

Concealment in Family Communication

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There are some topics that adolescents discuss with both parents, other topics that they discuss with only one parent, and still other topics that they discuss with neither parent. It is plausible to say that parents have little authority when they are unaware of what their sons or daughters are doing, or thinking about, in an area of their lives (Youniss and Smollar, p. 73).

Families are a microcosm of society. Their harmony or lack of it reflects the social conditions in the surrounding community. Parents nurture and raise a child while helping make the outside world comprehensible. When the child begins school the role of the parent changes but does not diminish. The process of individuation (Hofer, Youniss, and Noack, p. 2), when the child slowly breaks away from parental control in order to develop a separate identity, begins in adolescence. This period is often characterized by tension and trauma (Ambert, p. 41), as the child redefines his/her identity and relationship with parents.

Due to busy schedules, among other reasons, family members may lose touch with each other and, as a result, parents are often unaware of their adolescent child's new directions, thoughts or actions. As friends from the peer group become close confidants, their opinions often replace parental influence. How do

adolescents manage their changing relationship with parents? Are there signs that parents must heed to mitigate a deteriorating family environment? Do adolescents and/or parents conceal their thoughts from each other to avoid arguments? In this paper we consider ways and means that families use to minimize conflict and preserve harmony as family relationships change during adolescence. In addition, we examine differences in family communication based on gender, ethnicity, and class.

The social context

Adolescence is often romanticized in movies, so it should come as no great surprise that it is a recently invented phenomenon (Ambert, p. 42). Historians have identified the period when “teenagers” began to be labeled a distinct social group as 1890 to 1920 (ibid). Due to the industrial revolution and subsequent elimination of traditional jobs, labor competition produced social unrest. Adolescence was a useful device to shift a competing labor pool into schools. Furthermore, anthropologists, such as Margaret Mead, began noting as early as 1928, that the “tension and trauma” of adolescence does not exist in all societies (ibid). Nevertheless, the stressful symptoms of adolescence are real phenomena today and have spread to most western societies.

Perhaps one major reason for this change is the influence of media. Most young people have time to explore and are aware of trends almost as soon as they manifest. Television and movies project powerful and attractive images that sway young minds away from traditional values and ordinary everyday experiences. Thus media act as a magnifying lens on today’s youth, accelerating change by rapidly disseminating social trends.

Until the twentieth century social values remained fairly stable. Respect for others, hard work, honesty and patriotism were the attributes of a mature adult. Nowadays, self-esteem, educational achievement and independence are the desired characteristics in western nations. As society changes, emphasis is placed on specific social outcomes for its new members. Later, we will consider how adolescence is perceived in other societies and ethnic groups. Now let's look at how a child's identity develops from pre-teen to the teenage years and beyond.

Adolescent identity formation

Identity formation is based on a melding of past experience and future aspirations, while, ideally, maintaining a sense of well-being through self-appreciation. Adolescence is an inherently difficult period because the developing child must integrate rapidly changing physical, sexual, and psychological dimensions of being. Adolescents typically abandon the parental role models of childhood in order to begin experimenting with new behaviors learned from friends or media influence. Friends "reflect one's own values, attitudes and emotions" (Heaven, p. 29) and thus help clarify one's self-image. However, this process is stressful since self-exploration often entails temporary bouts of inner confusion and dissatisfaction, as well as disturbed thinking (Heaven, pp. 26-30).

Marcia (Heaven, p. 31) suggests that adolescents shift between crisis and commitment as they explore new roles, and experience four distinct identity phases, i. e. diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and achievement. 'Diffusion' refers to teenagers who haven't yet experimented with new behaviors or made a commitment to anything. 'Foreclosure' describes those who have made a commitment to a set of values, beliefs, or behaviors, but without first experimenting, and thus, possibly,

experiencing a value crisis. 'Moratorium' identifies adolescents who haven't finished experimenting or made a final commitment. 'Achievement' represents maturity in teenagers who have resolved identity issues successfully.

