports) and 29% (Positive Identification with Parents) of the group variance was explained by age. The demographic variables accounted for only a small percentage of the variance in the intercept, up to 7% for Family Social Support, Parent-Adolescent Communication, and Positive Identification with Parents (see Table 16) and up to 17% of the variance in the slopes, with the greatest variance explained for Negative Interactions with Parents (17%) and Parent-Adolescent Communication (12%). There were several measures where little or no group-level variation was explained in either the intercept or slopes, such as Strict Parenting, suggesting that factors other than age or social demographics are important here.

Table 15

Growth Models for Family Characteristics

	Intrusive Parenting	Negative Interactions	Strict Parenting	Family Social Support	Parent- Adolescent Communication	Positive Identification With Parents
For Intercept						
Intercept	2.88***	1.83***	2.86***	4.26***	3.71***	3.18***
SES	-.01	.00	.01	.06	-.07	-.02
Gender	-.06	-.05	-.09	.15**	.49***	.02
Ethnicity	-.18**	-.02	-.15**	-.06	-.01	-.14***
GXE	-.21	-.05	-.08	.15	.30*	.20**
Single	-.05	.11*	-.22	.03	-.40*	-.02
Intact	-.08	-.03	-.11	.10	-.13	.03
Age	-.19	-.02	-.09	-.07	.03	.05
Age ²	.04	-.00	.04	.01	-.01	-.01
For Linear slope						
Intercept	.03	-.04***	-.09***	-.05	-.01	-.08***
SES	.02	.01	-.01	.01	-.00	.01
Gender	.02	.01	-.01	-.00	.07*	.02*
Ethnicity	.07	.04***	.04	-.01	.07*	-.03*
GXE	.12	-.01	-.07	.00	.01	.06**
Single	.04	-.04*	-.08	-.01	-.07	.00
Intact	.07	.03*	.02	-.03	-.06*	-.00
For Quadratic slope						
Intercept	-.02*	.01**	-.02	.02	-.01	.01**
SES	-.00	-.00	.01	-.00	.00	-.00
Gender	-.01	-.01	.00	.00	-.01	-.00
Ethnicity	-.02*	-.01**	.00	.00	-.01	.01
GXE	-.01	.00	.03	-.01	-.01	-.01
Single	.00	.01*	.02	-.00	.03	-.00
Intact	-.01	-.00	.01	.01	.02**	.00

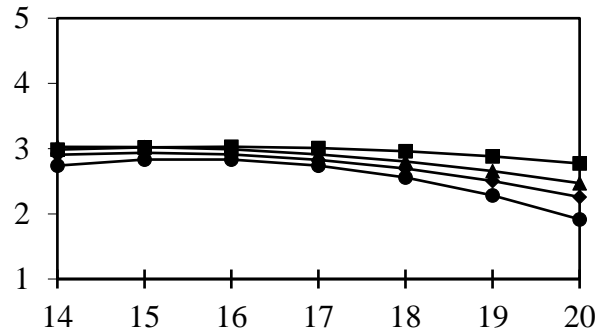
Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Table 16

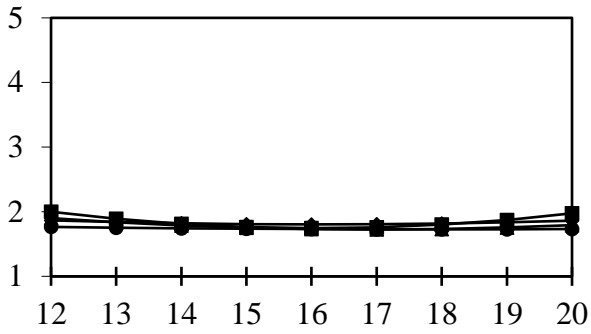
Residual Variance for Family Characteristics

	Unconditional Means Model	ICC	Unconditional Growth Model	R ² Level 1	With Level 2	% Explained
Intrusive Parenting		.33		.13		
Level 1	.596		.517			
Intercept	.293***		.216***		.212***	2%
Linear Slope			.009***		.008***	11%
Negative Interactions		.30		.23		
Level 1	.289		.223			
Intercept	.126***		.176***		.176***	<1%
Linear Slope			.006***		.005***	17%
Quad Slope			.000		.000	<1%
Strict Parenting		.33		.16		
Level 1	.912		.768			
Intercept	.448***		.490***		.485***	1%
Linear Slope			.018***		.018***	<1%
Family Social Support		.32		.06		
Level 1	.389		.364			
Intercept	.184***		.174***		.162***	7%
Linear Slope			.003**		.003**	<1%
Parent-Adolescent Communication		.37		.14		
Level 1	1.208		1.034			
Intercept	.724***		.882***		.821***	7%
Linear Slope			.017*		.015	12%
Quad Slope			.000		.000	<1%
Positive Identification		.39		.29		
Level 1	.214		.151			
Intercept	.137***		.174***		.162***	7%
Linear Slope			.003**		.003**	<1%

