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# Leaving home : family adjustment to the oldest child going away to college.

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LEAVING HOME:

FAMILY ADJUSTMENT TO THE OLDEST CHILD GOING AWAY TO COLLEGE

A Dissertation Presented

By

LEWIS S. BREITNER

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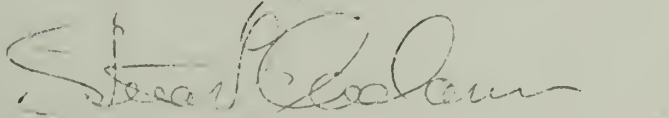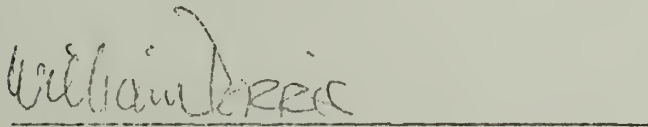
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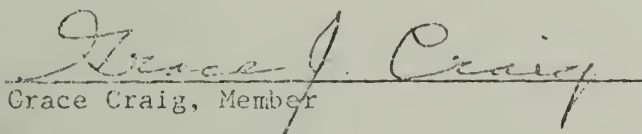
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Most of all I would like to thank the families who participated in the study for allowing me to share their lives for a short time, and for teaching me a great deal about how families survive and grow.

ABSTRACT

Leaving Home:
Family Adjustment to the Oldest Child Going Away to College

(September 1977)

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Directed by:  Professor Harold Jarmon

The purpose of this study was to examine how families prepare for
and adjust to their oldest child leaving home for college.  The parents
and the two oldest children in eight normal, intact, middle-class fami-
lies were interviewed for a total of 65 hours.  Major areas of inquiry
included:  family history, stresses and strengths in the marital rela-
tionships, relationships between parents and the oldest children, par-
enting styles, the development of autonomy in the oldest children, par-
ents' social relationships, parents' work-lives, changes in family struc-
tures and relationships after the oldest children left, the role of
grandparents, parents' feelings about aging and the future.

Results indicated that:

1)  Anticipatory experiences and "rites-of-passage" for the oldest
children were significant in helping parents shift their perceptions of
and behavior toward their oldest children, in the direction of acknow-
ledging increased maturity and autonomy.  Important experiences included
obtaining a driver's license, part-time and temporary jobs, and having
a steady boy/girlfriend.

2)  The role of "oldest child" was taken over by the second oldest

after the oldest child left home, and this accelerated the second child's psychosocial growth. In some families the second oldest male child took over the role of oldest male, even when an older female child was still at home.

3) Changes in the marital relationships took place over a few years as several wives went to work in anticipation of financial need to pay for college, and in expectation of the need to find new sources of stimulation and self-esteem as the parent role took up less time and energy. Wives gained independence and self-confidence as a result of working. Husbands reacted by gradually readjusting expectations and perceptions of their wives. Marital relationships became more equal as wives differentiated from their husbands and developed extra-familial sources of interest. This shift triggered a crisis of confidence in those husbands whose work-life was not satisfactory, but open communication and a strong commitment to the family allowed husbands to work these issues out over approximately two to three years.

Those wives not currently working anticipate similar stresses as they move out of the family orbit.

4) The role of the community was highlighted as a primary source of role definition both for the oldest child and the parents. Its importance as a source of support for family development and role-modeling was discussed. The influence of individual and group friendships in helping parents, especially wives, adjust to the oldest child leaving home was significant as a source of emotional and practical support.

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INTRODUCTION

> Nothing had changed except they become so independent and
> they're ready to try their wings and you feel it and they
> feel it and it's nature's way of saying get out and it makes
> me ready to see them go.  It's great to have them come home
> but it's time to leave the home.  It isn't anything that
> we're conscious of.  But I think it's good. . . .  I must
> have done something right in this job of mine because I want
> him to go so badly (Mrs. Joyce Johnson).

Leaving home is one of the major developmental events in most peo-

ple's lives.  It is the time when children can become truly responsible

for themselves on a day-day basis, and it can be an exhilerating and

anxiety-provoking beginning for the child, as well as a sadly sweet end-

ing for the parents.  One might think that a process of such signific-

ance for families in their middle years would be of intense interest to

observers of human behavior.  However, this normal developmental process

has been largely ignored until recently.  Chilman (1968), after review-

ing the literature on families in the mid-stage of the family life-cy-

cle, states that

> Research has not dealt with the dynamics of family life dur-
> ing the middle years of marriage.  The relationship between
> adolescents and parents has been studied very little. . . .
> Even fewer studies of the impact of children on the marriage
> have been carried out. . . .  Moreover, almost no study exists
> on family interaction in healthy, well-adjusted families (p.
> 309).

The purpose of this study is to help correct this imbalance.  Its

aim is to examine the effects of the normal adolescent separation process

on the adolescent's family; on the parents individually; on their mar-

riage; on other family members. The basic question this study asks is: What is the process by which families, especially parents, prepare for and adjust to having a child leave home?

The family has been viewed as an interpersonal system in which each member influences and is influenced by all the other members as individuals, and as partners in relationships within the family as a whole. Any major change in the status of one member will reverberate throughout the family, and will be felt not as an isolated incident but as part of a complex matrix of ongoing family interactions and experience. There are many ways in which children may leave home, and the type of life the child is entering is a major variable in terms of family reaction. Socially approved ways of leaving home include going away to school, getting married, getting a job and a place to live, joining the army. Socially disparaged ways include running away, or being incarcerated in a jail or mental hospital.

One of the more common ways of leaving home for the middle-class adolescent is to go away to college. This is generally recognized by the child, the family, and the community, as an appropriate and self-enhancing way of becoming an autonomous adult. This study focuses on families in which the departing child is going to college and living away from home. But which child? It is safe to assume that families will be affected differently, and will be at different points in the life cycle, depending upon which child is leaving. In terms of the relative significance of children in different ordinal positions leaving home, one might expect that the first and last child to leave would cause the most profound shifts within the family. (This is irrespective

of the fact that in any given family a particular child might be central to the family as a system and that that child's leaving would cause major changes.) As the first child leaves, the family is faced with a new situation which requires adjustments they have not had to make previously. They are entering a new phase in the family life cycle, and as in previous phases the oldest is about to pave the way. By the time the last child leaves, the family has had experience with the process and has made many adjustments, but the parents must now face an "empty nest," and this will require new adjustments. This phase has been relatively well-researched, while the beginnings of the process have not been explored. Thus this study chooses to examine the starting point; namely the point at which the oldest child leaves home.

CHAPTER II .

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The general theoretical framework for this study is a developmental
one. This approach has its origins in the individually-oriented devel-
opmental psychology of Freud, who dealt almost exclusively with the
first few years of life, and in the "family life-cycle" concepts of
early rural sociologists (Rowe, 1966). Because of the widespread in-
fluence of psychoanalytic concepts in mental health and social science
disciplines, and because this approach places almost exclusive emphasis
on early childhood development, developmental processes in adults have
been relatively neglected. In the past 25 years the focus has begun to
shift somewhat and there are now a number of theories which aim to de-
scribe the developmental processes of adults and families (Anthony,
1966; Benedek, 1959, 1970; Buhler, 1968; Duvall, 1971; Farber, 1964;
Gould, 1972; Hill & Rodgers, 1964; Jacques, 1965; Levinson et al., 1974;
Lidz, 1968; Neugarten, 1964, 1968; Newman & Newman; Rodgers, 1973).

Erikson (1950, 1968) was one of the first to attempt a development-
al analysis of the entire life-cycle. He postulates eight developmental
stages which are delineated according to a central conflict, which, due
to internal maturation and cultural prescription, the individual must
successfully resolve in order to go on to the next stage. Conflicts are
resolved in terms of a relative dominance of positive personality fac-
tors over negative ones. For example, the task of the first stage, in
infancy, is to establish a favorable balance of trust vs. mistrust.
Erikson points out that the developmental elements of all stages are

present before they become central, and remain in varying degrees re-solved even though the individual moves ahead. The development of auto-nomy obviously does not begin in adolescence but in infancy and early childhood. The negotiation of successive developmental conflicts will depend in part upon prior successes and failures.

For the purposes of this study the most important developmental conflicts in Erikson's system are: 1) the establishment of an "iden-tity" vs. "identity confusion" in the adolescent; 2) the establishment of a sense and pattern of "generativity" vs. a sense of "stagnation" in the adolescent's middle-aged parents.

The main tasks of the adolescent are to consolidate the personality and establish a stable identity. Erikson pays particular attention to the role of the community in this process. The community must provide avenues for the development of the various aspects of the newly emer-ging identity and must provide recognition that the adolescent is coming of age.

Levinson et al. (1974) provide a further sense of the tasks of this period for males. They refer to this time as "Leaving the Family." They see it as

> . . .a transitional period in the sense that the person is
> half in and half out of the family; he is making an effort to
> separate himself from the family, to develop a new home base,
> to reduce his dependence on familial support and authority,
> and to regard himself as an adult making his way in the adult
> world (p. 245).

This phase begins between the ages of 16 and 18, and ends between 20 and 24. Some of the outer manifestations of this process are moving away

from home, becoming more independent financially, and "getting into new roles and living arrangements in which one is more autonomous and responsible." There is a greater differentiation between the child and the parents, and greater "psychological distance" from the family.

Levinson et al. see college as an intermediate step between the original family and the adult community. It provides structure and support within which the adolescent is responsible for him/herself on a daily basis. S/he can relate to peers and adults as an independent, responsible person who can make his/her own decisions about life.

Of course, going away to college is a way of leaving home that is closely linked to the family's socioeconomic level. It is a commonly chosen vehicle for middle and upper-middle class families, but not necessarily for families in the lower and working classes, whose children are more likely to get jobs, join the armed forces, or perhaps drop out of high school to work or become unemployed. We are dealing in this study with middle-class family life, and while this may be the dominant mode of family life in this culture, it is not a universal one. This factor must be taken into account when describing developmental process in families.

According to Levinson Leaving the Family ends when the physical separation from the family is essentially complete and the child has begun an independent life.

Erikson's theoretical treatment of the middle-aged parents of the adolescent is somewhat sketchy. "Generativity" is defined as "the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation." He states that "mature man needs to be needed, and maturity is guided by the nature of

that which must be cared for." He includes productivity and creativity
as elements in a sense of generativity.

Lidz (1968) provides a concise description of this period:

> . . .Middle age is initiated by awareness that the peak years
> of life are passing. A person realizes that he is no longer
> starting on his way, his direction is usually well set, and
> his present activities will determine how far he will get. We
> might also consider that middle age starts when children cease
> to be a major responsibility; they have married, are away at
> college, or at least they are late adolescent and are largely
> responsible for themselves. A man had been occupied and pre-
> occupied with making his way in a career, and with providing
> for his wife and children. A woman's life had centered around
> the care of the children and in making a proper home for them.
> Now it is time to look where their lives have been going, for
> new patterns of life are required. Then, too, parents have
> died or retired, and the person realizes that he is one of the
> older, responsible generation. He has moved to the center of
> the stage. The consciousness of the critical transition is
> abetted by the awareness that the body is slowing down. It is
> no longer the well-oiled machine that quietly responds to the
> demands placed upon it; it creaks and groans a bit. The woman
> sees menopause looming before her when her generative capaci-
> ties will come to an end. What has been achieved? And what
> do the years ahead still hold? (p. 158).

Levinson et al. break middle-age into two stages; the Mid-life
Transition, and the Restabilization. They see major mid-life issues for
men as a sense of physical decline and mortality, and a feeling of being
old rather than young. The mid-life transition for men peaks in the
early 40's, and restabilization occurs in the middle 40's. They do not
describe this stage in any detail.

Benedek and others have considered the changing processes of par-
enthood throughout the life-cycle (Anthony, 1966; Benedek, 1959, 1970).
They divide parenthood into three general stages: early, middle, and
grandparenthood. Early parenthood begins with conception and ends with

the sexual maturation of the child. The middle phase ends with the birth of a grandchild, and the last phase ends only with the death of the parent. (Obviously the phases may overlap in the case of parents with several children.) Benedek focuses mainly on the parents' responses to the sexual development and behavior of the child. She claims that the main characteristic of the middle phase is parents' "involvement in and preoccupation with their children's sexual life." Parents whose sexual and physical capacities are beginning to wane must live with and tolerate the flowering sexuality of their children. It would seem that parents who have successfully dealt with the crises of intimacy and generativity in terms of accepting their own sexuality would be less stressed by their children's sexuality than parents whose own sexuality is not secure. Anthony (1966) supports this contention:

> Parental reactions to puberty are closely correlated with the
> extent to which sexuality has found a comfortable acceptance
> in the household as gauged by the affectionate demonstrations
> between the members and the level of accurate biological know-
> ledge possessed by the children. There are parents who regard
> it as the consummation of their own psychosexual development,
> rounding off the cycle of the generations. There are others
> who are pruriently intrigued by the shy and groping sexuality
> and naivete of the novitiate and obtain vicarious enjoyment in
> stimulating its appearance and mocking its ineptness. A third
> group of parents, with a high degree of sexual repression,
> may react with dismay and displeasure at the slightest dis-
> play of erotic feeling (p. 314).

A healthy way of retaining the child who is slipping away, cited by Anthony, is to help the process of individuation and separation to its completion in the adult child. This seems obvious, and the process actually begins in early childhood, as mentioned earlier, with the establishment of Erikson's "basic trust." Successful weaning of parents

from their adolescent children probably depends a great deal on the strength of the marriage. If the parents' basic needs are being satisfied in the marital relationship there will be less need to hold on to the child.

Stierlin (1974) is a family therapist who has studied the separation process between parents and adolescents. In a study of families with runaway adolescents, he describes three modes of family interaction which inhibit healthy individuation. The first, and most pathological, is called "binding." This may involve any or all of the following: 1) the parents' exploitation of the child's dependency needs. The child is rewarded for regressive behavior; 2) the child's cognitive integrity and differentiated self-awareness are sabatoged. S/he is mystified; 3) excessive guilt is instilled regarding moves toward autonomy.

The second mode is the "delegating" mode. In this mode the child is allowed limited autonomy in order to fulfill the parents' own unfulfilled desires for themselves. For example, a child may be pushed to become a doctor to satisfy the father's own adolescent dream of becoming one.

Stierlin feels that some limited delegation is appropriate:

> Up to a point it seems appropriate for parents to want to en-
> list their children as delegates. To a degree it seems legi-
> timate that they expect these children to realize their aspir-
> ations and ego-ideals, to carry on the family name, to remain
> loyal to their parents, to bring meaning and satisfaction to
> their lives. However, delegating parents threaten to exploit
> and damage their child to the extent that they fail to recog-
> nize him as a person in his own right as one who, in the final
> analysis, must separate and forge his own destiny.

The third transactional mode is "expelling." In its pathological

form it involves long-term neglect or rejection of children who are pushed to premature autonomy.

The extent to which families engage in the pathological modes described by Stierlin depends upon the parents' ability to resolve their own adolescent conflicts, so that they are not revitalized by the children's adolescence. If the parents have succeeded in this, they and their children will engage in what Stierlin calls the "loving fight":

> Both parties must strive to differentiate and articulate their differing needs and interests. From a position of articulate separateness they must be able and willing to share a common focus of attention and ensure an ongoing communicational relatedness.

There is a "deepening awareness of the parties' interdependence and mutual obligation."

Stierlin employs the term "centrifugal" to describe parental communications and expectations which encourage the adolescent to become independent and to move out of the family orbit, while the term "centripital" refers to those parental behaviors which discourage independence and foster continued dependence on parents.

Family sociologists have attempted a developmental analysis of family life using the family as the unit of analysis. Duvall (1971) defines family developmental tasks as

> . . .growth responsibilities that arise at a certain stage in the life of a family, successful achievement of which leads to satisfaction and success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the family, disapproval by society, and difficulty with later family developmental tasks.

This definition is in essential agreement with Erikson's definition of developmental tasks for the individual, although Erikson makes it explicit that "success" is not an all-or-none affair, but rather is reflected in a favorable balance of healthy, mature forces over their opposites.

Stages are differentiated from each other according to the amount of change or transition required by an event or series of events. For example, the birth of the first child requires major changes in family relationships and functions, as does that same child's entering school. Family life-cycle stages include a transition when the children begin to leave home. Going away to school is often seen as a major step in this particular stage, which is called the "launching stage."

As we have seen, the major task of this stage for the child is the successful discarding of the dependency of childhood and early adolescence, and the formation of more independent, mature relationships with parents and peers, as well as beginning to channel his or her energies toward an occupation. For the parents the major task is letting go of the children and redirecting energy to other, more appropriate activities. The situation in the family in which the oldest child is leaving for college is one of an intertwining of developmental issues for the children, the parents as individuals and as marital partners, and for the family as a whole.

Understanding how families negotiate these developmental transitions requires that they be viewed from a systems theory perspective. Individual change and growth feeds into and affects the family system and is in turn affected by the various structures and processes of the

system. This paper attempts to integrate the developmental and systems perspectives as it looks at how individuals, marriages, and families move through the changes wrought by time and by the development of their members.