Adolescents need to achieve independence from family but maintain a degree of connection for security. Without a safe emotional base, teenagers often remain in diffusion because they never attain the courage to challenge their boundaries. On the other hand, adolescents who simply adopt their parents' roles and beliefs may feel secure but lack independence and thus are attracted towards conventional behavior. Those in the moratorium stage tend to question authority and experience anxiety but also have high self-esteem. Identity-achieved youth are even more self-assured, and show empathic concern for others due to the strong emotional foundation provided by parents' affection and acceptance of their individuality (Heaven, pp. 37-39).

Children adapt to their parents and subconsciously mimic their behavior. Parents, and later teachers, are their key role models. As we have seen, once children become adolescents, many separate themselves from their family, find new role models and, at times, behave oddly. Under these circumstances, what constitutes an ideal family for our youth? Does the process of individuation drive adolescents into isolation and concealment? Surprisingly, teenagers seem to prefer an 'open' family environment with constructive communication. Furthermore, supportive parents, who use minimal coercion, increase the likelihood that adolescents will become socially competent adults. Thus communication between family members remains a vital concern (Heaven, pp. 56-58).

Parenting styles

A child's development is greatly influenced by the family environment. Whether parents are authoritarian, permissive or authoritative sets the tone for family communication and, in turn, probably determines the adolescent's adjustment pattern to stress. Authoritarian parents use various means to control behavior, including demands, threats, and punishment, but are often inconsistent and thus engender resentment in their children. Permissive parents make few demands on their children and, may or may not, provide warmth and support. Lack of supervision may lead to negative outcomes, such as delinquency, since children have few behavioral guidelines to follow. Authoritative parents supply warmth and respect as well as firm discipline. Their method is inductive but not arbitrary, since they explain the reasons for demands and rules. Teenagers from authoritative homes display better adjustment and more self-confidence than their peers (Ambert, pp. 44-45 ; Heaven, p. 61).

It is natural to assume that a warm, empathic caring style will engender a more positive communication environment than authoritarian measures. However, there is research showing that parents adapt their style to their children's behavior, e. g. adolescents who break rules may provoke coercive behavior from permissive or authoritative parents (Ambert, p. 46). Similarly, teenagers who meet and even surpass the demands and expectations of their authoritarian parents will earn their respect, warmth and, perhaps, indulgence. Thus, adolescents and their parents more likely co-create the interactional dynamics in their family environment.

In addition, parents under stress often make a radical switch from their normal parenting style. Factors, such as poverty, unemployment, marital discord, illness

and so on, may induce parents to adopt an authoritarian or permissive style, rather than their preferred approach (Ambert, pp.46-48). In fact, ‘vertical stressors’ (Searight et al, p.206), such as alcoholism, may even alter the traditional adolescent development pattern, with its associated normal “horizontal stressors”, such as identity formation, since preteens would likely avoid disclosure much earlier than normal.

Topic avoidance

Guerrero and Afifi (pp.229-230) describe research which examined eight commonly avoided topics : (1) relationship norms - the rules and roles of the relationship ; (2) dating experiences ; (3) feelings about the state of the relationship ; (4) past behavior, including embarrassing experiences ; (5) failures at school or work ; (6) sexual experiences ; (7) friendships and (8) negative behavior that strained the relationship.

Teenagers avoided these topics to protect their privacy and independence, minimize conflict, embarrassment and so on (ibid, p.221). Guerrero and Afifi (ibid, pp.240-241) report that (a) most children avoid communication with fathers more than mothers ; (b) children avoid communication with the opposite-sex parent if the topic involves sexual experience and (c) teenagers in the middle of adolescence avoid topics more often than preteens or young adults. These results conform to gender appropriate role models in society. Fathers tend to be emotionally unresponsive, and thus children gravitate to mothers for understanding and support. However, the topic of sex is an exception since parents can only share their own gender’s experience and insights.

Teenagers may avoid discussing topics if they fear the subject will lead to conflict and thus harm the relationship. Parents have the power to reject children's arguments and ultimately withdraw financial and emotional support. Children may avoid topics as a strategy to minimize negative consequences. However, as children age they tend to yield less to parents in decision making (ibid, p. 226), perhaps because they realize that arguing or sticking to their demands is likely to only have a short-term outcome, i. e. it will not cause lasting harm to their situation or relationship. In addition, they may also feel more confident in their ability to find employment and survive independently, if necessary.