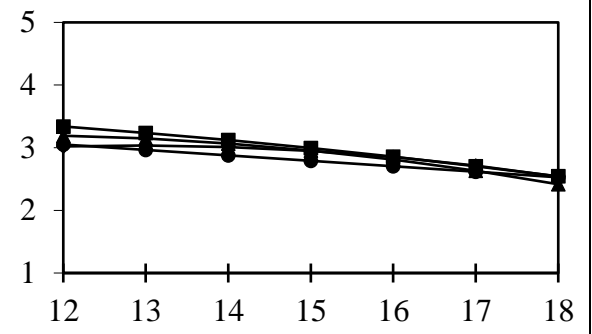
Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.



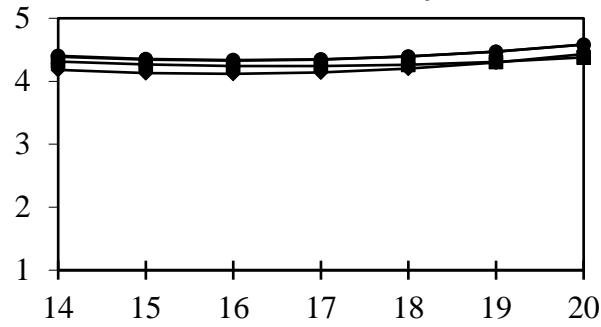
Intrusive Parenting-
Gender x Ethnicity



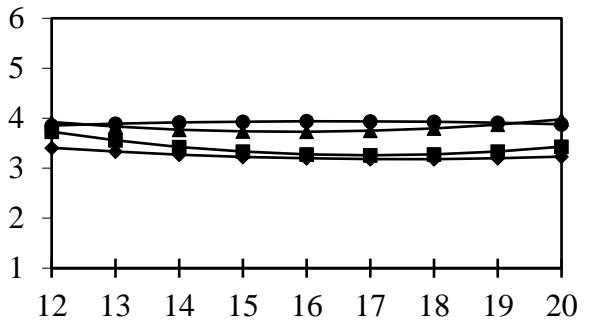
Negative Interactions-
Gender x Ethnicity



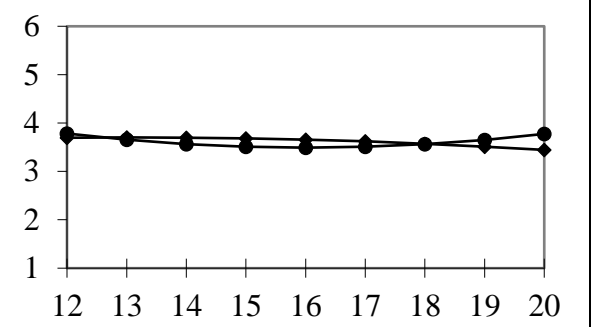
Strict Parenting-
Gender x Ethnicity



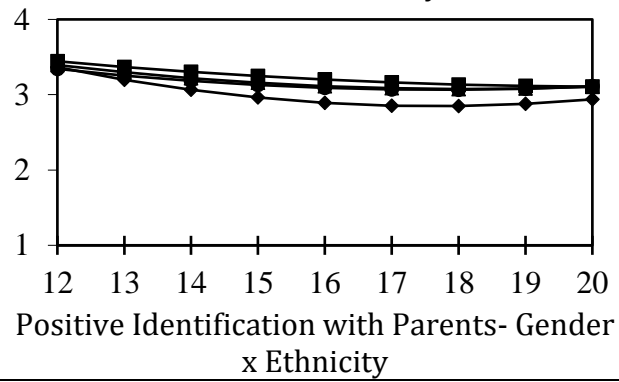
Family Social Support-
Gender x Ethnicity



Parent-Adolescent Communication-
Gender x Ethnicity



Parent-Adolescent Communication -
intact and non-intact families



Positive Identification with Parents-
Gender x Ethnicity

Note. The x-axis represents age in years, whereas the y-axis represents the mean of the scale, controlling for the covariates. For the gender and race/ethnicity growth curves, European-American females are represented by the circle, European American males are represented by the diamond, African American females are represented by the triangle, and African American males are represented by the square. For the marital status growth curves, adolescents from intact families are represented by the circle, whereas adolescents from non-intact families are represented by the diamond.

Figure 5. Growth Curves for Family Characteristics.