The issues for women are somewhat different from those for men during middle-age transition periods. Frank and Frank (1956) consider the basic question for women in middle-age to be "What shall I do with my life when I am no longer needed or required to serve others?" The woman who has chosen marriage and motherhood has for almost 20 years devoted most of her energy to caring for her family, and obviously her self-image is intricately tied to these activities. As the children need her less and less she must develop interests and activities that will allow her self-image to grow and maintain a positive focus. One pertinent question that may be asked here is: What is the effect of the child's leaving on the mother's self-image? A woman's assessment of her performance as a mother must be affected by the kind of person she sees her child to be, the kind of life they will enter when they leave, and the opinions expressed by the community about the child. Do feelings of success as a parent help a mother to adjust to the winding down of the role?

Men's lives and self-images as a rule are not as intensely connected to hearth and home as wives' are; they are more likely to be concerned about performance at work. According to Neugarten and Havighurst (1967), women define their age-status in terms of intra-family events, while men's age perceptions are tied to their career progress. Neugarten, as well as Sheehy (1976), comments that women during middle-

age often experience a sense of increased freedom as they explore new-found interests and abilities, while their husbands are experiencing job frustrations, since they may have gone as far as they are likely to go in their work-lives.

These conclusions are based on the experience of women who go back to work after a lapse of many years. Women's feelings and experiences may change as they take advantage of opportunities to work (or are forced to do so by circumstances), or to develop personal interests along with or instead of limiting their activities to raising a family. The feeling of freedom alluded to above often functions as a counter-balance against feelings of depression and loss of self-esteem which exist side-by-side with new hopes and possibilities.

How do all of these issues come together and play against one an-other as the children begin to leave home? What events and experiences prior to the actual separation help make the process a successful one for the family? What specific role does the community play in aiding or hindering the process? How does the oldest child's leaving affect the next child in line? How is the parents' marriage affected? These are some of the questions this study attempts to explore by examining families who are living through this stage of family life.

CHAPTER III

THE METHOD

## The Setting

The setting for this study was a small, affluent New England col-
lege town with 15,000 permanent residents, and another 35,000 students
and faculty connected with the three colleges in the immediate area.
As in most college communities there is a large turnover of people
from year to year, and this lends an atmosphere of transiency and in-
stability to the town, making it somewhat difficult to establish and
maintain long-term friendships or community involvements. In addition,
the town has experienced an extremely rapid growth-rate in the last 20
years, due to the expansion of the local colleges. This has changed
the character of the community from that of a quaint, homogeneous New
England village to that of a bustling center of political and cultural
activity.

Underneath the constantly shifting surface of the town lies a sub-
structure of solid, stable, long-term residents, many of whom have lived
in it three or four generations or more. The town has several well-
established churches and community organizations which serve the middle-
class majority. Residents of the town take a very active role in local
affairs, and local political and economic issues are openly and often
passionately debated. The town school system is renowned, and is one
of the most important foci for social contact in the community.

There is virtually no industry in the area, and thus no signific-
ant blue-collar population, although there are remnants of what was once

a thriving farming industry, and several large and medium-sized farms contribute to the local ambience.

Because of the diversity of the local population it is possible for an individual or family to adopt one of a number of alternative life-styles, ranging from traditional New England individualism to modern suburban to semi-communal. Drugs and alcohol are fairly easily obtainable and, although alcohol consumption has made a comeback lately among the local teenagers, marijuana is still popular. In recent years the women's liberation movement has become a major force in town, and it is hard to find people who have not been at least exposed to women's issues.

Children growing up and attending school in town are exposed daily to a wide variety of influences and pressures. The school system places heavy academic and social pressure on students. When students enter the high school they are confronted with an academic environment that is strongly college-oriented, and a social environment that encourages the development of small cliques which are often at odds with one another, and which reflect the diverse ethnic, cultural, and economic groups in the town. In the past 80% of the graduates went to college. The figure is now 70%. Most students develop ties with a particular group and associate mainly with group members. The high school has relatively little structure, which allows students a great deal of freedom and mobility. This is a mixed blessing since it offers students many non-traditional academic opportunities, but demands more independence and maturity than many can handle. Aside from the usual extra-curricular school activities, the town provides little in the way of faci-

lities for adolescents to occupy their time and energy. This has been officially recognized by the town in their recent Major Needs Assessment, and a youth center has recently been initiated.

In summary, the setting for this study illustrates the convergence of a number of trends and tensions within modern American society; suburban vs. rural lifestyles; traditional vs. modern values; cultural diversity vs. homogeneity; mobility and change vs. a sense of roots and a respect for history. It is within this complex, multi-faceted community that the study took place.

## Finding the Families

Since the object of the study was to examine normal developmental processes in families it was necessary to locate families who could be characterized as "healthy" or "successful." First, minimal criteria for "normalcy" were established. Neither the family as a unit, nor any of its members, could be in psychotherapy, nor could any member have been labelled by a social agency as having a problem. These criteria were not meant to imply that "normal" families have no problems, or that families not meeting the criteria were fundamentally different from "normals." They were merely intended to establish a baseline of relative family stability and health. Further, single-parent families and families with only one child were excluded.

With the above criteria in mind, several local clergymen were approached and the project was described to them. They were asked to provide names of families whose oldest child was a freshman at an out-of-town college, and who seemed to be intact and healthy. A list of 10

possible families was compiled. Six families were then selected ran-
domly and the parents were sent a short introductory note (see Appendix
IV) identifying myself and the general aim of the study. In addition,
a friend had mentioned the study to a family who met the criteria and
they expressed an interest in participating. They were sent a note as
well. A follow-up phone call was made to assess interest in the pro-
ject. One family was disqualified because their child had gone to a
local school and was staying at home. The other six sets of parents
agreed to participate in an introductory interview in which the study
would be described in detail. On the basis of this interview one fami-
ly decided not to participate because of the time involved and the
depth of the subject matter. The other five families enthusiastically
agreed to participate, and supplied the names of three other potential
families (two of which were on the original list). These families were
contacted and all agreed to be interviewed.

It is important to reiterate the salient characteristics of this
group of families at this point, in order to make clear the particular
slice of American family life through which we will attempt to under-
stand family development. These are middle-class professional church-
going families who have been identified by their ministers as being
among the more successful members of their congregations. They are not
necessarily "average" American families in any statistical sense.


## The Interview Procedure

A total of 65 one-hour taped interviews were done over a period of
approximately six months. The order of the interviews with each family

was as follows:

        1--Introductory Interview with Parents
        2--Parents Together
        3--Individual Parent
        4--Other Parent
        5--Parents Together
        6--Parents Together
        7--Second Oldest Child
        8--Oldest Child

In one family the youngest child was also interviewed because less than three years separated all the children. The order of the interviews varied slightly depending upon the families' convenience, but the basic pattern was followed throughout. The majority of the interviews took place in the evening in the families' homes. A few were conducted during the day, either with the husbands in their offices, or with the nonworking wives in their homes. Interviews with the oldest children were done while they were home during vacations.

The specific content of the interviews was suggested by previous research and theoretical considerations discussed above. The complete outline of the interview topics will be found in Appendix II, and only a short summary will be presented here. After the introductory interview established some initial rapport, the first substantive interview with the parents together covered the early history of their relationship, from the initial contact through the births of their children. Inevitably, about halfway through this interview an almost visible glow came over couples as they reminisced about the beginnings of their life together. Most couples commented that I was inducing them to think about things they had not thought about in 20 years. By the end

of this interview an open, trusting atmosphere seemed to prevail, the couples expressed their enjoyment of the process, and they felt they might be able to learn something about themselves through their participation. Personally I felt as though I was making friends.

The purpose of joint interviews was to allow the spouses to respond to each other's perceptions and comments, and thereby gain what would hopefully be a more accurate picture of their family life. In addition, it allowed me to develop a sense of how they interact and communicate with each other.

The individual interviews allowed spouses to provide their own perspectives on the events and processes discussed, and allowed me to gather information about them as individuals. Topics included their development in their original families; feelings about their current personal and professional lives; perceptions about their oldest children's development as well as the other children; aging; their thoughts about the future.

The next two interviews were with the spouses together and covered among others the following topics: perceptions of their current relationships; their relationships with their children, especially the oldest; changes since the oldest has been gone; relations with extended families; social relationships; the future.

The interview with the second oldest child included: perceptions of their parents' relationships; perceptions of and relationships with the oldest child; perceived changes since the oldest has been gone.

The interview with the oldest included: perceptions of their parents' marriages; changes since they have left; the development of their

independence; their intra- and extra-familial relationships.

The first family interviewed served as a pilot family in that the appropriateness of pre-selected topics was tested; new topics arose out of the initial interviews; the order and format of the interviews was checked. Since the data from the first family seemed to be useful, and corresponded to that from the other families, it was decided to include these data as part of the overall study.

All interviews were taped on a cassette recorder with the families' permission. Detailed summaries and partial transcripts of the interviews were done by the interviewer. The transcripts were essentially complete except for elimination of repetitions, grammatical errors, and conversations not related to questions or issues, and condensations of lengthy discussions. The names of all participants have been changed to protect anonymity.

Once the interviews were recorded and transcribed, I listened to the tape recordings several times, and a number of topics emerged that were common to either most or all of the families, and which seemed to reflect important aspects of the relevant developmental issues as stated or implied by the theories mentioned. A list of these topics appears in Appendix III. Many of these specific themes grew out of general areas of discussion that were developed from theoretical reading or which were clearly implied by the focus of the study. Chapter headings and the emphases placed on content within chapters stem from what appeared to be logical groupings of specific themes into broader categories, which tied directly into major areas of family life. This particular way of organizing the data may not be the only meaningful way,

but it should provide a salient picture of important issues for these families, and of some of the ways in which they experience the stresses and joys of individual and family growth.

In order to set the stage for discussion of the major findings of the study, and to provide an introduction to the families, the next two chapters will describe my impressions of family members (Chapter IV) and will summarize their reconstructions of their families' formation and early history (Chapter V). These chapters are not meant to be exhaustive, but are intended merely to familiarize the reader with the study's participants, and with some of the forces which shaped the relationships and developmental issues which are the main focus of this project.

Subsequent chapters will explore areas of family life including the parents' marital relationships (Chapter VI); the roles of parenthood, work, the oldest child, and social networks (Chapters VII, VIII, IX, X); changes in the family as the oldest leaves (Chapter VI); the future (Chapter XII).

C H A P T E R   I V

THE FAMILIES

In this chapter I would like to give a brief description of each
of the families individually, and a general description of their char-
acteristics as a group. The descriptions are based on the content of
the interviews and on impressions of family members gathered as I talked
with them.

As a group the families in this study are quite impressive and
somewhat unusual. Five husbands are tenured university professors.
The other three husbands are department administrators. Four wives have
been working either full-time or part-time for some years. One wife
started working during the study. One wife is a graduate student and
two wives are not currently working. All have graduated from or attend-
ed college. Three families have three children, three families have
four children, and two families have five children. All eight families
are socioeconomically middle or upper-middle class. The husbands range
in age from 43-48, the wives from 38-45. Spouses have been married
from 19-21 years. Of the oldest children six are 18; one is 17; one is
19. Six oldest children are boys; two are girls. The demographic
characteristics of the families are listed in Appendix I.

Every family in the study lives in a large, well-furnished, com-
fortable single-family home, all of which have a very warm, informal at-
mosphere about them. They have lived in town from 7-19 years. Most of
the families could be characterized as traditional middle-class, home
and community oriented, American families, and some describe themselves

that way. They are almost all extremely child-centered families, and it was often hard for parents to talk about their marital relationships separately from their lives as parents, possibly because the focus of the study emphasized the parental role to a large degree.

As indicated earlier, several families knew each other, more often than not through common participation in child-related activities, e.g. the local hockey association.

### The Whites

The White family consists of Morton, 48, a college professor; Sheila, 45, a graduate student; Barbara, 17, a freshman at a private college about 100 miles from home; John, 16, and Julie, 15, both in high school.

Sheila had heard about the study from a mutual friend, and expressed an interest in participating. They were the first family I interviewed and helped set the tone of task-oriented informality that I felt with all the families. I had no idea at first how families would react to me or to the study, and Sheila and Morton's friendliness and willingness to discuss their lives with me relieved my initial anxiety. They were tolerant of my occasional vagueness and ambiguity, and seemed comfortable in their role as "pilot family." In fact they made a procedural suggestion which I adopted with all the families. They suggested that the children would probably provide more information if I interviewed them alone than if the entire family were present.

The interviews with the parents were conducted in Morton's study; a cluttered, book-lined room suggestive of a small English library.

Interviews with the children took place in a small downstairs bedroom. While their parents were open and articulate in exploring thorny or intimate questions, the children were somewhat more hesitant to reveal their feelings, and were more tentative and uncertain in their answers.

Morton is short, with a full dark beard and a strong, craggy voice with an infectious laugh. Having grown up in Europe, he has a slight accent which adds to his mystique as a crusty professor. As a child he did not live with his family, but grew up in various foster institutions. He came to America to continue his education, and met Sheila while a graduate student. He describes himself as a "curmudgeon." Professionally, Morton has been quite successful and is one of the top men in his field. He has started a number of societies and journals, but is somewhat frustrated because he feels he has very few peers with whom he can communicate.

Sheila is a slim, dark, attractive woman with sharp features and a very quiet, relaxed manner. Her voice is so soft that I often had difficulty hearing her even though I was only a few feet away. Since moving to their present location from the midwest Sheila has become heavily involved in the women's movement. This has led her to attend graduate school, and she hopes to pursue a career as a psychotherapist. Interestingly, Sheila's current academic work involves a self-analysis which covers many of the areas we talked about during the interviews.

As a couple Morton and Sheila seem very relaxed and comfortable with each other. Their participation in the couple's interviews was balanced, and each could confirm, contradict, or elaborate on the other's remarks. Both have a lively sense of humor, and these were

freely displayed throughout our sessions together.

In some ways the Whites are quite different from the other families interviewed. They have no young children, and are not nearly as actively involved in their children's activities as are most of the other parents. They do not belong to any church or community organizations, and are somewhat isolated, putting most of their energy into their active professional lives. Though the Whites are a closely knit family, the ages of the children are such that home functions more as a base from which to venture into the community, rather than as a center of major activities. Despite these differences the Whites' contributions to this study mesh well with those of the other families.

Barbara, the oldest child, is a pretty, dark-haired girl with a very soft-spoken, almost reticent manner. I interviewed her twice. The first interview took place during Barbara's visit home on the second weekend of school. She was suffering an acute bout of homesickness (discussed in a later chapter) and responded to my questions in a perfunctory and hesitant manner. We talked for just a few minutes and then decided to continue at another time. The second interview went much more smoothly.

Julie, the youngest, has the same low-key manner as her sister. Both girls closely resemble their mother in this way. John, the middle child, was a bit more forward and social than his sisters, and appeared to be the one who engages in most of whatever mild rebelling is done by the children.

The Fosters

The Foster family consists of Michael, 46, a college professor; Judith, 45, a speech therapist; Harold, 18, a freshman at a small private college in the midwest; Lynn, 15; Raymond, 11; and Leonard, 9.

My first meeting with the Fosters took place in their downstairs playroom, while the two youngest sons were watching television. The Fosters offered me coffee, listened as I described my study, and expressed their pleasure that I was doing this kind of research. They then volunteered the names of several families they thought might be interested in participating. I felt quite relaxed with them, and they turned out to be the most articulate and informative of all the families.

Michael is a tall, slim man with a great deal of nervous energy. His voice projects this energy, as he talks rapidly with many starts and stops. My impression is that he is a man with strong emotions, especially concerning his family. Judith says he is very direct and "painfully honest." He stated quite clearly that his work-life has been a source of frustration for the past few years and he has turned to his family for solace.

Judith struck me as a good counterbalance to Michael. She is a tall woman with a full figure and a soft, gentle manner. She exudes maternal, nurturant qualities, and seemed a very warm, down-to-earth person.

Michael and Judith are both from midwestern families. They met in college and were married four years later, while in their mid-20's. After they were married, Judith was told she could not have children.

While they were adjusting to this circumstance, Judith became pregnant, and they have been able to have the kind of family they wanted. Both are extremely devoted to their children but have other interests as well. Michael is a sports "nut" and spends a great deal of time in athletic activity with his family and friends. Judith is not particularly interested in sports, but works full-time, and belongs to a bridge group.

As individuals they seem like opposites, but they have managed to complement each other quite well, and I sensed a very strong commitment between them. They share the same basic values, and each is genuinely proud of the other. They were capable of laughing at each other and at themselves, and each could take a stand against the other's views without difficulty. I found their oldest son, Harold, to be a big, strapping blond who was friendly and open with me, while Lynn struck me as a pretty, shy girl who possesses a quiet strength and dignity. Both seemed to be intelligent, responsible children with strong family ties.

In sum, the Fosters are in a real sense a classic American family. They work hard, and have strong ties to each other and to their community.

## The Robinsons

The Robinson family consists of Donald, 46, a college professor; Jane, 38; Jessica, a freshman at a small private school a few hundred miles from home; Diane, 16; Ruth, 13; and Robert, 4.

Jane and Donald met while he was a graduate student and she was a college freshman. They were very compatible and decided after only a

short time to get married, even though there was an eight year differ-
ence in their ages.