Researchers contend that teenagers need to establish privacy boundaries in order to develop their unique identity without interference (ibid, p. 226). This process also entails renegotiating rules and roles with parents, which may lead to misunderstanding. Thus topic avoidance may also indicate that children haven't developed enough confidence in their ability to debate and persuade their parents, especially when they have to broach a difficult subject.

Adolescents often perceive parents as invading their personal space with requests to perform tasks that do not reflect their own values (Searight et al, p. 211). They react particularly strongly when parents insist the tasks must be done in a prescribed way. Topic avoidance may also be a tactic that teenagers use to avoid being disturbed and upset by parental demands on their free time.

Teenagers often avoid topics about ordinary day-to-day matters, such as household chores, personal hygiene and schoolwork (Noller and Callan, p. 45). These topics are often contentious and difficult to resolve to everyone's satisfaction, since they depend on establishing mutual understanding and cooperation between all

family members. However, once teenagers have left their home, researchers report that family communication usually improves and satisfaction with the relationship increases (*ibid*, p. 228).

Parent-adolescent communication and conflict

One view of adolescence is that close living conditions are responsible for the majority of interpersonal disputes (Noller and Callan, p. 50). Teenagers argue about manners, choice of friends and clothes with their mother, and about money, leisure time and schoolwork with their father. The key concern of adolescents is about how much control parents wield over their personal matters. As they grow older, teenagers consider an increasing range of issues to be under their personal control (*ibid*, p. 47). Some parents relinquish control gradually as their children prove themselves mature. On the other hand, many families experience frequent turbulence as teenagers demand more and more personal freedom. This is exacerbated by hormonal effects which provoke some adolescents into irrational emotional outbursts, thus increasing parental anxiety.

Parents often grant their children more privacy as long as they meet minimal expectations, such as maintaining academic success and avoiding trouble with others (*ibid*, p. 77). This freedom allows teenagers to explore their own ideas independently and only occasionally report to parents about their extrafamilial activities. As a result, they may also develop the ability to control how information about themselves is presented to their parents and thus keep the most important aspects of their lives private. However, parents are reluctant to let teenagers have more freedom when rules are broken or grades suffer. They become even more anxious about bigger issues, such as career or marriage plans, since they have a

much clearer idea about the life-long consequences of these decisions (ibid, p. 57).

Daughters seem to be easier to handle since they are often emotionally dependent on their mothers and display foreclosure status by adopting their parents' values (ibid, p. 49). Fathers are generally perceived as closed and judgmental and thus sons, in particular, may miss the emotional bond with a male role model. Sons seem to regard both parents as authority figures, but may experience more conflict with fathers since they often reject the validity of their son's perspective in arguments (Youniss and Smollar, pp. 58, 67).

However, the use of authoritarian power by either parent may hinder adolescent development. A teenager, whose frame of reference is based on fear of detection and punishment, may lack higher moral reasoning and fall under the influence of the peer group (Noller and Callan, pp. 60-61). Inductive disciplinary measures, based on reasoning through the consequences of behavior, are more likely to promote an internalized moral code that will guide the youth through difficult decisions.

Collins has pointed out the distinction between overt and covert conflict (Ambert, p. 50). Overt conflict occurs when tensions have reached a maximum and powerful, often hostile, feelings are expressed openly. Covert conflict occurs much more frequently as parents or teenagers avoid topics that might lead to open disputes. In fact, Youniss and Smollar (Ambert, p. 50) report that parents and teenagers often spend only a few minutes each day talking! Naturally, this reduces the potential for conflict.

Jurkovic and Ulrici state that overt conflicts are often followed by adaptation as parents and teenagers reestablish a working relationship with newly negotiated

parameters (Noller and Callan, p. 45). This mimics the behavior of labor unions, which use strike action to further their aims. Teenagers may intuitively sense that they can accomplish their goals most effectively with angry outbursts and then repeat this pattern in a cyclical fashion.

Class consciousness may also predispose some youth to argue more than their peers. According to Jacob (Noller and Callan, p. 54), middle class families experience less conflict than working class families. This is perhaps because middle class parents are more likely to form a united front in dealing with their child's demands but also use an inductive parenting style to maintain harmony and instill respect for their authority.

Research suggests that an adolescent's self-esteem is correlated with the perception of support the teenager receives (Noller and Callan, p. 59). Teenagers may be more inclined to forgive their parents for a host of sins if they feel financially and emotionally secure. Working class parents may not be able to afford basic necessities nor the time and energy required to emotionally support their children through difficulties at school or in achieving their goals.

Cultural variation

A remarkable disparity exists between the situation of adolescents in western society and their counterparts in Japan. According to a study in the 1980's, Japanese adolescents spend considerably more time at school than their western peers (Csikszentmihalyi, p. 65). In fact, Japanese students spent 59 hours per week in school compared to 20 hours for American teenagers. At the same time, there were 69 more days in the Japanese school year than the American one.

Therefore, American teenagers had much more leisure time at their disposal than Japanese youth, i. e. 42 to 28 hours respectively. The latter figure may be somewhat misleading since many Japanese adolescents go to cram schools after class, sometimes even on weekends.

During the last two decades Japan has tried to catch up to the west by eliminating regular weekend classes and encouraging youth to spend more time in outdoor play activities. However, the overall message has been clearly drummed into Japanese teenagers – study and succeed or fall by the wayside. Not surprisingly, most Japanese parents consider education “the one and only passport to a happy life” (Takahashi and Takeuchi, p. 237).

Education in Japan is often a fierce struggle for survival. Students compete to get top grades in order to enter the most prestigious universities and thus claim an almost automatic guarantee of employment and success in life. Unfortunately, this concentration on grade achievement leaves many adolescents with little intrinsic motivation for learning (Takahashi and Takeuchi, p. 238).

In western families, mothers occupy a more central role in the support and guidance of their children than fathers. Mothers are seen as caring, understanding and willing to listen to problems. This is even more true in traditional cultures like Japan, where mothers are the primary caregivers and fathers are often physically absent (Takahashi and Takeuchi, p. 240). For example, nearly 40% of Japanese children have supper without their fathers. Furthermore, the traditional authority and power of the father, rejected as a feudalistic relic, has largely disappeared. Nowadays, males may be affectionate and friendly but still spend relatively little time with their family due to work demands, thus leaving mothers completely in

charge with the task of raising children.

Nevertheless, Japanese fathers do play a pivotal role. Gjerde and Shimizu (Coleman and Hendry, p. 83) showed that parental agreement is critical in how well children are socialized. As long as parents were in accord, the strength of the mother-teenager relationship was enough to enable the adolescent to adapt successfully and become a socially competent young adult, but was insufficient when parents disagreed.

In Japanese society, open expression of dissent is discouraged and conflict avoided through ritual behavior (Piasetski, p. 52). Families may not be able to work through their disagreements satisfactorily since negotiation is not a common, well-understood process. An unresolved issue may simply be put aside in the hope that the matter will somehow get settled in time. However, adolescent tensions may eventually lead to delinquency, the apathy of thwarted identity formation or violence.

Germany has also had a traditional authoritarian family structure, but in the wake of the student peace movement of the 1960's, liberal reforms of educational practices were introduced (Hofer, Youniss, and Noack, p. 3). The rejection of patriotic values for freedom, peace and autonomy as new social goals had a profound influence on society and families. Nowadays, German families have moved towards a discourse relationship, characterized by negotiation of conflicting goals.

Israel offers another interesting contrast. The kibbutz is a communal living arrangement where all members share work and financial gains equally. Families

have traditionally allowed their children to spend much more time with their peers than with parents. In the 1980's, this social experiment ran into some difficulties, when youth became attracted to drug use and cults (Coleman and Hendry, p. 84). As a consequence, Israeli society decided to place more emphasis on family interaction and reduce peer influence to eliminate the problems.