Donald is a low-key, soft-spoken man who seems comfortable and set-
tled in his ways. He responded to many of my questions in a matter-of-
fact way and did not elaborate a great deal. Jane is an attractive,
vivacious woman whose career has been that of wife and mother. She is
the youngest sister of older brothers, and was protected somewhat as a
child. She sees herself in a similar dependent position with Donald but
does not seem at all uncomfortable with it. She did say quite clearly
that she is feeling frustrated and trapped in the house, and is sensing
a need to find alternative outlets.

The major complicating factor in their lives as individuals and as
a couple is their four-year-old son, Robert, who is hyperkinetic. With
three growing daughters the Robinsons were essentially a completed fa-
mily, and Jane was beginning to consider ways of branching out to meet
some of her personal needs when Robert was born. His needs as a young
child have forced Jane to delay her emancipation from the house. Donald
feels that he is a bit too old to put the necessary enthusiasm into ac-
tivities for a youngster, and feels guilty about that. Both have ac-
cepted the responsibility of being Robert's parents and he seems to be
a lively and happy child. The other children, especially Jessica when
she is home, give him a lot of attention and taken some of the burden
off their parents' shoulders.

All of the interviews were conducted in the living-room, which is
centrally located, and we were sometimes interrupted by Robert. Usual-
ly Diane or Ruth was enlisted to occupy him while we were talking.

Jessica was described to me as a very outgoing, exuberant, some-what scatter-brained child who still had a lot of growing up to do. When I talked with her she struck me as lively and verbal but she seemed to have done some serious thinking and maturing in the weeks she was away at school; at least she talked as though she had.  Diane reminded me of Lynn Foster; quiet, soft-spoken, but somewhat more organized than her older sibling.

The Robinsons are an example of a family that is just beginning the launching process, relative to the other families, in that the parents have not yet made any major adjustments in anticipation of the children leaving, and are just now thinking about those changes.

## The Abbotts

The Abbott family consists of Richard, 43, a college professor; Katherine, 43, who works part-time in a religious bookstore; Peter, 18, a freshman at a state university in a nearby state; Linda, 16; Sarah, 12; and Nancy, 11.

Richard and Katherine are both from the midwest, and met while they were in college.  They were married about two years later and have been married for 21 years.

My interview with Richard took place in his laboratory, where we were surrounded by electrical and chemical equipment.  Although I was a bit distracted, Richard seemed perfectly relaxed and able to concentrate on the topic.  Throughout all the interviews he came across as a calm, rational, friendly man with somewhat flat affect.  He was quite like-able and answered my questions thoughtfully though not in too great

depth. He appears to be quite content with the major aspects of his life and capable of dealing with problems when they arise.

Katherine impressed me as the nervous, high-strung half of the couple. She is a tall woman with strong traces of a midwestern twang in her voice. She appears to be going through some "withdrawal" symptoms as she lets go of the children and thinks about redirecting her life. I felt as though it was painful for her to talk about the children growing up and leaving, and she admitted to feeling strong emotional conflict about it.

Richard describes Katherine as "the ideal American woman." He seems genuinely proud of her, and she of him, although they seem slightly distant with each other. Like the Fosters they came across as opposites who are complementary to each other. When Katherine gets too intrusive in the children's lives Richard pulls her back, while Katherine would like him to be a bit more involved.

The children appear to be a bit subdued and somewhat conservative in their attitudes, though both Peter and Lynn come across as very likeable people. As with the White children, their responses to my questions did not flow easily, as though they were too much in the middle of the issues to have a real perspective on them. Peter is planning to be married soon, and that appears to be the arena in which many family issues are currently being worked out.


The Johnsons

The Johnson family consists of Steven, 44, a college dean; Joyce, 43; Paul, 18, a freshman in a private college about 80 miles from home;

Mary, 17;  Joseph, 14; Carol, 12; and Marjorie, 7.

Joyce is from the midwest and Steven is from the east. They met in college and were married about four years later, after Steven returned from the army. My interview with Steven took place in his office. He impressed me as a strong, energetic, dynamic man who enjoys the turmoil of heading a major university program. He is of medium height, with a full face, and a mischevious quality about him. Steven likes to be in control of his life. He does not like being surprised at work or at home. At the same time he seems perfectly capable of dealing with crises when they arise.

Joyce is a short, heavy-set woman with a very warm, friendly personality. She has not worked in the past and has no desire to work now. At first I was a bit skeptical of her dramatic, enthusiastic manner of relating, but gradually became comfortable with it and felt it to be sincere. Joyce really seems to enjoy life. She attributes her positive attitude to the fact that she recently quit smoking. My initial doubt as to the power of this event to influence her attitudes was dispelled as every family member I talked with mentioned its effects.

Steven and Joyce seem to be very much in love with each other and express intense satisfaction with their relationship. They talk as though they are still newlyweds after almost 21 years of marriage. As with the other couples, their participation in the joint interviews was balanced; each being perfectly capable of expressing him/herself as an individual. Perhaps the single most salient impression I gathered about Steven and Joyce as a couple was a sense of energy. They seem to work at maintaining their interest in each other and in themselves. Their

marriage is quite traditional in terms of the division of labor and of roles, and they both are quite comfortable with things that way. Both are intelligent, verbal people, and they provided me with a number of useful insights and perspectives.

## The Kellys

The Kelly family consists of Tom, 44, a fund-raiser for a local college; Diane, 40, a saleswoman at a local store; Barry, 18, a freshman at a university in a neighboring state; Irene, 16, a student at a local school for the deaf; and John, 14.

Tom and Diane were both raised on the east coast. Tom was the younger brother of two sisters and Diane was the oldest of two sisters. They met just after Tom graduated college and Diane was entering school. Diane dropped out during her second year so they could get married, which was a disappointment for her family since she was the first to go to college.

My interview with Tom took place in his office. He is of medium height and slightly overweight, with a very young-looking, almost "baby-face." I found him to be a very warm individual who likes people and is concerned about how they view him. He likes to make a good impression. His demeanor is that of a jovial, happy-go-lucky fellow, but underneath he appeared somewhat depressed when he talked about his work-life, which has not been too enjoyable for him. On the other hand, questions about his marriage and family were answered with obvious pride and pleasure.

Diane was interviewed in their living-room. She is an attractive

woman with short hair and a mellow quality reminiscent of Sheila White. She has been working full-time for a few years and is very happy in her job. She also enjoys her domestic life and takes pride in her domestic skills.

Together the Kellys present themselves as a strong, loving couple who are deeply committed to each other. From my impressions of Diane and Tom as individuals I would have expected Diane to be the calming, rational force in the relationship, and Tom to be the nervous one, but according to them it is the opposite. Diane is the one who gets upset more easily and Tom is the stabilizing one.

The major problem they have had to deal with as a couple is that their middle child, Irene, has been deaf from birth. This has affected Tom's choice of jobs and the family's choice of where to live. Irene has been attending a nearby residential school. They expect her to graduate soon and return home to live. Irene is still a concern to them in terms of her future and their role in it. They say they dealt successfully with their feelings about having a deaf child early in their marriage, and it is not a source of tension between them now.

## The Porters

The Porter family consists of Bill, 43, director of the physical plant at a local college; Susan, 41, head teacher at a local church school; Larry, 18, a freshman at a small private college a few hundred miles from home; Nancy, 17; Barbara, 15; Howard, 12; and Seth, 10.

Bill and Susan were both raised in the east, in neighboring communities, and knew of each other by reputation. They met at the beach

where Susan was working as a lifeguard, and were married a few years later after she finished college and he had returned from the service. All interviews were conducted in their living room.

Bill Porter is a handsome, sturdy-looking man with short, graying hair and a powerful voice. As a young man he was an athlete, and still has the look of a man who enjoys physical activity. He worked in the construction business for many years before moving to his present position. Bill impressed me as a forceful individual who likes to be in charge. He describes himself as a fairly straight-laced, conservative person, although he claims to have become a bit more liberal as a result of working around students. In his leisure time he enjoys hunting and participating in the athletic activities of his children, especially hockey and football.

Susan is a short, stocky woman with a pretty face and short brown hair. She has been working part-time as a teacher in a local church school and enjoys it very much. She is an active, vivacious woman who likes to read, and who swims every day. Susan's father died when she was 10 years old, and she was raised by her mother.

In their relationship, Bill has been the dominant one, the decision-maker, the provider, and Susan feels she has been the submissive one, the giver. In the past few years this pattern has shifted somewhat, and there appears to be more of a balance in their relationship. Their marriage seems to be a strong one. After their fifth child Bill had a vasectomy, and they claim this has allowed them a freedom with each other they had not had before. They feel they are very compatible and have a balance of similar and different interests. Both say that they

rarely argue, and they claim to have had very few real fights in their marriage. Their interaction with each other during the interviews was similar to that of many of the other couples. I sensed no tension between them. They were very relaxed and comfortable with each other.

Larry and Nancy, the two oldest children, seem much like their father and mother, respectively. Larry is a big, athletic boy who reminded me of Harold Foster and Barry Kelly. Nancy looks like her mother and has a similar manner. Interestingly, the relationship between the two siblings, as described by Nancy, parallels that of their parents; that is, Larry expects Nancy to be submissive to his wishes around the house. Nancy, who is rapidly gaining self-confidence and maturity, is angry at this expectation, and rebels against male domination. All-in-all it seems to be a situation of healthy conflict within a secure, stable family environment.

## The Pattersons

The Patterson family consists of George, 47, Director of Food Services at an area hospital; Rose, 44; Joe, 19, a freshman at a small private college in the midwest; Edward, 16; and Tom, 14.

George and Rose were both raised in New England, and met in college. They developed their relationship while George was in the service, and were married after Rose graduated college. The interviews were conducted in their living room.

George Patterson is of medium height with a bit of a middle-age paunch and a booming voice. During the interviews he was constantly smoking cigarettes. I found him to be a man of great humor, but one who

uses his humor to avoid communicating very much about himself. Often he would avoid answering in-depth questions involving feelings. When he did provide some insight he sometimes shrugged off the significance of his feelings. However, there were times when I felt his responses were real, personal and unguarded.

Rose is an attractive woman with a full figure and a quiet, somewhat sad manner. In her appearance she reminded me of Katherine Abbott and Judith Foster. She had been looking for a job for the past few months, and had recently obtained one where George works. She started working during the interviews. Rose indicated that she and George had had serious marital difficulties several years ago but chose to remain together, partly in order to raise the children. Both were reluctant to discuss the nature of their problems, and I did not feel it appropriate to press the issue.

Although I liked Rose and George very much as individuals, interviewing them together was an uncomfortable experience for me, though it pointed out the validity of my impressions of the other couples' relationships. There was definite tension between them that I had not felt with the other couples. This tension was generated whenever I asked a question involving personal feelings rather than factual information. George would usually answer in a perfunctory manner, and Rose would attempt to draw him out, often accompanying her question with nonverbal cues to me. I felt as though Rose was using the interviews in an attempt to reach George in some way. I had to consciously avoid slipping into a therapist role and losing my neutrality.

George and Rose both recognize that they have trouble communicating.

Rose feels that George is an excellent provider but is not as available to her emotionally as she would like. George admits that their relationship is not all it could be but seems resigned to it. On the positive side, both seem quite devoted to the children, and enjoy their roles as parents. The children seem not to have any serious problems and are maturing well. Individually, and as a couple, the Pattersons are making the adjustments necessary to allow the children to grow up and leave home.

CHAPTER  V

IN THE BEGINNING

. . . It's more or less the expectation that people will get
married and have a family and it will be a happy family, and
that there will be attention to home life (Michael Foster).

I felt like I had accomplished something.  I was pleased with
her and was happy to have her.  I thought to myself, "Gee!  I
did it" (Jane Robinson).

Families begin when a man and a woman meet, court, and marry.  The
conditions under which this takes place can serve to enhance the likeli-
hood that the marriage will get off to a good start, or may militate
against the success of the new relationship.  Similar backgrounds, val-
ues, and lifestyles make adjustments easier, and support from parents
and friends can be an important factor in a young couple's early years.
Even the general ambience of the culture of the time plays a role.  Cer-
tainly the happiness and stability of the families of origin can esta-
blish an expectation of a similar life for young spouses.

The couples in this study all met and married in the early and mid
1950's.  It was a time when people were searching for security and sta-
bility, trying to reestablish a sense of order after World War II.  Every
couple met either in college, or just after one spouse had graduated.
Michael Foster expresses the feeling of the time:

. . .people in our generation that's just what happened to
people.  It happened to most of our friends or most of the
people you knew. . . .  People met in college, they got mar-
ried some time later, they had a family.  To me it was almost
like you fell more into the social cultural context. . . .
That was more or less a normal thing to have happen to you.

Most spouses came from stable, secure families, and felt as though they had good upbringings. Looking back 25 or 30 years they felt as though they had an appropriate amount of independence given the social context of the time:

> I was really given a lot of freedom. . . . I would come home, "I want to do this, I want to do that." "You want to do it? Go ahead try it." And so if it turned out all right, "Oh good, did you have a good time; you enjoy it?" So I think I felt an awful lot of freedom in terms of being able to try new experiences. Of course I was raised in the 30's and 40's and everything was pretty well chaperoned (Judith Foster).

One factor which seemed to contribute to some spouses' independence, especially the wives, was the perceived independence of their own mothers. This is perhaps most clearly seen with Joyce Johnson and Susan Porter. Both of their fathers died when they were young and they were raised essentially by their mothers. They describe their mothers as very independent women who could have held them back but did not. When it was time for Joyce to go away to college her mother told her that she should not enter Joyce's thoughts about going away. Mrs. Foster's mother took over her husband's business when he died and later became prominent in local politics. Both women saw their mothers as strong, capable people who encouraged them to be independent.

Not all spouses felt that their families actively fostered their independence. Both Jane Robinson and Tom Kelly mentioned that their parents protected them and did not particularly encourage them to make their own decisions. Interestingly, both were youngest children; Tom was the only boy and Jane the only girl in their respective families. They experienced no great difficulty when it was time for them to leave

home for college, and they felt their parents were proud of them.

It seems clear that by the time spouses had met each other and developed a premarital relationship most had established some level of independence and distance from their families; the women by being in college; the men by either being in college or having already graduated and started some independent life.

## Acceptance by In-Laws

When a young person gets married, in a real sense they marry not just another person but a whole family. By their attitudes and behavior toward the couple they can foment trouble, or help cement the marriage. Virtually every spouse felt accepted by their in-laws, and none of the spouses felt that the marriage was opposed by the other's family. Several spouses seemed to have exceptionally good relations with one or both parents-in-law. In a few cases in which wives were still in college they sensed that their parents would have preferred them to wait until graduation. Diane Kelly's parents were "sorely disappointed" that she did not finish college but when they realized that marriage was what she really wanted they supported her decision.

After the couples were actually married, family support took various forms depending upon the newlyweds' circumstances. In some cases either one or both spouses lived with their in-laws for periods from a few weeks to several months in the first year of marriage. Some parents helped furnish the newlyweds' first household by going shopping with them, giving them gifts, or by helping with finances. This seems to have been accomplished with a minimum of intrusiveness by the parents.

In instances where the young couples felt parental involvement was inappropriate they seemed capable of maintaining their distance. Richard Abbott's parents invited them along on a trip out west just after they were married, but they declined to go.

Family involvement with couples seemed to taper off after the spouses settled into their new life a bit, often because they moved out of proximity to their parents. Parents were reintroduced as grandparents when the first child was born to the couple. This provided another test of the young spouses' independence from their parents, as well as another chance for the new grandparents to attempt to undermine or support the marriage.

## The First Child

The birth of a couple's first child must certainly be the most significant event in the early years of their marriage. It should of necessity change the nature of their relationship. There are new roles and responsibilities to be delegated, new skills to be learned, and the attitudes and resources with which couples approach this phase of family life will shape their gradually evolving parental styles. Every couple in this study had their first child within the first three years of their marriage.

The attitude of parents in this study toward the birth of the first child is beautifully expressed by Judith Foster:

> I just have a theory from most mothers I talk with. . .that first child of any marriage is a very special child; it really is a wonderment. I think the first child is a special kind of miracle. . . . To my mind that's because of the placement.

It's a special miracle in that the first time you experience
anything it's really unique and heightened and it's with you
always. . . . If it all goes well; if there's not a lot of
trauma or unhappiness. . . . If the child is a normal healthy
child. . .so when that baby was born and they said, "Oh, what
a fine big boy he is" and I saw he had a pointed head, and the
doctor said there was nothing wrong with him. . .that had
probably been my largest concern, but I wasn't really aware
of it until that doctor told me that and then the world seemed
just right. . .to this day he is special because each phase
that he goes through is a <u>new</u> phase. . . .

This feeling seems to express what Erikson terms "belief in the species"
and reflects the successful resolution of the young adult developmental
issue of a sense of intimacy vs. one of isolation. Similar faith was
expressed by mothers who seemed to feel the birth of their first child
as the culmination of their womanhood and their marriages. Sheila
White's perception of other women changed. She acquired great admira-
tion for those who had "done it," and she saw it as "quite an accomplish-
ment."

It's just terribly terribly marvelously exciting to produce
something that's us; from us (Joyce Johnson).

Katherine Abbott's feelings were similar to those of Sheila White. She
needed to know that she "<u>could</u> get pregnant" so that she would feel she
had accomplished something that was very important to her.