In China, dignity is highly valued; thus, indirect, implicit communication is often used to avoid offending (Peterson et al, p. 292). In the family, obedience and respect for elders are also highly respected principals that help preserve harmony and family ties. Although traditionally Chinese families were authoritarian, recent research shows a change in parenting style (Peterson et al, p. 302-303). More parents are listening to their children and allowing them greater input in decision-making. This may, in part, reflect the changes brought about during the social revolution of the 1960's, especially the One Child Family Planning Policy, which limited family size and therefore made the one child more precious.

It remains to be seen whether social trends inspired by American values will eventually spread a more democratic, open style of communication inside previously authoritarian societies. Every culture has its traditions but as social and economic changes increase, many countries have felt increasing pressure to adapt their values and redefine socialization goals.

Delinquency

Some researchers suggest that conflict is not necessarily an entirely negative aspect of parent-adolescent relations (Peterson et al, p. 290). They claim it is necessary for individuation, redefining roles within the relationship and promoting

psychological development. However, conflict may also lead to delinquent behavior, which besides being harmful to the individual and their family, puts a strain on social resource systems, thus requiring police, medical and counseling intervention.

Are there ways to predict which types of family conflict are acceptable and which are self-destructive? Research has shown that the psychological health of parents and their children is linked, and specifically, that pathological behavior in parents often predicts adolescent delinquency (Heaven, pp. 64-65). Families that exhibited conflict and poor cohesion predicted poor self-esteem, neurosis and overall dissatisfaction with life in their teenage members. This even led to depression and schizophrenia in some cases. Thus, parental attitudes and values, for better or worse, seem to be reflected in their children.

Robertson and Simons (*ibid*) found that parental rejection was the critical factor in adolescent depression and it increased in importance in homes where parents failed to provide love, understanding and support. Researchers have also observed that families with schizophrenics often communicated with less clarity and precision than normal families, used harsh criticism, expressed intense emotions and were intrusive (Noller and Callan, p. 134). Interestingly, parents with an external social focus were likely to produce teenagers with anti-social delinquent behavior, whereas parents who were family-focused, with minimal external social interaction, engendered internalizing disorders in their children, such as schizophrenia and depression.

Japan offers a striking contrast to the western experience with delinquency. To begin with, Japan's rate of delinquency is the lowest among developed nations

(Savells, p. 129). Delinquency is a form of social disorganization and thus may be less tolerated in an Asian country steeped in the patriarchal Confucian value system.

Japan's feudal cultural patterns have endured despite industrialization, technological advances, and western influence. In many western countries, delinquency is a symptom of urban distress, an expression of dissatisfaction with the post-industrialized impersonal world. However, Japanese seem to be relatively comfortable with an impersonal existence as long as society satisfies the individual's basic needs.

Nevertheless, Japanese youth do manifest socially deviant behavior. The typical delinquent is a young student who extorts money by bullying fellow students (Savells, p. 133). Perhaps the reason delinquency remains at a low level in Japan compared to western countries is based in police methodology, which mostly uses an authoritative style. Deviant behavior is harshly rebuked but simultaneously efforts are made to educate and reintegrate delinquents.

Case studies

Four students were interviewed, two Canadians, a male and a female, both twenty years old, and two Japanese girls, aged 15 and 17 years old. The students were first interviewed individually, and a second time, together with at least one parent. The interview covered a wide range of subjects, i. e. health, school, chores, spending allowance, leisure activities, homework, self-assessment, friends, dating, discrimination, sensitive topics, and future plans. The objective was to observe communication patterns between parent(s) and child that demonstrate concealment strategies. The same topics were discussed in both interviews;

however, in the second interview the questions were addressed to the parent(s), although the student could interject comments as well. A brief description of each interview follows.

Student A is a 15 year-old Japanese high school student with a friendly but slightly shy manner. When asked about her health she spoke about being tired everyday and just wanting to sleep. Her teachers set high academic goals and require students to study hard, even during holidays. Yet she likes school because her teachers are kind and very supportive. To relieve stress she sings and paints. Her chores involve occasionally helping with cooking and cleaning the bathroom. She has complete freedom to decide her hair and clothes style, but she is not interested in dating yet because she is too busy studying. In addition, she has no concerns about money since she is confident her parents would buy her whatever she needs. She has a good relationship with her parents and can talk with them about her problems. She has decided to go to college in Tokyo to study English.

Student A's mother has a realistic view of her daughter, i. e. she knows her daughter is studying hard but is happy with school. She considers it appropriate to postpone dating and would prefer this continue in college since she regards dating as an obstacle to studying. For the same reason she doesn't expect her daughter to help with chores. Although her daughter sometimes has arguments with friends, her mother doesn't interfere unless she is asked for advice. In fact, her mother feels she gives her daughter complete freedom, presumably as long as she succeeds at school.

Student B is a 17 year-old Japanese high school student with an energetic, confident personality. She likes her teachers and school subjects, especially world

history, and has many friends. She wants to go to Hiroshima University because of its reputation for excellent research in occupational therapy. Although she doesn't participate in sports she is healthy and is a member of the running and drama clubs. She helps with housework every day, including washing dishes, cleaning the bath, throwing out garbage and occasionally washing clothes. Her room is often messy but sometimes her parents clean it and on Sundays she takes care of it. She doesn't have a boyfriend and doesn't discuss the topic with her parents. She sometimes takes care of her younger brother and has a good relationship with him because they often play games together. She thinks her parents are not strict.

Student B's parents are satisfied with their daughter's school results and allow her complete freedom to decide her future. They consider themselves a little strict about household chores and routines but Student B's reaction was that they are just behaving normally. Her parents don't see any reason to discuss boyfriends until the subject becomes a reality. They consider themselves a bit different than other couples since the father washes dishes. The father would like his daughter to study harder because he feels that would improve her future job prospects. However, although he felt this was not a likely prospect, he was not putting pressure on her to change her behavior.

Student C is a bright, talkative 20 year-old male who works full-time at an auto dealership. He enjoys the job but plans to return to college after the year of work is completed. He is interested in history and may choose to become a teacher. He loved high school because he spent lots of time with his friends. He exercises a little, smokes and tries not to eat too much junk food. When he experiences stress he tries not to worry about it and will discuss problems with friends or his parents. He is honest with his parents because they value frank communication and

consequently give him more freedom to act independently. He has trouble doing chores and this causes arguments with his parents. Another point of contention concerns money; for example, his parents charge him \$300/month for room and board. They also want him to save for going back to school but he borrowed money for car insurance instead and has yet to repay it. Otherwise, he feels no pressure from his parents concerning other issues, such as dating etc. In fact, he feels his relationship with his father has improved in the last few years.

Student C's parents discuss topics openly and try to influence their children rather than tell them what to do. However, chores are an ongoing struggle. They use the principle of 'natural consequences' to resolve issues. For example, if one's room is dirty and one continues to live in that environment, one will eventually realize that it affects one's health. Student C's mother is also confident that her son will communicate with them about problems since he did so in high school when he started spending time with a new group of friends. Although his friends didn't tell their parents the real reasons for staying out late, her son explained everything honestly and thus earned his parents' trust. However, student C's mother is still concerned about her son's future because she wants him to do well, whereas his father is satisfied with whatever his son chooses to do with his life because any choice will be a good lesson.

Student D is an amiable, perceptive 20 year-old female studying political science at the University of British Columbia. She has already finished a 2-year program at Langara College. She liked high school although she had to take extra lessons in mathematics with a tutor to help her improve her academic results. She didn't participate in clubs and only played sports in grade 8. Nowadays she exercises occasionally and has no health issues. She has a part-time job at a retail

shop in the mall and doesn't experience much stress at work or at school. She is a bit shy and likes the job because it forces her to interact with customers. At first she worked a bit too much but now she is learning to manage her time better.