Finding out she could get pregnant may have been especially import-
ant for Judith Foster because she had been told by doctors that she pro-
bably could not have children. When she became pregnant

I think I felt quite joyful actually that we would have a
family because I kind of like the continuity of generations.

This feeling that an important event was taking place was experienced by husbands as well as wives:

> I was excited too, but again in a slightly bewildered I never thought I would be a father way. . . . I felt a sort of glow in a rather self-centered way (Morton White).

> I felt a tremendous responsibility. . . . I felt I was in charge of a human life that was dependent upon what we did. . . and this was a fantastic experience that I had to go through for a week or so (Tom Kelly).

Every couple mentioned the "specialness" of the first child as related specifically to the fact of being first, but in two families the child represented a concrete link between generations. Tom Kelly's father died while Tom's wife was pregnant, and Tom felt that "for every close one that died there was a new one coming along." The Whites actually decided to have a child after Morton's sister died:

> It is sort of legendary with me. It was when my sister died . . . . The form it took for me had to do with providing something for my mother. . . . We did have a conversation. . . . We were in New York staying in a hotel and we talked about it right then and there in a highly emotional way about having a child. . . . My sister died in February 1957 and Barbara was born in December (Morton White).

As mentioned above, when a family enters a new phase of the life-cycle there are both opportunities for growth and possibilities for tension and stress. Most spouses recalled the first child's birth in this dualistic way. Potential conflict arose in a number of areas. Almost every wife was working when the child was born and they had to stop work in order to take care of the baby. Wives reacted to this forced hiatus from the work-world with either an accepting sadness or feelings of resent-

ment, but the culture at the time placed heavy emphasis on full-time mo-
thering, and these young couples were in the mainstream. The mixed qual-
ity of the blessing of birth is most evident in Judith Foster's case
since she had resigned herself to not having children:

> We both led professional lives and I was quite happy. . . . I
> taught children. . . . At that point in your life you don't
> think well maybe you would miss something in the closeness of
> a mother-child relationship. I just gave that up; it wasn't
> going to be so. . . . I wasn't going to worry about it. . . .

When she in fact did become pregnant

> It was quite a surprise. . . . If we had been planning it I
> don't think we would have planned to have a child that soon
> . . . . It was ill-timed in terms of when the child was going
> to be born. . . . Michael was due to be released from the
> service in July and the baby was to be born in July. Now you
> never do that. . . . Then all of a sudden the realities of
> life start setting in and you have to plan and provide. . . .
> I don't even know if we were that pleased. I think we were
> just kind of shocked. . . . We were a little bit concerned
> about were we between the two of us capable of coping with
> this human being that we were going to be responsible for be-
> cause we hadn't thought in terms of being responsible for an-
> other being. . . . There's a bit of anxiety involved in that
> situation and I think that for the first time we felt anxious-.
> ness come into our relationship which had never been before
> . . . . I felt more anxious about could I cope with this baby
> cause I had no experience with babies and I didn't trust Mi-
> chael because he didn't have any more experience than I did
> with babies, and I think he was thinking what's she going to
> do . . . .

Most couples made gradual adjustments to this new family member and
while it was sometimes hard, each couple quickly became a family in deed
as well as in numbers:

> . . . .You might want to talk about something but you can't
> at that particular time because a third person needs attending
> to. . . . It gets progressively worse as you add numbers . . .

> you think of yourself more as a family than as a couple. . .
> (Jane Robinson). If anything it brought us closer together
> (Donald Robinson). You have one more common interest (Jane).

The couples in this study seemed to integrate the child into their lives rather than allowing the baby to dominate them:

> We travelled a lot with our children. We never stayed home
> because of them. . . . I always heard let the children adjust
> to your life . . . (Katherine Abbott).

When the first baby was born the families of origin often stepped back into the picture in order to bask in the glow of a new grandchild. It was at this stage also that friends and neighbors in similar circumstances began to coalesce into a support network which for most families has continued to function, albeit with changing membership, up through the families' current developmental phase.

Several grandparents contributed money or gifts, and quite a few travelled long distances to visit after the baby was born. The young mothers solicited advice about parenting from their parents, and the emotional security of having someone to turn to was probably as important as the practical utility of the advice. This was clearly the case with regard to friends and neighbors who were themselves just learning to be parents. The Kellys had no family nearby and rather than call a doctor Diane would ask a neighbor about

> minor little things. . .which is really supportive to a mo-
> ther of a first child without any relatives around.

Rose Patterson compared notes with other mothers her age:

> Mine held his head up today; mine got his first tooth today
> . . . . How old was yours when he started to walk? . . . .
> a comparative sort of thing.

As we shall see later in this paper, this type of support continues to be vital to parents as they deal with new developmental issues of their families.

The absence of relatives in some families highlighted the contributions of the husbands to the parenting process. Diane Kelly felt that Tom was a crucial source of support: ·

> This comes more when you <u>are</u> alone and you don't have anybody else to depend on. If Tom and I had my mother in the next <u>town</u> even. . . . I would have relied on her. . . . We only had each other. . .that's the way it should be.

Most husbands participated actively in handling the new responsibilities. When Susan Porter was pregnant Bill sewed her maternity outfits. After Larry was born Bill changed diapers and generally took charge even though Susan's mother was there: "He just stepped right in and took over" (Susan Porter).

With the birth and development of the oldest child, the families in this study solidifed their "family-ness," both internally, in terms of their images of themselves and their adaptation to new roles and responsibilities, and publicly, by developing friendships and acquaintances who were living the same kind of life they were. Over the next several years the pattern of family life established with the first child continued as other children were born, and as the families moved from place to place according to the requirements of the husbands' work. In some families children came in rapid succession, but in most families they

were spread out over about 10 years, with the second child being born
within at most three years of the oldest. Some children were planned
and some were not, but the parents wanted children and accepted the re-
sponsibilities and limitations on their personal freedom that came with
them. Family life was chosen by these couples in early adulthood to be
the nucleus around which their lives spun, and around which their de-
velopment continues today.

C H A P T E R   V I

THE MARITAL RELATIONSHIP

Nobody really knows what marriage is all about until it hap-
pens and you just hope and pray that the two of you together
have got that something where you can work it all out (Tom
Kelly).

Having considered some of the factors which seemed to contribute to
the success of the early marital and family relationships of the couples
in this study, we now turn our attention to their present lives.  The
families have ended their expansion, and with the first child's leaving
about to usher in a new stage of contraction of the family, we may ask
ourselves what the current marital situation is like.  Battles have been
fought; issues resolved or unresolved; time-tested rules and patterns
established.  How do the spouses see themselves in relation to each
other after approximately 20 years of marriage?

Most couples describe themselves as being very child-centered.  The
focus of family life has been the growth of the children; their inter-
ests; their issues.  The parents generally see their marital relation-
ships as being somewhat subordinate to their mutual concern for raising
the next generation, and in fact several couples had difficulty thinking
about their marriage as an entity separate from their roles as parents.
Two opposing conclusions may be drawn from this fact.  Perhaps the cou-
ples' commitment to each other is superficial; they do not really find
the marriage very satisfying and so use the children as a buffer between
them.  On the other hand, perhaps the spouses feel so secure with each
other and know each other well enough that they do not find it necessary

to consciously evaluate their relationships very often. From my observation of the couples, and from what they have said about themselves, it seems clear that, with the exception of one couple, the latter conclusion is far more likely. Jane Robinson mentioned that, paradoxically, the emotional support she feels she needs from Donald must be there because she never notices it. Amidst the daily rush of running a household with four children she takes the emotional and physical security provided by Donald for granted, and is conscious of it only when he is away for a few days. At those times she misses "all those small things that let you know somebody is taking care of you." Susan Porter also intimated that when her husband is gone she misses his presence and notices his contributions. She enjoys the space when he goes hunting but "by the time he comes home I'm so glad to see him back again." Taking a spouse for granted or being unconscious of a spouse's contribution to a marital relationship can be a sign of an unproductive fusion in a marriage. On the other hand constant reflection on or discussion of the relationship can mean a lack of commitment or can reflect some deeper conflict. A balance is required such that spouses can be confident of the reliability of the other's behavior and concern, and can recognize what the other provides in terms of emotional support and security.

Another sign that the couples are in fact deeply committed to each other is that when a spouse occasionally compares their marriage to those of their friends they come away feeling pretty successful. Tom Kelly enjoys knowing that Diane is his when people compliment her. Sometimes he tells people what he thinks of her, and they seem "amazed because people married 20 years don't say those things." Susan Porter

sometimes asks herself, ". . .how would I feel being married to so and so's husband? I've never yet found anyone that I would feel as comfortable with as I do with Bill." Sheila White enjoys "the feeling of having somebody to live with, of not being lonely, and really liking (Morton) a lot." He is "very understanding. I get a lot of support from him. I think a lot about what it would be like to be on my own because so many of my friends are on their own."

The reason the couples seem so child-centered is probably because, as Jane Robinson put it: "It's so <u>there</u>." However, it is interesting to note that although most couples describe themselves as child-oriented, in only one instance has a couple allowed their concern for the children to dominate the marriage to the point where it has become a serious problem. George Patterson sees the main purpose of his life in terms of "propagating the species," and feels that marriage is primarily an institution for raising children. He feels this attitude is a response to his father, who he saw as having emphasized the marital relationship to the detriment of the children. Rose Patterson feels George has gone too far in one direction and would like him to be more involved with her. She sees George as working <u>too</u> hard to be a good provider and as such is unavailable to her as a mate.

The other couples in the study seem to have found a reasonable balance between child-centered and marriage-centered activities. Although they accept the fact that raising children demands a tremendous amount of energy, the couples manage to find some time for themselves, and consider this time to be quite precious. Steven and Joyce Johnson make a point of going out to dinner alone together once every week. They use

this time to talk with each other and do some "unloading." If for some reason they miss a week, they try to go twice the next week. The Porters, who have five children, are rarely alone together. When Bill has a night emergency at work, Susan will often drive with him and they will use this time to talk with each other. It seems as though couples realize that they must actively seek out time together in order to maintain more than superficial contact, to head off problems before they get out of hand, and to just relax with each other. What makes this time productive is that couples generally feel as though they can really communicate with each other, and enjoy each other's company even after many years together:

> We're in _love_. . .we both would bend so that we don't have any really serious problems. We want our marriage to work and we enjoy keeping it that way. . .we both have enough respect for one another. . .it works out. . .(Bill Porter).

> We do feel that we have a closeness that will not come apart . . . . We are still infatuated with one another (Tom Kelly).

Several couples stated that they enjoy doing things together and look for experiences they can share. The Johnsons play tennis and run an opera company together; the Kellys work together on a variety of projects; the Whites share an increasing amount of their professional lives with each other.

The observations of the older children tend to corroborate the parents' views of the marriages. In the interviews the children did not seem to be acting as apologists for their parents, and could be quite critical of them, but their impressions were mostly quite positive, and often indicated real pride in their parents' relationships. Lynn Foster

did not feel as though she <u>really</u> knew what it was like, but she <u>did</u>
know that her parents respected each other, enjoyed their time together,
and shared responsibilities equally. Her older brother, Harold, felt
that his parents' relationship was close and loving:

> They can sit down and talk about all kinds of things. Each is
> interested in the other's work. They can have heavy discus-
> sions about anything. They really do enjoy talking about
> things with each other.

Mary Johnson felt that her parents' marriage was the most ideal she has
ever seen. They seem to love and care for each other a great deal and
her impression is that they actively work to make it succeed. Mary has
seen many of her friends' parents get divorced and "it's nice to see one
work. . .they're not just letting it go." Julie White feels that her
parents ". . .understand each other very well. They help each other in
things that have to do with each other's work. They're <u>very</u> open with
each other."

Although the family role-structure is basically a traditional one
in these families, i.e. the husbands are the major physical providers
and go out to work full-time, while the wives are the main homemakers,
one gets a strong sense of equality, flexibility, and interdependence in
the marital relationships. The husbands are generally very active par-
ticipants in family life, and despite strong commitments to their work
lives, place great value in home and family. In addition, they appar-
ently communicate quite clearly to their wives their appreciation of the
wives' efforts:

Probably one of the most positive points that either Judith or

I could say involves our children. Both of us feel that we have very very fine children, we're proud of our children, and we're _happy_ with them in terms of what they do and basically they have just been _damn_ good kids. . . .(Michael Foster).

Steven Johnson stated with obvious pride that:

Joyce's job is the kids. This is not something that I've laid on her. Just as my job is bringing home the bread every week and taking care of the physical wants. . . . She is there and she listens. She pays attention to those kids. . . . Joyce's job is bringing up the kids and she takes it seriously.

Clearly Steven takes his wife's job seriously also. Bill Porter said that the vast majority of his leisure time is spent with the family:

Being a part of _their_ life really. We've really enjoyed it. Susan would prefer to have it this way and I would too.

Morton White assesses Sheila's contribution:

. . .I think she is extraordinary in her capacity to, the level of confidence that she has been able to develop with _all_ the children. I've heard them talk about this separately and to-gether. All their friends have to hide things from their par-ents that they don't have to hide from us.

Strauss (1974), in a study of successful marriages, has alluded to the "work ethic" of marriage, described as "a belief that it is import-ant and necessary for two people to consciously work at living together." The couples in the present study seem to have a similar attitude to that expressed by Strauss' couples. They recognize the mutual effort, toler-ance, and understanding that are essential ingredients of a good marri-age. Steven Johnson feels that ". . .each person has to go more than halfway. There are times when she goes 90% of the way; sometimes _I_ go

90% of the way." Richard Abbott feels that he must ". . .try to learn and understand as much as possible. You stay together and try to work on it. You don't agree on some things but you stick with it."

## Stresses and Strains

The ability of a couple to work together, to be tolerant of each other, and to resolve differences, does not exist in a vacuum. Relationship skills develop in response to the press of events both within the family and from the world at-large. Most of the marriages here described have had difficult periods or issues that tested their capacities for productive interaction.

Predictably, conflicts have tended to arise in areas of most importance; namely child-rearing and work. In the area of child-rearing there is something of a pattern to the conflicts and disagreements between spouses which fits the cultural stereotype of parental role-behaviors that exists in this culture. As parents, several husbands seem less involved with the children's emotional lives than the wives and more concerned with independence, responsibility, and performance. They attempt to foster these characteristics in the children, and provide more discipline and structure than the wives while at the same time encouraging independence. Sometimes the wives see the husbands as too tough on the kids while the husbands see the wives as too lenient. In the main, couples see this difference in parental style as creating a complementary balance, but it sometimes leads to conflict. This pattern is best exemplified by the Porters. When they disagree about something it is usually about the children. Bill is more of a disciplinarian;

Susan describes herself as more easygoing. Bill feels that alone he would be stricter about things like hair length, clothes, household chores than they are, and together he and Susan are stricter than Susan would be alone. They both feel this pattern reflects their own upbringing. Bill says that, "I've always wanted them to grow up the way I wanted them to grow up." In the past Bill wanted the children to do more around the house than they did while Susan felt that except for their regular chores the house was her responsibility. In recent years she has tried to make them assume more responsibility but it has been a struggle for her. In her mind Bill has not set a good example in this area because he has not helped as much at home as Susan would have liked. She has tended to defer decision-making power to him. This male-dominant, female-submissive pattern has been observed by the children. Nancy, the second oldest, thinks that her mother sometimes goes too much out of her way to please Bill. The children only see mother serving father. Nancy feels her older brother has come to expect that Nancy will serve him the way mother serves father, and she is very annoyed at that. Over the past few years Bill has loosened up a bit due to his working with young people on his job, and Susan has become more independent since she has started working. (The role that work plays for working wives has very important implications for marital conflict and adjustment in these families and will be discussed in detail in Chapter IX.)

The Abbotts have some disagreements about handling the children which are somewhat similar to the Porters' with regard to attitudes toward independence, and the dependence issue does seem to be there in a submerged way also. At present they do not agree on how their oldest

child, Peter, should be handled. Katherine admits to being still very "motherly" towards him and has a tendency to be too intrusive with her opinions: ". . .I think I probably do put too much input into his decisions. . . . I find it hard not to say something." Richard, on the other hand, seems willing to let Peter try to run his own life. An important example of this conflict centers on Peter's serious involvement with his girlfriend. Katherine describes the conflict:

> I'm all for putting on the brakes. I think he is too <u>young</u> and I want this to wait awhile and (Richard) is saying like he is going to be 19, kids get married at that age; better to let them get married. . . .

When this type of conflict flares up Katherine tends to get withdrawn, while Richard works to get her involved in discussing things. Eventually they come to some understanding or compromise, but this particular issue is not yet resolved.

The issue of the wife's dependence on the husband surfaced in the Abbott's interviews in much the same terms as with the Porters. Richard feels that:

> . . .it's easier to let her raise the family and easier for her to be dependent. Marriage is a partnership and there is a certain amount of interdependence. . .there are certain things that most of us are weak in. . . .

Katherine looks to him for security and he looks to her to raise the kids. He feels that sometimes his wife is bothered that he does not take a more active role with the children.

Rose Patterson feels it is important for their marriage that George <u>demonstrate</u> concern for the children in ways other than providing physi-

cal security. When their oldest son asked them to visit a college with him because he was thinking of transferring there, George had to take time off work to go. If he had not, Rose said, she would have been quite hurt: "It's the kind of support I need whether (Joe) goes or stays."