She has a good relationship with her parents, although she has to be careful about what she discloses since they have conservative views. Her mother is very supportive and gives her lots of advice but she doesn't feel she has to follow everything. For example, she wants to travel in Europe although her mother is against this since she herself was married at 21 while on a trip to Europe! As well money is an issue but student D plans to save and pay all her expenses. She does lots of household chores because she is the oldest child and her parents pressure her to accept more tasks. She resents doing more than the other children but when she resists she feels guilty and so prefers to accept the situation and avoid arguments. Her parents were very strict with her in high school and didn't even let her go out in the evening occasionally with friends until she was in grade 10! However, now her parents are less restrictive. They trust her more because she has always behaved responsibly and never does anything extreme.

Student D's mother has 9 children and is naturally over-protective because she worries about deteriorating social values affecting her children. She was very concerned about letting her daughter go to a regular high school and considered home schooling. However, soon after her daughter entered high school, she realized that the teachers were fine and her daughter was studying consistently, as well as keeping her informed about her progress. Now she knows her daughter is on the right track and supports her independence. She expects her daughter to do extra chores and is stricter with her than her boys because she feels girls are in greater danger. She wants her daughter to have an even better life than herself and

would prefer her to avoid rushing into relationships or waste time on trying too many random university courses. Her husband is even more over-protective and conservative so she has to conceal issues from him until she can explain matters in a way that he will understand and accept as reasonable. Despite her best efforts, she had very serious problems with her second daughter who got involved with the wrong crowd at high school, took drugs and had to be removed from school to protect her from a youth gang. Thus, her concerns may seem paranoid but were unfortunately justified.

It is difficult to draw clear conclusions based on such a small sample of interviews. However, the purpose was to gain some insight into family interaction and perhaps discover communication patterns that may be examined more fully in a follow-up study. One notable distinction between Japanese and Canadian families is the focus on chores. It seems Canadian parents expect their children, especially girls, to take care of chores, presumably so that they learn necessary life skills and develop good habits. Japanese parents prefer to focus on studies and let their children learn the skills when they live on their own and thus let necessity be the motivating force. Chores can be a divisive issue in family communication and there are benefits to avoiding the topic altogether.

Canadian parents talk more openly about various social issues, such as drugs, because they know it's a real problem that is better discussed before their children come under the influence of peer pressure. Japanese children spend most of their time studying and so have little time for mischief. However, recently drugs have become more prevalent among youth and it may soon be necessary to raise the issue at school or at home.

Canadian parents value honesty and open communication with their children. Japanese parents value harmony at home and try not to impose rules but seem to have 'silent' expectations. Both Canadian and Japanese mothers seem to be more involved with their children.

Finally, in reference to the identity formation phases discussed earlier, it would seem that student A is in the diffusion phase, since she has yet to explore questions about her identity, perhaps because she is too busy studying. On the other hand, student B seems to be in the achievement phase because she is goal-oriented and has healthy relationships with friends and family. Student C is in the moratorium phase since he has begun to explore issues but has not made up his mind yet. Student D seems to be in the foreclosure phase since she has accepted her parents' views as a necessary precondition for avoiding arguments.

Conclusion

As teenagers develop they often conceal aspects of their lives from their parents. One factor that may lead to greater isolation is children having their own room and, subsequently, spending more time away from parents in various activities, including watching their own television, listening to their own music, communicating with their peers by telephone and using their computer or personal entertainment device. As a result of modern affluence, children have more opportunities at their disposal to spend time alone but this also has negative repercussions when they experience loneliness.

Adolescents model their parents' behavior even when they disagree and argue with them, or when parents display anxiety or social withdrawal (Noller and Callan,

p. 135). If parents do not provide good role models as socially competent adults, their children may feel awkward and reluctant to initiate contacts with others and, teenagers who isolate themselves, are likely to remain lonely. However, adolescents tend to open up to parents that are warm, supportive, and caring. As a result, they also tend to open up to peers and escape their social limbo.

Furthermore, parents that encourage open communication by being supportive also tend to share more information about themselves, such as their perceptions and perspectives on the challenges they face, as well as personal anecdotes (Searight et al, p. 212). Thus, adolescents who feel loved may need less privacy and be willing to share more of their thoughts and experiences with parents as they mature.

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