In emergencies, or when the wives make an issue of the husbands' participation in the home, the men are capable of responding positively. Their level of involvement seems as much a function of what the wives will tolerate as what the husbands will give.

The second major source of stress mentioned by couples centers on the husbands' work lives. Most of the husbands are heavily invested in their careers, and if things do not go well professionally it tends to create stress at home, especially since their type of work is hard to leave at the office. Morton White is quite successful in his field, but the nature of his work is very esoteric, and there is virtually no one that Morton feels can act as a peer or colleague in his immediate work environment. This lack of a support network leaves him feeling professionally isolated, and he misses the support intensely: "There is nobody around whom I can share a problem with or get advice from." His frustration often manifests itself in insomnia, neck aches, and other somatic complaints. Sheila has had to bear the brunt of this situation as she is the person to whom Morton turns for support. He admits that he asks for more time and energy than she can or should give. She is forced to play roles that do not make sense for her. She becomes an audience and editor for Morton's papers and projects. Morton's own energy is sapped by these concerns, and Sheila feels that as a result he

is not as available to help her with her own increasing professional ac-
tivities. They both have attempted to create support networks for Mor-
ton, but this has not been successful. Sheila does feel that he is ad-
justing to her reduced availability but one senses that this is a con-
flict that they are still resolving.

The Fosters too have had marital problems stemming from Michael's
frustration with his work life:

> . . .I think we basically have a good relationship with each
> other but I think that we have had problems stemming from my
> feelings toward the work I do. . .I think I'm in a field that
> represents avenues for very limited advancement. . .(it's) a
> kind of second class citizen as recognized by most people any-
> how. . . . Pressures at home? Yeah; I wouldn't say fantastic
> pressures either. It seems to me that if Judith and I have a
> disagreement about something it probably relates somehow or
> other to that area. I would suspect that her feelings would
> constantly be that things haven't been that bad for me and I
> have been fortunate to be where I am and that I view that
> somewhat differently. . . . I don't think that we have begun
> to have problems like some people have problems but. . .as I
> look back upon the period of time that we have been married,
> it seems to me that we have had more problems or disagree-
> ments along that line since coming here.

Michael is now 46, and is talking about the period of his early 40's,
which corresponds to Levinson et al.'s Mid-Life Transition stage for
men. Michael goes on to describe what this time has been like for the
family:

> . . .I think I've been a problem to them. Maybe more of a
> problem to my wife than to my children. . . . I've been fair-
> ly successful professionally but I seem to be a person who
> hasn't quite found it. . . . I'm not quite sure. . .in my own
> mind that I'm doing the thing professionally that I should be
> doing and I think that it has had an effect on my personal
> life as well. . . . Judith and I have gone through some
> fairly rough years the past couple of years. Not that we've

been separated or anything, but there's been some pretty tough
sledding. . .the children have done very well in spite of
this, probably because of the way she has hung in there. . . .
I think she has been the real bulwark of the family. . . .
The other thing I'd like to say is that I think I've begun to
work my way out of it to a certain extent. . . . I don't
think things are as bad for me now as they were three years
ago and I think I'm able to see some things a little bit bet-
ter in perspective than I did a few years ago.

At this point Michael does not foresee much change in his professional

life. He feels he has "plateaued off" in his career, and while he is

not comfortable with that he seems resigned to it.

Some of the stress between Michael and Judith probably resulted

from the conjunction of his work difficulties and her going back to work

after a lapse of several years. This period was one in which Judith had

to be the tolerant, understanding one. From what Michael says, she gave

her 90% and it saw them through some rough times.

Tom Kelly is another husband who is not really satisfied with his

work life. He feels: "My work life has not been what I hoped it would

be." Like Michael Foster, he feels he is not as successful as he should

be at his age, and he does not think he ever found what he really wanted

to do for a living. Although Tom works in an academic setting his job

is not an academic one, but is more business-oriented. Tom feels that

even though he doesn't like his job that much he will stay because his

family likes living in the area:

I'm willing to put up with it for the happiness of my family
and everybody in my family seems to be very happy living here
. . . . It takes guts to change. You must consider the fami-
ly who judges and depends on you.

He does get some satisfaction from the job and has made some friends

there but financial security seems to be his main reason for staying. "My family is the most important thing to me and my obligation to their proper education and getting out on their own." Diane feels that Tom's dissatisfaction with work has not affected their marriage too much because he does not bring it home with him. He seems at least temporarily to have weighed all the factors and decided to make the best of the situation.

An important consideration for the Kellys is that they have a deaf child, Irene, who attends a special school in the area. According to Diane, Irene's birth represented a crisis for them at the beginning of their marriage which could have either brought them together or ended the marriage. They managed to survive and grow through this crisis, and Diane feels that subsequent stresses have been quite minor in comparison. Both Tom and Diane attribute their success in dealing with Irene's handicap largely to their ability to communicate with each other.

The lives of the couples in this study seem to fit quite well the description of middle age that Lidz provided above. The hopes and dreams of youth have given way to a sober and mature assessment of the present. Couples have made, and continue to fulfill, commitments to share the joys and burdens of married life, and are actively working to make the relationships succeed as best they can. Conflicts arise, but the fundamental commitment to the family encourages communication, compromise, and sharing of problems. Several marriages have been through turmoil in the past few years which seems the result of a combination of forces; husbands realizing the limits to their professional growth; wives re-entering the work world. For the husbands, the security, sup-

port, and deep satisfaction of a strong family system is apparently the most crucial resource they have had during this period of uncertainty.

There is of course much more to the marriages of these couples than has been touched upon in this chapter. We have however seen some of the major strengths and stresses that characterize these couples' relationships. They work at making their marriages successful; spouses communicate well with each other as a rule; they seem compatible in fundamental areas and they share common interests; they plan time for themselves so they can pursue their relationships. They are deeply and consciously committed to their children and to their marriages as primary, though not exclusive, sources of satisfaction and emotional security. As we explore different areas of life in these families the marital relationships will surface again in many contexts, and we will see how the marriages, as well as individual spouses, adapt to the various pushes and pulls of time, growth, and change.

C H A P T E R   V I I   .

PARENTHOOD

> I've always treated the children in some strange way as
> equals. . . . I can never say to myself, "They're only chil-
> dren" (Morton White).

> It's easy to ask a kid something and then end up telling him
> how it ought to be; how _you_ think it is. . . . I think I try
> to be less directive than when they were little and required
> so much guidance and direction in terms of everything they
> did (Judith Foster).

> I wouldn't even _realize_ the fact that suddenly I had a lot
> more freedom than. . .six months earlier (Larry Porter).

As children grow and develop  the tasks of parenthood change.  In
the early years parents must establish a caring and nurturant physical
and relational environment that will foster the sense of basic trust
that is the initial developmental task, not just of the individual, but
of the family as a system.  As children branch out from the safety of
the family into school and neighborhood the parental tasks become some-
what more managerial in nature; providing opportunities for the children
to develop physical, intellectual, and psychosocial skills within the
context of the surrounding community; setting limits and teaching rules;
supporting the developing ego.

The task for the parents of the adolescent is to help the child
join the adult world more and more fully while maintaining a gradually
more equal relationship.  Morton White describes the process of individ-
uation and _mutually_ increasing recognition that evolves over time:

> . . .Now that they're more equal to me I think it's easier for
> them to be responsive to me; as they grow up they take me less

for granted and can interact with me in a way that was very
hard when they were little and I was like, presumably, like
some unquestioned presence. I don't mean personal, but some-
thing that you just take for granted. As their interests get
more diverse and I become one of a series of people in their
lives. . . .it's easier to share things. . . .

Morton's sentiments illustrate an attitude that is common to most par-

ents in the study--one which seems central to their ability to deal pro-

ductively with their children's growing autonomy; central as well to the

childrens' ability to become autonomous. The parents value, and active-

ly foster, their children's independence, and they modify their own per-

ceptions and behavior, often consciously, in relation to the increasing

maturity of their offspring. In order to be able to accomplish this

shift it is crucial that parents be able to see their children as unique

individuals with their own needs and desires.


## Parents' Perceptions of Children as Individuals

One attitude that most parents spontaneously expressed while talk-

ing about their children and about their relationships with them, was

that the children were all different from each other, all unique, spe-

cial in some way. Within the context of a closely knit family struc-

ture, parents saw their children as people, rather than as mere exten-

sions of themselves. This ability to perceived children as separate

beings, and to communicate those perceptions to the children, is felt

by many family theorists to be crucial to the healthy development of the

child. Laing (1965) comments:

    In order to recognize persons and not simply objects, one
    must realize that the other human being is not only another

object in space but another center of orientation to the ob-
jective world.

Watzlawick et al. (1967) describe this attitude in terms of its commu-
nicational properties, and call it confirmation, i.e. the acknowledge-
ment of another person's definition of themselves in relation to that
person. They feel confirmation is a central element in the development
of a mentally healthy person.

Stierlin, Levi, and Savard (1971) caution that parental perceptions
and expectations regarding children's individuality and autonomy are not
necessarily straightforward:

> What may look like a separation-inducing expectation may have
> a covert, inhibiting dimension, and vice versa. . . . We must
> differentiate between overt and covert perceptions and expec-
> tations.

Sometimes the parents' perceptions of their children contained paradox-
ical or contradictory messages. Jane Robinson, in discussing the rela-
tional aspect of her perceptions of the children, comments that

> The personalities of the children are radically different. I
> am one half of a relationship. Even though I relate the same
> to each 'the response is different. The oldest is very outgo-
> ing, talkative, bubbly; you have to tone her down; you have
> to temper the crazy ideas she gets. The second one is very
> quiet and has to be drawn out. . . .

The paradox here is that even though Jane recognizes the differ-
ences between her children she seems to have certain expectations for
similar behavior from them. The children themselves mentioned this
apparent contradiction in some of the families. Lynn Foster felt that
her parents expected "basically the same thing" from each child, al-

though they respected the children's individuality, likes, and dislikes. Julie White expressed similar sentiments.

It seems as though parents allow individuality to exist within the limits of family norms and the practicalities of anywhere from five to seven people living together. That a balance exists between individual freedom and group expectations, and that this balance is essentially a healthy one, is seen when we examine the ways in which parents in this study foster their children's independence and autonomy. Stierlin, Levi, and Savard point out that parents convey messages to the children regarding 1) a self-image of potential autonomy or a lack thereof; 2) the children's capacity to shift interest and energy away from the family and towards the outside world. In the next section we will examine how parents' behavior toward the oldest children communicated the parents' perceptions of the children's ability to grow up and leave home.

## Fostering Independence

The parental task of letting go of children is not a passive endeavor, but a very active one. Its successful completion depends in part upon creating a proper balance between actively intervening in the children's lives, and actively refraining from intervention at certain times. Interventions may be centripital, i.e. limit-setting and boundary-maintaining, or they may be centrifugal, i.e. aimed at moving the child out of the family orbit (Stierlin, 1974). Parental restraint may have either focus also.

The parents in this study have, as couples, succeeded in creating a productive balance of inward- and outward-looking forces. They are

capable of fostering and nurturing independence both in terms of their
perceptions of the children and their behavior toward them.  They are
proud of their children's involvement with and success in the world, and
enjoy watching them become autonomous beings.  A quote from Michael Fos-
ter illustrates these themes:

> I don't think Judith or I are ones to put. . .great restric-
> tions on what Harold did.  Nor by the same token did we say
> to him everything is OK.  It seemed to just kind of evolve
> naturally. . .particularly when he was a senior, he showed
> increasing signs of showing more self-assertiveness, autonomy
> . . . .  Judith and I just view this as kind of a natural sort
> of thing.  It never posed a problem in the household.  We had
> very few disagreements with Harold. . .he was a rather enjoy-
> able chap to have around the house.  At the same time he more
> or less did his own thing too.  We never interfered with what
> he did.  We have a great deal of confidence in Harold. . .he
> was brought up with the idea that some things in life work out
> better than others. . . .  I don't think he was brought up
> with the idea that everything goes but neither was he brought
> up in. . .a rigid existence. . . .

The deliberateness with which Judith and Michael acknowledged Harold's
growth is clear:

> We consciously established a new relationship with him last
> year.  We talked this over between the two of us and said now
> look; he's a senior in high school.  He is physically a man.
> He can go about and do as he jolly well pleases regardless of
> what we say. . .he sort of lived in the home in the same sense
> that we did. . .like an adult in the home. . .(Judith Foster).

Michael goes on to describe what was clearly an active, centrifugal in-
tervention by him and Judith:

> We attend church. . . .  In his senior year, maybe it goes
> back further, we gave Harold the choice.  We said, "Do you
> want to go to church or don't you want to go; do you want us
> to call you in the morning?" and sometimes he would say he
> wanted to and sometimes he would say he wanted to sleep.

Either one was fine with us.

They proposed this change to Harold:

> I suppose to let him know he had the <u>choice</u>. . . . He was
> basically brought up in a family environment where a person
> <u>is</u> expected to do certain things. . . . He was not brought
> up in an unstructured environment to begin with.

Judith describes another centrifugal intervention:

> Last year it was his senior year and he was told that if he
> wished to do something there would be a car available. . .he
> didn't need to say, "I will see if I can have a car." If he
> wanted to go do something there was a car available and he
> might have it. . . . He'd always done a lot of the care of
> the family for us. If we were going out Harold or Lynn would
> babysit. We said, "We don't count on you for this anymore.
> If Lynn can't do it, we'll make arrangements with somebody
> else. . .in other words, do what you want." That had never
> been; that was the senior year. We felt that that time had
> come. He had always lived within the limits. . . . As you
> see them being able to function and I think function well,
> they require more time in terms of really getting to know
> them as people and less as children to be cared for.

She continues, describing how her <u>perceptions</u> of the children shift:

> It's not necessarily a given age. . .there are things that
> happen, things that seem to occur or an experience we have and
> then all of a sudden upon reflection this person is really a
> different person. They have really changed.

Most parents expressed sentiments which were quite similar to those

offered by the Fosters. Several mentioned the circularity of the mutual

individuation process. Richard Abbott commented:

> I'm sure it's a two-way street. . .as they get out from under
> the nest I'm sure you treat them differently. . .I have this
> feeling that what I say now isn't, "You have to do this,". . .
> as much as "Well, I look at it this way."

Susan Porter feels that when she gives the children freedom things generally go well "and of course the smoother they go the more responsibility they've been given."

As mentioned earlier, an important but often overlooked technique of fostering independence is for parents to <u>not</u> intervene with their children; to <u>actively</u> avoid what might be a natural tendency to intrude upon and structure their children's experiments with autonomy.   Tom Kelly espouses this general approach:

> I've tried to have my children make their own decisions, something that I didn't have.  If a decision is made that's going to bring about some problem to the child but not much let them make their own decision. . .this is a direct response to the way it was when I was a youngster.

The Fosters have a similar philosophy, derived interestingly enough from the same source; the family of origin:

> In terms of letting our children try things. . .that's much like my house.  They did not interfere a great deal. . . .
> Our policy was that when things went wrong in school we'd say, "Well, you'd better work that out yourself.  Everybody has to make their own way. . . ."  I think that was a reflection from my own family.  I was expected to work out those things yet I always knew that if something really went wrong that they would go to bat for me.  I really think that I tried to do the same thing.

Lynn Foster corroborates her mother's account:

> They expect that I can make my own decisions.  They trust me that I can take care of myself basically. . . .  They're not worried that I'm going to get into trouble. . .and they've always let me do pretty much what I want to do.

This philosophy of benign neglect translates into specific action.

Richard Abbott "let go" certain of Peter's activities so that Peter could develop independence. One potentially dangerous activity involved Peter's drinking during his junior year in high school. Richard knew Peter was drinking too much but did not make an issue of it. The wisdom of this approach is attested to by Peter himself. When he discovered that they knew of his drinking he "expected them to throw the book at me." Instead they talked with him about it but left it up to him to deal with. "I was drinking to be cool and since nobody made a big deal about it I stopped."

The Johnsons took a trip out of the country just when their eldest, Paul, was making his final decision about which college to attend:

> I wanted to be just as far away from him when he made that de-
> cision as I could be because I was afraid he would in the end
> come to us to make the decision which we would not have done
> but I'm sure we would have colored. . . (Joyce Johnson).

Mary Johnson prodded her parents to use centrifugal restraint with her:

> All your life your parents have engrained certain morals. . . .
> and when you finally get to a point where you want to test
> the morals they don't allow you to. I talked to them about
> it and they agreed. They let me test my morals and trust me
> to make my own judgments.

Jane Robinson is another parent who employs centrifugal restraint. She has always had her children make their own appointments at the dentist, banks, etc. "I've tried to make a conscious effort to teach them how to handle themselves in these situations." Recently she received a letter from Jessica, at college. Jessica mentioned that she was short of money. Jane wrote back and sympathized but purposely did not send

money in order to encourage independence. As with the other children interviewed, Jessica attested to her recognition of her parents' restraint by spontaneously discussing these incidents as examples of her parents fostering her autonomy.

Of course not all experiments are successful. Occasionally a child fails to use an opportunity adequately, and parents feel the necessity to pull the child back a bit from autonomy that may be premature. When Jessica Robinson was a high school senior, her parents gave her $50 @ month with which to buy everything she needed, to help her prepare for college life. However, she did not have the necessary discipline so they discontinued it. Jane feels that often when they have given Jessica responsibility "she's almost thrown it back at us. She isn't ready to handle her own life nor does she want to. She wants limitations and direction. . . . I'm not worried about it. I'm sure in time it will come." In general, there were few difficulties mentioned by parents, and they were viewed as the normal ups and downs of growing up.

## Changing Responsibilities

One might expect that the responsibilities of parenthood diminish as children get older. The couples interviewed here almost unanimously feel that in fact responsibilities do not lessen, but change in quality, and become in a sense even greater. As they watch their children grow, these parents have felt their responsibilities grow in parallel fashion. Judith Foster describes this shift:

> I think I spend more time thinking about their total well-being. When they were young and I was in the home all the

time I was concerned with were the clothes done and put away;
with things like doctor appointments, dentist appointments
. . .it was all sort of an immediate kind of thing that is a
day-to-day existence because they physically required a lot
of care and I don't think I thought of the long run, but now
I think I tend to. . .try to engage them in conversations
that are a little more meaningful. . .where they would express
some of their values. I really try and explore their minds
a little bit more. . . . I try not to tell them how I think
it is. . .but really try <u>harder</u> to find out what they think
about things than I once did. . . .

Sheila White is another parent who sees the responsibilities of

parenthood changing. Her job is now:

Being available to be a consultant, being well-informed. . . ,
I really see it as moving towards a parental advising role and
being more of a consultant, and just being there and being
somebody that children can rely on. . .the reality of the
responsibility seems to be greater the older the children. . . .

It must be a terribly difficult and conflicting feeling to deal

with; sensing increasing responsibility just as you are relinquishing

control over your children's lives.

George Patterson reflects on this dilemma:

It's difficult to slam the door and say he doesn't need me
any more. That really does not happen. It opens and shuts
for a while until he finds his own family and the need for
parental guidance will become less, less, less.

His wife Rose felt that things were "more comprehensible and easier"

when Joel was in high school because the problems were day-to-day

things. Now they are concerned with "what kind of man he will be."

Jane Robinson describes what the feeling is like for her. She sees

(parental responsibilities) changing. I don't see them end-
ing. . . . When Jessica was in school it just struck me that

it was like an author who was writing a book and took every good thing he could think of or a great part. of himself and he put it into this book and at a particular time he handed the entire book over to someone else and said, "Finish it." That's the kind of feeling it leaves you with. You can stand there and watch and you can advise, but as far as the writing goes you are finished.

If all this sounds somewhat everyday and commonsensical, it must be remembered that many parents find it quite difficult to make the kinds of perceptual and behavioral shifts described here, as Steirlin's work, cited in Chapter II, indicates. After studying the families of runaway adolescents, he concluded that:

When age-appropriate transactional modes are out of phase, too intense, or inappropriately mixed with other modes, mutual individuation and separation between parent and child will suffer (p. xii).

The extent to which parents in this study delegate their children seems to be quite similar to the description Stierlin gives of what is appropriate. For example, several oldest sons are athletes, as were their fathers, and the fathers enjoy the fact that the sons have followed in their footsteps in this way. At the same time they do not push their sons to excel in sports. Tom Kelly purposely avoided encouraging Barry to play football, but when he did it on his own, Tom supported him and gained a great deal of satisfaction from his exploits.

Most of the parents have experienced some degree of conflict with the oldest child which took place within the context of the mutually increasing "articulate separateness" of the parents and children. The tension between the child's sometimes reckless search for autonomy and the parents' concern for their safety, which probably contained an ele-

ment of reluctance to cede control, created the "fight" to which Stierlin refers. In some families there was one particular issue around which the tension surfaced, while in others the tension was of the nagging, day-to-day variety.

In the White and Kelly families, the issue was the oldest child's relationship with their boyfriend and girlfriend respectively. In the Abbott family the issue was Peter's drinking. In the Porter family the "fight" was between Larry and his father around curfews and hair length. In some families oldest children bickered with younger siblings about everyday things. All this tension arose within positive, loving relationships, and differences began to resolve themselves as parents and oldest children learned to treat one another as differentiated adults. In a later chapter we will see that college provided for these families the "common focus of attention" that both catalyzed the differentiation process and allowed the "ongoing communicational relatedness" between the oldest child and the parents.

The families in this study illustrate Stierlin's "loving fight" quite well. The parents, by acknowledging the separateness of their children, and by fostering independence at a reasonable pace, have set the stage for the "fight" to be one in which there are no losers.

CHAPTER   VIII   .

THE ROLE OF THE OLDEST CHILD

He was a difficult child probably because he was the first
and just about everyone says the first child is the one that
you learn with (Susan Porter).

Joe going away points to the fact that eventually Ed will be
going away and eventually Tom will go away (George Patter-
son).

Until now we have been setting the context for the developmental

shift marked by the oldest child leaving home.  In this chapter we will

begin to focus on the oldest as a particular member of the family sys-

tem, with functions determined in part by the fact of being oldest.

Others have examined the effect of being the first child on that child's

personality (McArthur, 1956; Toman, 1969), and parental behavior toward

the oldest as a young  child has been studied (Lasko, 1954).  This chap-

ter looks in the opposite direction, i.e. at the role of the first child

in relation to the rest of the family.  How does the expanding autonomy

of the oldest child help both the child and the family pave the way for

the children to leave home?

## The Oldest as Trailblazer

It seems a cliche to say that the first child is the one with whom

the parents learn to be parents.  Nevertheless, it is a profound and on-

going truth that each developmental change in the oldest child requires

that parents learn new skills.  Every parent interviewed commented that

the specialness of the oldest was that whenever that child experienced

something for the first time it was a new experience for the entire
family:

> With the first child you're never quite prepared.  You don't
> know what it's going to be like because you never had one be-
> fore (Rose Patterson).

Parents experimented with the oldest child, and the results have helped

them to deal with the other children as they enter similar situations.

The first child is the standard-setter for the other children:

> There is always sort of a special feeling about the first
> child. . . .  You really want the first one to succeed. . .
> (Susan Porter).   . . .to set a precedent for the others (Bill
> Porter).

Sheila White sees herself as "practicing" with Barbara:

> I'm sure we feel much more involved with what happens with her
> than with the others, which again is a kind of myth of doing
> well with Barbara, then no problem with the others, which we
> know is not true.

Michael Foster feels that "with the later kids things happen you more or

less take it for granted."  Diane Kelly

> . . .was worried when Barry went to junior high school but not
> about John. . . .   There are things John just knows not to do
> . . .because he witnessed Barry at the same age.

Donald Robinson comments:

> When  we have a problem with the other kids we usually have
> gone through it with the oldest already and know what to ex-
> pect even though we might handle it differently.

His wife Jane continues:

> . . .from (Jessica's) point of view she's had to fight for
> everything she's got, and I guess to a certain extent that's
> true. . . . With Diane or Ruth perhaps because they have an
> older sister they're much more organized; they have learned
> a lot from her.

Rose Patterson feels they were too strict with Joe, so they let up on

Edward. Now they are finding a middle ground with the youngest.

The oldest children themselves have some feelings about being

trailblazers. Several think they were given a great deal of responsi-

bility because they were the oldest. Harold Foster feels that "they

thought I was a little older than I really was." His parents have ex-

pected things of him because he is the oldest that they have not ex-

pected of the other children at the same age. Larry Porter has felt a

responsibility to his younger brothers to set an example for them. His

sisters have more freedom at a younger age than he did. Jessica Robin-

son senses that her parents:

> . . .were still learning how to be parents when I was learn-
> ing how to be an adult. . .they were trying really hard to
> let me be free and do what I thought was right for myself but
> now. . .they're letting my sisters do what I did <u>younger</u>.
> Diane is doing at 13 what I did at 15.

An immediately relevant area in which the oldest is now a trail-

blazer for the next child is the process of choosing and going to a col-

lege. John White thinks that Barbara's experience "has been helpful

just because of the logistics. You know, what to do." Lynn Foster

". . .just sort of sat on the sidelines and learned what I could get

from it." Because her sister Jessica is changing colleges next year

Diane Robinson is more aware that she should choose her college care-

fully. Lynn Abbott feels that her brother Peter "taught me what the process is like." Nancy Porter was nervous about going away to school because she was afraid she would not like it and would not make friends. Her brother's experience this year has given her confidence. He not only talked with her and reassured her but had her visit him at school. Her brother's success and concern for her was a major factor in her decision to go to an out-of-town college.

The oldest child's function as a trailblazer most likely continues even after he or she leaves home, probably throughout the whole life-cycle of the family.

## Anticipatory Experiences

Certain specific experiences or events that took place in the year or two before the oldest left for college seem relevant to their trail-blazing role. These seemed to be significant turning points for the child as well as for the parents, in terms of increasing autonomy, and in terms of preparing both the child and the parents for the child's eventual departure.

These experiences fall into two categories: 1) events of a semi-public nature that constitute unofficial, unrecognized "rites-of-pas-sage"; and 2) events unique to individual families.

Rites of passage. In many societies the transition from childhood to adulthood is marked by ceremonies and rituals, and as such is a process of public redefinition of the person. Old rights and responsibil-ities are given up and new ones, consistent with adult status, are adopted and acknowledged by family and community. The person is per-

ceived differently, and is expected to act in accordance with those per-
ceptions. The transition period and its attendant rituals can last from
a few days to several years. The rituals themselves have been termed
"rites-of-passage" (Van Gennep, 1908). Van Gennep recognized their im-
portance for human developmental processes many years ago:

> The critical problems of becoming male and female, of rela-
> tions within the family, and of passing into old age are di-
> rectly related to the devices which the society offers the
> individual to help him achieve the new adjustment (p. xvii).

In some societies the transition periods have evolved into seper-
ate, relatively discrete stages themselves. Adolescence in modern so-
ciety is just such a period. Further, in our culture publicly acknow-
ledged rites-of-passage have lost their importance as formal rituals.
Religious ceremonies such as the Jewish Bar Mitzvah and Catholic Con-
firmation have long since lost their secular function as rites-of-pas-
sage. However, it appears, from what the families in the study tell us,
that certain activities of American adolescents may in fact serve as
unacknowledged, "secret" rites-of-passage.

Every couple interviewed, as well as several oldest children, men-
tioned certain experiences that the oldest child had in the years prior
to college which provided increased independence in a real sense and
which, by their nature, involved the larger community in a partial
redefinition of the child in the direction of adulthood. These events
were obtaining a driver's license and driving, working at a job, and
having a boy- or girlfriend.

The automobile has been an important symbol and resource for Ameri-

can adolescents for many years. It represents, in a very direct way, entrance into the mainstream of modern adult society. Driving requires training, judgment, responsibility, and legal sanction from the community (almost like hunting in primitive societies). The driver must demonstrate knowledge of relevant laws, ability to handle money, and is directly responsible for his or her own life as well as the lives of others. For Harold Foster, getting his driver's license was "a step towards freedom, getting around on your own. . .a big step." For Larry Porter "getting my driver's license is a big thing. It gave me a lot more freedom." Before he had to depend on his parents and friends for rides. "It's a bit more responsibility and a bit more freedom that I was allowed to have." When the oldest child learns to drive he or she spends less time with the family, and ranges much further afield. Rose Patterson saw it as the "beginning of the end" of Joe's childhood. He was no longer "home-centered" but his energy was focused away from home. Joe's parents did not want him to buy a car, but since he earned the money for it himself they allowed him to, thus practicing a form of centrifugal restraint that altered family relationships significantly. Not only did Joe have more freedom, but so did his parents since they were no longer required to chauffer him around. He could also help them drive the other children to and from their activities.

Of course there is no formal ceremony marking the obtaining of a driver's license, but it does seem to function as an intermediate step on the way to full adulthood in American middle-class culture, and does contribute in a major way to mutual separation of parents and children.

Work is another activity which moves oldest children closer to

adulthood in their own eyes, in their parents' eyes, and in the eyes of the community. To enter the work-world is to become a productive member of society. When adolescents first start to work it is usually assumed that it will be part-time or temporary. Rarely does an adolescent start working full-time in a serious career. Work may therefore be looked upon as an apprenticeship for adolescents; a general apprenticeship in "working" which gives the child a taste of what it is like without re-quiring any long-term commitment to a particular job. It gives the child an opportunity to interact with adults, not as a son, daughter, etc., but as a worker and peer.

Larry Porter and Barry Kelly are two oldest sons who most clearly illustrate the role working can play in redefining the child as an adult. Bill Porter got Larry a summer job as a janitor at Bill's place of work, which lasted for two or three years. In fact, Bill was Larry's boss and saw to it that he worked very hard. He told the other men, "If there's a lousy job put him on it." Larry responded well to his father's centrifugal intervention. Both Bill and Larry see this ex-perience as a maturing one for Larry. Bill says:

> He grew in the view that (the other men) learned to accept
> him as a person; not as the boss's son. He got along with
> the other men who were much older than him. He always car-
> ried his end of the stick. . . . He also learned that he
> wanted something better for himself.
> We were quite proud of the fact that he upheld his end of
> it (Susan Porter).

It was important to Larry that he made money and learned how to handle it. He feels his job taught him responsibility and getting along with others.

Barry Kelly's initial work experience was similar to Larry Porter's in that Barry <u>also</u> worked at a parent's place of business; in this case it was the same retail store at which his mother worked. Diane says that Barry impressed her a great deal during his first few months at work. Seeing him as a fellow employee, seeing the way he dealt with customers, seeing his knowledge of the products, she realized that he was much more grown up than he seemed around the house. Her relationship with him at work was that of peers:

> I respect him more as a person on the job than I do at home.
> I see him as an individual and not as part of <u>me</u> (Diane Kelly).

This statement clearly reflects a mutual individuation process. Diane feels that this experience may help make it easier for her to see Barry leave home.

Other parents and children mentioned jobs as maturing experiences. The Robinsons saw Jessica's summer away as a camp counselor as getting her used to being on her own. The Pattersons felt that Joe's working after school, and using his earnings to pay for his car, showed that he could be somewhat independent living at home. Harold Foster thought his job at a restaurant, which was his first regular job, was an important maturing experience for him.

To reiterate, the importance of a job both as a maturing influence for the child, and as a vehicle for partial public redefinition as an adult, stems from the child's involvement with the dominant life-style of the community, and from the parents' observations of their child in that community. As such, it clearly seems to function as a rite-of-

passage for the child, even though it is not accompanied by a formal ceremony.

The third rite-of-passage described by couples took place when their oldest child became involved with a member of the opposite sex in an emotional relationship. The first "serious" boyfriend or girlfriend functions to initiate the child into heterosexual involvement and also prepares the parents for their eventual displacement as the most important people in their children's lives. Morton White describes the effect that Barbara's relationship with her boyfriend had on him:

> I don't feel that Sheila and Barbara are in the center of some organization that is 'hiving off.' Maybe it hasn't sunk in, or maybe it's possible that something significant may have happened that anticipated that in Barbara's case while she was still here, and that is the beginning of her relationship with Henry. . .perhaps a sense of loss of something I hadn't really been aware of that I had. . .of an in-group; of a little tribe. Maybe that was spoiled for me in some way by that relationship. . . . The departure was more of a symbolic one than a geographic one.

Sheila White continues:

> I can remember saying to a friend one day she is getting into the back of a station wagon and the next day getting into the front seat of a Triumph with her boyfriend and what a rude shock. . . . That was a few years ago.

Judith Foster expresses similar feelings about the effect on her of Harold's relationship with his girlfriend:

> I think with the advent of a girlfriend, I remember when the girlfriend came on the scene, "OK, kid, it's gonna be what she wants and not what you want." I remember those days when I thought I could prevail over my boyfriend's mother on some things too. . .and I think I consciously thought of that. I guess you could say I felt it was right, fitting, and I also

felt that now the time had come that he was functioning as an
adult. . . . She exerts a certain influence that no other
woman has ever exerted in his life and at that point in life
the young attractive female begins to supercede the mother.
That's surely what's gonna happen when they choose a mate.  I
think that people ought to be prepared for that or you're gon-
na have a miserable relationship. . . .  I think there was a
turning point in becoming friends but I think somehow that the
mother remains the mother more than the father remains the fa-
ther. . . .  I was cast in the mother role.  Maybe because the
mother is always prying for information.  The father laughs
and has enough sense to let him be.

Diane Kelly expresses sentiments which echo Judith Foster's and give a

sense of the emotional readjustment that a mother goes through when she

sees herself being replaced by another woman:

> When the girlfriend takes the mother's place and quite natur-
> ally so, it still isn't easy to see this happen.  I remember
> a time when Barry's girlfriend took him to the dentist over
> Christmas to have his wisdom teeth pulled.  I noticed that he
> doesn't need me any more.  Seeing him as an adult at work
> gives me a feeling of satisfaction but seeing him involved
> with his girlfriend has been much harder to realize it's hap-
> pening.  Maybe it's letting go.  It's hard to see him in such
> a close relationship with another woman.  It tells me I'm at
> that stage in life where we do give up our children.

Her husband Tom has tried to be supportive while at the same time urging

her to not get overinvolved with Barry.  Diane says, "Even now, he will

sometimes say, 'Calm down, relax, don't get excited.'"  Both of them

can sense Diane's jealousy and together they keep it from interfering

in Barry's life.  Centrifugal restraint is particularly hard, and is

especially important in this type of situation, since adolescents are

painfully sensitive to intrusion into their romantic involvements.  Tom

is not jealous because he can easily identify with what Barry is doing:

> I'll never forget the first time he ever took a girl out.

> _That_ made me say he's growing up. . . . I drove him to pick
> up the girl and he put her in the back seat and sat in the
> front with me. These are the kinds of things you see. I re-
> member when I was that age and what I was doing.

Katherine Abbott is another mother whose perceptions of her oldest son

shifted when a girl entered his life:

> When he started dating I think I looked at him in a different
> perspective. He's come under the influence of his girlfriend.
> She is important to him.

Richard Abbott shares his wife's feeling. To him the biggest jump in

Peter's maturity occurred when his relationship to his girlfriend shift-

ed from a "teenage type one to ultraseriousness." Peter himself agrees.

He felt as though he was becoming more mature and was accomplishing some-

thing important.

If their oldest child is considering engagement or marriage, some

parents may see the child's romantic interest as a problem. Peter Ab-

bott and Barry Kelly both plan to get married in the near future, and

their parents have mixed emotions about it. Katherine Abbott thinks

Peter is too dependent on his girlfriend, and at 19 is too young to get

married. Richard disagrees and feels that Peter's relationship to his

girlfriend is appropriate. What may be most important in this conflict

is that Peter says his parents told him they had no right to tell him

what to do, and the decision was his to make. The Kellys both feel that

Barry is too young to get married. Tom told him that if he was mature

enough to get married he was also mature enough to pay for his own edu-

cation. The choice was Barry's but they let him know how they felt.

Barbara White's relationship with her boyfriend was of some concern

to her parents, who felt they were "so wrapped up in each other" that she seemed like a "child-bride" at times. They felt she needed to be away from her boyfriend, not because there was something inherently wrong with the relationship, but because "she didn't know anything else." This sentiment highlights one plausible reason for parents' concern about their oldest children's romantic involvements, and that is that parents may unconsciously or consciously recognize the preparatory nature of the relationship, i.e., it provides "practice" for more committed relationships in the future. They may see it as a rite-of-passage that is symbolic, and are trying to communicate that to the children without pushing them to make it literal. The Whites consciously avoided discussing it with Barbara in relation to her going away to school, because, as Morton puts it, "We didn't want to force on her a premature definition of the relationship." Of course, parents may also be somewhat reluctant to face this sign of their own aging, and some natural parental jealousy may be involved as well, but on the whole, their concern seems genuinely related to the rite-of-passage quality of these involvements. When one parent is in danger of overinvolvement in the child's social life, the other parent seems to have the distance to gently maintain the appropriate boundaries.

The issue of heterosexual involvement recalls the work of Benedek cited earlier. Benedek feels that parent involvement with the sexuality of their children is the main theme of middle-phase parenthood. That conclusion seems somewhat inaccurate as far as these parents are concerned. While sexuality certainly is one important theme for these parents, it does not seem to stand out clearly as the only important

one. As we have seen in this and previous chapters, parents are also seriously concerned with what kind of people their children will become. Sexuality seems to exist as an issue or concern in the context of the adolescent's increasing independence from the family. In fact the development of autonomy, which like sexuality begins in infancy and continues through adulthood, might perhaps be seen as a precondition for sexuality to develop and mature in healthy ways. Rites-of-passage involving sexual maturity seem no more important in this culture than those involving work, although they may be more obvious and parental reactions more intense.

This is certainly true in terms of the society at large, for when adolescents cannot enter the work world, and are left idle after school or in summer, they may enter into unproductive, anti-social behavior (New York Times, August 19, 1976; p. 34), which may preclude their ever reaching and successfully negotiating the passage into the work world.

In all the rites-of-passage discussed, the community plays a central role. It must provide opportunities for productive work, for healthy heterosexual activity (including resources for both group activities and for privacy), and for public acknowledgement of adolescent growth. Without this crucial feedback from society, the adolescent will have difficulty becoming an adult in his or her own eyes as well as in the eyes of others.

Unique events. Some of the oldest children interviewed had experiences which significantly altered their parents' perceptions of them, and through which they gained maturity, but which were essentially private for the family, and did not constitute rites-of-passage.

Peter Abbott and Paul Johnson were both severely ill during their last two years in high school. Their ability to handle this stress impressed their parents a great deal. Peter spent several weeks in the hospital and had serious surgery. His mother

> . . .really marveled at how he went through all this. With not a complaint in the world; not a gripe. I admired him from that point on. He's really got a lot of good stuff there.

Paul had pneumonia and was in the hospital for two months:

> He had a lot of time to himself to think. Looking back on it from Christmas to May he must have matured four years (Joyce Johnson).

Harold Foster had an experience during his junior year in high school that very directly served an anticipatory function for the family. They went on a sabbatical leave to a university in England. At first Harold did not want to go, but changed his mind when he received a letter asking him to play basketball with some boys at the college. Judith Foster talks about the effect of this year on Harold, and on her perceptions of him:

> We went on sabbatical and when we came back. . .I really felt that Harold was a grown up man. . . . When he got there he was the oldest in the family and he is a big boy, living on a college campus. He joined one of the teams. So he was off with these boys and he travelled with them to play these games. This was quite a different experience than he had ever had. He had to handle his own money, and another country--a little difference in some of the relationships; things are a little more formal--and he just got on terribly well. When we went to the continent he just seemed to blossom. A professor in Amsterdam took an interest in him. He felt more like a person in his own right who had something really worthwhile to contribute and to say. . . . I think I was quite delighted. I felt

a great deal of joy in seeing a person emerge who was not re-
liant upon his father or me to stand on his own two feet.  I
don't mean that he turned us off emotionally.  We were not
always with Michael cause he would be away.  I would turn
around and say, "OK, Harold, which way do we go?" and he'd
say, "You'd be lost all over the world if I weren't leading
you around," and I'd say, "Yeah, be sure, you know, because
I'm counting on you for directions. . . ."  In Amsterdam he
took the children on some occasions about the city. . . .  I
had anxious moments when he was off with the boys at college
. . . .  I'm sure they realized he needed some looking after.
From some of the stories he did some of the looking after.
That was a good experience for him. . . .  His school experi-
ence relating to those masters and seeing the difference in
the attitudes. . . .  I think that was a good experience for
him to know some of them. . . .  But we had seen him all of
a sudden just take hold and function and go off by himself
and do things, and so we gained confidence and so we said,
"Ok, we're confident.  Now you have this ability. . . ."

Larry Porter took a course at a local college during his senior year in

high school and his parents see this as an important maturing experience

for him.  His father Howard describes the effect of the course:

It was the most significant thing he did in high school.  It
made him grow up from an academic standpoint, opened his eyes
up.  He's a better college student today.  I thought it was a
very meaningful thing that he did this totally on his own.
He was with older kids in a new environment.  That made him
mature in many ways. . . .  That's one of the things that made
me realize that he was suddenly a man.

The important dimension of these experiences is that they were new

both for the child and the family:  they required learning new skills,

and demanded that parents shift their perceptions of the child to see

him or her as an adult.  This seems the crucial ingredient in terms of

the potential of a situation to be one of growth.  Again, this repre-

sents the essential uniqueness of the first child in relation to the

rest of the family.  Van Gennep (1908) recognized the importance of the

<u>first</u> rite-of-passage:

> There is a popular saying that only the <u>first</u> time counts; it
> is an interesting fact that this idea is truly universal and
> that it is everywhere expressed to some extent through special
> rites. That the rites-of-passage do not appear in their com-
> plete form, are not greatly emphasized, or do not even exist
> except at the time of the first transition from one social
> category or situation to another has been shown repeatedly (p.
> 175).

> These rites are simply rites of entry from one domain or situ-
> ation to another and it is natural that, once the new domain
> or situation has been entered, the repetition of the first act
> has a decreasing importance. Furthermore, psychologically,
> the second act no longer presents anything new; it marks the
> beginning of habituation.

This is not to deny the importance of transitions and anticipatory ex-
periences for children other than the oldest, or that they have effects
on the family. My aim is simply to point out the special role of the
oldest child in making the unknown known, and in presenting family mem-
bers the opportunity and the challenge to move to the next stage of
family life.

CHAPTER IX

THE ROLE OF WORK

I teach for several reasons; I like what I do; I enjoy it and I gain a lot of very personal satisfaction because I like to feel I've accomplished something apart from the group (Judith Foster).

My situation at work contributes as much to my ability with the family as the security within the family does to my ability to face things at work (Steven Johnson).

The importance of work in people's lives, as individuals and as members of families, deserves to be a study in itself. In this section I will attempt to describe how the work-lives of husbands and wives fit into the matrix of their family life, and how work affects and is affected by the oldest child leaving home for college.

In all the families interviewed the husbands have been the bread-winners. The work-world has been their domain for most of their family life, and this is felt by both spouses to be appropriate. At the same time, work has become increasingly important for the wives. Six of the eight wives are currently working, although the length and amount of their employment varies considerably.

## The Husbands' Work

In their work lives the husbands fit quite neatly into the middle and upper-middle class professional world. Five men are professors at a local university and have attained a degree of prominence in their fields. The other husbands have positions of responsibility and some power. In terms of external criteria they have been quite successful

and most of them acknowledge this fact:

> Superficially someone looking at me would probably think I've
> done very well professionally, I suppose. . .because I'm a
> full professor, a department head. . . (Michael Foster).

> I have what I feel is a well-rounded professional life. . .in
> retrospect I can't imagine having done anything else.  I
> guess I've done better than I should have (Richard Abbott).

Aside from providing for the financial needs of the families, work
provides a number of basic satisfactions for the husbands as individ-
uals.  Richard Abbott feels that his work fulfills many of his "ego
needs."  He enjoys helping people, being successful, and likes the va-
riety his work allows him.  He is also "really interested" in the sub-
ject matter of his field.  Steven Johnson is another man who enjoys his
success.  He is proud of the fact that he "built the program out of no-
thing to one of the best in the Northeast."  Bill Porter expresses his
feelings about his work:

> I enjoy having to deal with people.  I've succeeded in crea-
> ting an atmosphere where people enjoy working for me and I get
> something back from them; a good day's work.  I do a pretty
> good job.  It's a challenge every day to do as much as you can
> with as little as you've got.  I'm proud of my own track rec-
> ord.  I've done a reasonably good job. . .it's a challenge all
> the time.  There is a certain amount of pride.  I enjoy the
> men down there.  I hope they enjoy me. . . .

Bill finds that his contact with the students in the past eight years

has modified his rather conservative attitudes and helped him relate

better to his own children.  George Patterson and Donald Robinson both

expressed sentiments similar to those volunteered by Steve Johnson and

Bill Porter.

Several husbands seem to be in a transitional process in relation to their work. Both Michael Foster and Tom Kelly have been dissatisfied with their occupations and have had to go through a re-evaluation period which was quite difficult for them. The effect of this trouble on their marriages was discussed earlier. Both are resigning themselves to work situations that are unsatisfying in important ways. Tom feels he has not gotten the kind of recognition he deserves, and resents seeing younger, less experienced men get promoted over him. His main occupational goal is to retire. He is concerned with "my financial status as an older person. The pension plan is very good here but I don't know if I can stick it out another 20 years." Both men are strongly family-oriented, and their pride in and involvement with their children apparently serves to cushion their disappointment with their work lives. In this type of situation husbands may be more affected by their children leaving home than if they were more satisfied with work. Because their self-images are closely tied to their parental roles, the dynamics of their reactions may be more intense than those of less involved fathers.

Morton White feels as though he is constantly in transition in relation to his work. Currently he is trying to decide:

> whether I want to develop new ideas and start new projects
> and accelerate change or do I want to tone it down. What is
> the best career for me? Sheila and I have been talking about
> that for 20 years. I'm very profession-identified and think
> in relation to it. I've never been able to project two or
> three years ahead. I've never been able to answer the ques-
> tion: "What do I want to do?" In a way I'm marking time in
> two or three professional lines.

Morton sees his career as having been unconventional, and feels he

is a maverick in his field. He and Sheila describe his founding of journals and professional societies as an attempt to create a "professional family"; a support network to counteract Morton's sense of isolation. At the same time one senses energy and excitement in his voice when he talks about future possibilities for collaborative work with his wife.

The relation between the husband's feelings about work and the oldest child's leaving home is indirect and subtle, and cannot be understood without considering the role of work for the wives, whose work activities are, at least initially, more directly tied to the oldest going to college.

## The Wives' Work

None of the wives in this study have worked continually since marriage. All took many years off to raise families and entered the world of work only after all their children reached school age, and could substantially fend for themselves.

Several women stated that the explicit reason they went to work was that they anticipated the added financial burden of sending their children to college; this anticipation being triggered by recognition that the oldest child was becoming an adult. The effects of their working have come to be much more profound than merely providing supplemental income for the family, however. It has resulted in individual growth for the women, and in some major shifts in their marital relationships. In the interviews the wives were often more articulate than the husbands in expressing their feelings about work, probably because the experience

is newer for them and they are still going through changes as a result of working.

What does work mean to the wives? Sheila White, who is a graduate student and budding psychotherapist, talks about what it means for her:

> In one of the first groups I was in at the School I had my first realization that I could be a person with needs of my own _and_ a mother, and I had maybe never thought of that before. . .it was the work I was doing.

Sheila feels her work has helped her to be a better parent:

> I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't had the training I had and if I hadn't made the changes I did. I just would not have been as effective. . .the training was good in dealing with Barbara's sexual relationship and being able to talk with her about sex and contraceptives.

Judith Foster, who is a speech therapist, is another wife whose work seems to serve essential functions for her _personally_:

> I need to feel, I _do_ feel that I can do something well. I think it makes me feel important. A little bit important. Just in terms of what _I_ can do. Not because I have a husband who does well or anything like that but I'm very proud of the work I do. . . . I feel confident to stack my work up against anybody that wants to come and observe. I like the challenge of it. I like devising new programs. I like working with children who have something a little special and out of the way. I like thinking with them, I like exploring with them. I get a heck of a lot of satisfaction out of the kids I see. . .moving along a little bit better and I just terribly excited if I think I had anything to do with it. I gain a _great_ deal of satisfaction.

Like Sheila White, Judith feels her work has helped her to be a better parent:

> It has a good effect also in terms of the children. . .it gave

me a certain insight into my own children. I began to think that a lot of things can go by the board. A lot of milk can be spilled on the floor and a lot of tears can be shed. Those years of working with the retarded make a lot of difference. I think I did a lot of thinking through in terms of the kids and their lives and what was important and what wasn't important for them. And I think I tried to force them to think a little bit about this too. I'd come back with my stories some of which were kind of heart-rending stories too. . . . I think I'm a better person in the household for working. I think I allow them the satisfaction of their own opinions, decisions, and their own likes and dislikes and their own feeling of pride in what they do.

Judith talks about why she went back to work five years ago:

I was thinking of the fact of the college education. We realized that we have 13 years of college and three years with two in and never a year's break. . .it's a pretty expensive proposition. . . . I felt like I would like to be able to do a _few_ things during these years that they are going to college and not just say, "Look at poor us. All these kids in college and we can't go out to dinner." . . . So that's one reason why I went back to work at that _time_.

Susan Porter went back to teaching to help out financially only after the youngest was in school. She explains, "I've always felt that my place was with the children until they were old enough to go to school." Susan's feelings about work are reminiscent of Sheila White's and Judith Foster's sentiments:

I've grown since I've been working. I'm much more liberated than I was. I've been in touch with a lot of very interesting people. They've really expanded my ideas. I'm very confident with my teaching abilities. I _know_ I'm a good teacher. I don't always put everyone else's needs first right now. There are some things that I want to do. There are times when I think Bill thinks that my job is not as important. To _me_ my job is important. . . . There is a personal satisfaction that I get from working with the children and from having parents of children that I have had come back and say, "Yes, that was a marvelous year."

It is interesting that all three women have chosen fields that involve working with people in ways analogous to being parents. In this they fall within the traditional occupational roles of women. At the same time, of course, they do seem to have a truly deep interest in and talent for their professions. Apparently in their case a talent for parenthood and skill in relating to people go hand in hand, and it seems logical and proper that as their own children grow up they would seek activities similar to those which have provided rewards in the past. Judith Foster feels that the satisfaction of working with children will help her adjust to her own children leaving:

> . . .too many people kind of in these years start; women live through their husbands; sometimes vice versa. . .or they begin to see their children's lives, they start meshing with their own. . . . I think you kind of prepare yourself to part with them too and you do that more by finding something that you enjoy; if you're fortunate enough to have something you enjoy. . .and the options of doing it and that's not something that everybody can have. . . . I hope when the time comes that the children go, that the fact that I have had this and intend to pursue this rather meaningful career also makes me less reliant on them for my satisfaction and my happiness. I don't know whether that affects them adversely at this point; some people would debate that with me; people say, "Well, you work and your children are still young and in school." I expect there are different ways of looking at that.

Judith's remarks point up the importance of the community for the parents of the developing adolescent, in terms of helping women to make the transition from full-time mother to active member of the work force. Just as the community must provide means for adolescents to define themselves as adults, so it must provide an alternative path for women as their children grow up. Of course work is not the only possible alternative, but it is the one chosen by more and more women, many of whom

need the increased finances. Larger economic and political realities and decisions obviously have profound repercussions for individual families during this stage of family life, as well as during other stages.

One of the most significant, and potentially disruptive effects of the wives going to work is the resulting change in the marital relationship. Change takes place in a number of areas, from practical day-to-day living issues, to deeper psychological and interpersonal questioning within and between spouses. A number of couples interviewed have been through, and are still going through, these changes.

Morton White expresses the dilemma in which couples often find themselves as changes begin to occur:

> She has changed so much in the past five years that patterns of behavior that have become almost second nature are being questioned by her, in ways that I accept but are somehow ingrained and difficult to change. It has to do with both of us. She has changed but what she has changed away from is something that we both developed and I'm left the unchanged person dependent on an old set of habits; the development of which she is a participant in, and she recognizes this and in fact the change has a lot to do with my changing.

Sheila talks about what it has been like for her:

> Work has made me a lot more independent and a lot less of a nag in some ways, having to live vicariously through Morton . . . . I must have made him feel that he had to do a lot of living for me. . . . I used to have the feeling that I should be more interested in his work that there was something the matter with me that I didn't share his work and he used to feel that way too. He has always been willing to give me the kick in the ass I needed to get out and do things. . . . He has always gone along and encouraged me but there has also been a resistance because things aren't like they used to be but he is unusually good at working that through. He has a real capacity for integrating very quickly.

She continues, describing some of the day-to-day adjustments they have made:

. . .well, the reorganization of housework. He has no back-
ground for domesticity having been involved in institutions
and not having had a family, he feels very awkward doing
things around a house. He'll open up a can of beans and eat
them cold out of the can, or would have a few years ago, and
my reaction would be to feel sorry and want to do it for him,
but he really has learned to do things for himself. Also
just a whole different approach to entertaining. He takes
more responsibility for entertaining now. A lot more is taken
for granted; just a lot more role flexibility in general. I
still feel most of the responsibility for the children. . .
but it's not always taken for granted that I am always avail-
able. A lot has to do with my being able to ask him to do
things that I'd just as soon not have him do. It's not as-
sumed that I will automatically do things like shopping. I
mean that's a big thing. It's just assumed that we pretty
much share the housework; it's really taken for granted. And
it's also assumed that when he has people over who have no-
thing to do with me I don't have to be there. . . . We're
much more separate people and in general have a much better
relationship. We're much less fused than we were. There used
to be things just automatically he would say, "Which tie goes
with which shirt?" and attribute it to his color deficiency,
and I used to resent it but I used to do it. That was one of
the ways in which I really felt like a mother, but that's symp-
tomatic of the kind of thing he would do automatically which
he doesn't do anymore. . . .

Sheila feels this process has helped her let go of the children:

I think that my getting away from that mothering role with him
also helped me to make the transition with the children. It
was more obvious that I didn't need to mother a grown man when
I noticed that I had been mothering him a lot and could see
how that looked. I could see how it felt to stop that; I
could also feel what it was like not to need to do that with
the children as they got older.

Sheila evaluates where this growth process has taken her relationship

with Morton, and her feelings about it:

I don't know that the behaviors have changed that much. I
think that it really is much more of an experiencing of the
relationship. . . . I used to have a great stake in his
achievements on whatever level, and then as the relationship
went on it was satisfying to me in the relationship and not;

but I can remember as recently as five years ago having a tremendous swelling of pride at seeing him being in the newspaper because he was attending some national conference, in much the way that you would be proud of a child's accomplishments, and I notice that I still feel very good about his accomplishments but. . .I'm not as overwhelmed by it; I mean I don't need to have such big expectations for him because I'm feeling some satisfaction of my own. . . . I can feel the difference and I also can allow him to be more ordinary; I can let him alone.

Diane Kelly is another wife whose work activities have helped her differentiate from her husband. Their relationship has shifted in much the same way as that of the White's. Diane went to work in a retail store six years ago, when her youngest child was in the fifth grade, because:

> I began to have feelings that I should either go back to school or go to work for my own satisfaction. I needed to be with people. I started working part-time and gradually got to almost full-time.

She has received much praise for her work, and like the other wives, feels very good about her accomplishments. She feels:

> better about myself now than ten years ago. I'm personally more satisfied in my marriage now. If I weren't happy in my marriage I wouldn't be happy with myself in it.

Reaching this level of contentment was not necessarily easy for the Kellys. As Diane has gained experience and confidence on her job she has become more independent of Tom:

> It started as something to do, then became financially necessary. She used to agree with everything I said. With me out and her home she was very attentive. Work gave her more opinions of her own. She didn't just say, "Yes, Tom." Also, there were two people home tired at the end of the day (Tom Kelly).

All did not go smoothly at first. Tom, who has been less than satisfied
with his own work, began to have doubts about himself and his marriage:

> I didn't like it at first. I felt I wasn't needed as much.
> I questioned our relationship briefly. Where did I stand in
> her eyes now, up here or down here? Does the work come first?
> I wanted her to have as much respect for me as she always
> had. . .wanted to be sure she cared so to speak.

Tom was hurt by and jealous of Diane's satisfaction with her job:

> When someone is very satisfied at work they take the family
> for granted as if to say, "I don't really need you people.
> I'm doing fine out here. I'm getting respect from this other
> life." They don't really mean it but it seems that way.

> This is exactly what he felt at the time (Diane Kelly).

They would have arguments about Diane's working and Tom sometimes told
her to quit her job, but they both realized that the extra money was
necessary. After their arguments they would find a way to talk about
what was bothering them. Tom gradually began to realize that

> she needed to feel a sense of I _am_ something in this world
> other than just a mother and a wife in the house. That there
> are other people in the world and there are other places and
> she _is_ appreciated by people other than her husband and kids.
> Whatever she's done people have liked her.

Clearly, Diane's success brought on a crisis of confidence in Tom, which
stemmed from his lack of fulfillment in his own work. It has taken them
a few years to readjust both their day-to-day lives and their deeper re-
lationship. Tom was flexible enough to share household responsibilities
and to accept that Diane's success did not negate his own worth:

> I began to realize that I had to be more patient which I'm

still trying to do.  I can't expect her to work and be a full-time housewife too.  I realized I had to help.

The Kelly's and White's situations are clear examples of a process that probably goes on in varying degrees in other healthy families as well, i.e., a parallel process of differentiation, children from parents, and wife from husband.  Tom Kelly has had to make the same adjustment in relation to his wife that Diane is making in relation to Barry, the oldest child.  Just as the wives need to find some ego-enhancing alternative to full-time mothering, so the husbands need some meaningful way of maintaining their self-images as the wives become more independent and less reliant on them for their connections to the outside world.  If husbands are satisfied and secure in their occupational roles, the process proceeds relatively smoothly.  If, however, the husbands' basic needs are not being met at work, a difficult psychological adjustment is more likely, and the couple's ability to communicate, to be tolerant and patient, is essential to a successful resolution of the crisis.

At this point it may help to summarize the steps in this process as described, and their relation to each other:

1)  Children develop in the context of a stable family structure with parents in clearly defined roles, until;

2)  the oldest differentiates to the point where parents can anticipate the child leaving home, and the youngest reaches school-age;

3)  wives sense their parental role shifting, and look for and find alternative sources of structure and satisfaction, which leads to;

differentiation of wife from husband, readjustment of role behav. and a possible personal crisis for the husband depending upon

his sources of satisfaction and the strength of the marriage.

As I have tried to point out, this is not a linear process. Each element feeds into all other elements, and any number of factors, both within the family and external to it, may affect both process and outcome.

## Other Factors

Other couples in the study point up how idiosyncratic factors may enter the process to affect it considerably. At the same time that Joyce Johnson was preparing for her son Paul to leave for college, she quit smoking. This was a major personal victory for Joyce, and seems to have served the same ego-enhancing functions for her that working has served for the other wives:

> I feel a lot better physically cause of quitting smoking. I will have a much fuller life. Every single day is so full and so exciting. I never felt like this before and I do now.

This feeling has helped her adjust to the fact of the children leaving:

> You work into it gradually and I hope that I'm going to be growing during this period, now that I have this new sense of my own worth as an individual and not as a mother. I feel so good about myself that I know I will continue to be interested in life.

Interestingly, Joyce's quitting smoking has also affected the marital relationship in much the same way as working as for the other couples:

Steve: We're conscious of the relationship.

Joyce: More sensitive to each other. I feel he has been <u>very</u> sensitive to me in the last few months. I've forced

him into that position because of _my_ transition.

Steve: I agree. Her quitting smoking was the major factor of the last few years. It's affected me more in terms of her effort. There was much care and personal effort; not an outward effort but an inward one.

Joyce: He took a lot of pounding.

Steve: We're both aware that a major thing has been done and now other things become possible.

Joyce: The relationship is more honest cause I feel more honest. Communication is more open. . .the important thing is when you become aware of where you are and what you are.

The spacing of the children in terms of age as an important element in determining the wives' activities is highlighted by Jane Robinson's situation. The Robinsons have found children, aged 18, 16, 13, and 4. With the first three they were essentially a completed family, and before Robert, the youngest, was born Jane anticipated either going to work or going back to school. At 38, she is in just the position that Sheila White and Diane Kelly were in a few years ago, and seems especially frustrated because she had a taste of freedom, and has now been thrust into being a full-time mother again. She eloquently describes what daily life must be like for many mothers:

The function of the mother is the hub of the wheel. In the morning everybody goes _out_ to their own activities and then everybody returns but it's not a stationary thing because they've expected certain things to happen. They don't even think about them happening. As far as they're concerned mother sits and crochets the _whole_ day. . .but the laundry is to appear in the drawer. The food is on the table; basically you just keep things humming, boring as it may be and it _is_ terrifically boring at times. Some days are just spent waiting; I _wait_ for my husband to come home for lunch, I _wait_ for him to finish so I can clean up and then the girls come home at 2:30 so I can't leave. . .and I have to wait for David. You

are entirely geared to everyone else and this is probably the
most frustrating thing that you have to deal with. You are
always planning and programming yourself around one individual
or a half-dozen individuals. I like to be able to accomplish
something and at the end of the day if I've accomplished no-
thing for _myself_ you just throw up your hands and say aah!
The whole day is gone by and I've wasted it. You haven't
really but I like to see something that I've done. This is
how I see my job is to keep everybody else running smoothly
. . . . I haven't found a great deal of _inner_ satisfaction
for myself. I haven't done anything to really feel _proud_ of.
There will be time later. I still have half my life left.

Jane has recently begun to do some work at the church to which she be-

longs. Diane, the second oldest child, commented that this seems to

have made her mother happier. "Before that she felt worthless. All she

was doing was housework. She complained about it to me and to the fami-

ly." Jane's statement clearly illustrates the point made by Frank and

Frank cited earlier, that the mother is mostly involved in serving

others, and her main task as the children get older is to refocus her

energies in other, more self-centered directions.

So far in this chapter we have looked at families at the very be-

ginning of the adjustment process occasioned by wives going to work

(e.g., Robinson), and at those who have essentially completed the pro-

cess (e.g., White, Kelly). I would like to close this chapter by focus-

ing for a moment on the Pattersons, who are literally in the middle of

the process. Rose Patterson started working during the interviews, and

in fact one interview was done the evening of her first day on the job.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the Pattersons have had some marital

problems. As Rose describes it, George got involved with his work and

she involved herself with the children, and they drifted apart. Now

that the children are almost grown, and one has left the house for good,

they are having to face each other and get reacquainted. Rose taught public school when they were first married but gave it up to raise the family. Several years ago she worked part-time as a substitute teacher, but has not worked in seven years. In the past few years she has been re-evaluating her life:

> The kids are leaving the nest and I didn't want to find myself sitting home. I've heard enough to know to prepare myself for this so it's no shock.

She decided to go back to school last year, and George was supportive of her doing so:

> He seemed to carry it off very well. He seemed to enjoy it. He says he likes grocery shopping. Sometimes I'll come home and he and the kids have cleaned the whole house.

Rose decided to look for work because she realized they would need extra money to finance the children's college educations. She obtained a job at George's place of work, which somehow seems to be an attempt to deal with both the financial issue and the marital issues simultaneously. Both sense that this is a big change in their relationships. They will be alone together for an hour every day, and will have much more in common. They seem both anxious and hopeful when they contemplate the possibilities. George is quite happy that Rose is working. He feels there would be a crisis for both of them if she did not find something to do:

> It's good she's working or involved in something other than looking for her life to be all me. She must have a life of her own. Her involvement will give us something to share.

He views Rose's job as:

. . .a challenge for her. It's a challenge for me too to see
if we can working out the necessary changes so we don't go
crazy.

George recognizes the necessity for Rose to find something meaningful

for herself and is aware of the fact that it will require him to make

adjustments. He knows he cannot expect "fancy dinners" and that Rose

will not be as available in domestic areas as she has been in the past.

Although he knows he <u>could</u> get "paranoid about Rose taking over some

financial responsibility," he does not feel he will since he is quite

satisfied with his own job. Rose herself seems quite ambivalent about

working. After her first day at work she came home physically and emo-

tionally drained:

> I don't like work. It scares the hell out of me that the kids
> might be dependent on my money to go to college. It's a frigh-
> tening new experience. I don't know how to handle it.
>
> George: You shouldn't put that pressure on yourself.
>
> Rose: The pressure is <u>there</u>. I don't like it. You face it
> every day. I couldn't cope with it if I were a man.
> If I had a mortgage and everything on my shoulders I'd
> collapse. . . .

Rose echoes what are probably the emotions of many women when they first

confront the work-world. At the same time Rose feels she must continue

to work, for herself:

> I'm working partly for money and partly cause I don't want to
> sit and clean house all day. I need some kind of social con-
> tact. It's a personal need. It doesn't matter what kind or
> setting. . . . They need somebody to do the work. It makes
> me feel good that what I do needs to be done and that I con-
> tribute.

Sitting with the Pattersons that evening I could easily sense the mixture of excitement and anxiety that both felt about the changes wrought by Rose going to work.

The aspects of work that seem most crucial to both husbands and wives in relation to changes triggered by the maturing of the children are its potential for maintaining and enhancing self-esteem, for giving people a sense of personal productivity, and for providing social contact within the community. For the wives in this study, their maternal role served these purposes as long as it was their major occupation. As the children in these families have matured, the wives have been lucky to have alternative avenues to pursue, and marriages that are stable and secure enough to accomodate the changes that come with shifting roles and relationships.

C H A P T E R   X

THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL NETWORK

In a town like this when you don't have family you have to
turn to friends in case of sickness or something and in your
fun times as well (Jane Robinson).

We are always looking for some people, a couple or a few
couples who share our interests and outlook and lifestyle
(Morton White).

Most people suffer when they live in isolation from their commun-

ity.  This is true for a married couple as a unit as well as for indi-

vidual spouses.  We need other people to validate our view of ourselves

and of the world, to provide fresh insight and ideas, to support us in

times of stress, and to share our happiness.  Friendships become even

more important when access to the family network is limited, since most

people turn to their family in times of trouble or joy.  The families

in this study have very limited access to their extended families, and

generally have well-developed friendship networks upon which they rely

to serve a number of important functions.  In a previous chapter we saw

that, early in their marriages, couples sought out and established links

with other young families, and that these links helped educate and sup-

port them while they were learning to be parents.  Connections with peo-

ple in similar circumstances are significant resources for couples at

present, although as a rule they seem more actively pursued and utilized

by wives than husbands.  Michael Foster sees his and Judith's joint

friendships as direct links to the larger community:

We've lived in places where we didn't have as many common

friends as here and I'm not so sure that's not one of the more
important measures as to how much people like a place.  It may
have recreation as a base but also provides an identification
with the community.


## Friendships

Several people mentioned that the availability of friends gives

them a sense that they are not alone in their situation:

Just to know they have the same problems you have it makes
your problems not seem so bad maybe. . .you don't feel like
you're the only one (Katherine Abbott).

Diane Kelly expresses a similar sentiment:

We don't feel like we're the only ones that have this kind of
problem or that kind of problem.

Of course, the value of friends goes far beyond providing relief

from isolation.  Friends provide new information, different perspectives,

and a sympathetic ear.  One has an opportunity to test out perceptions

and get feedback on thoughts and feelings.  George Patterson, Donald

Robinson, and Joyce Johnson all mentioned using friends as a "sounding

board" when they had issues or problems to work out:

Talking and verbalizing you are talking to yourself as much as
to others, saying the words and seeing how it sounds (Donald
Robinson).

It's nice to have a sounding board.  I use (my friend) once in
a while.  She can keep secrets and I can say just about any-
thing I feel.  She's a wife and it's important that it's a wo-
man.  If anything really serious came along she would be more
than just a sounding board (Joyce Johnson).

Rose Patterson and Susan Foster also mentioned using friends as sympa-

thetic ears to whom they could go for a supportive outside perspective.

Sheila White is a member of a woman's group as part of her graduate training, and has belonged to one support group or another for several years. She does not have any really close women friends here and seems to use the group in much the same way as other wives use their individual friends:

> I use the group as a good friend; to talk things out. I need someone who can sympathize and understand and who is in my field. I talk about where I am personally and professionally. · People in the group are in similar positions.

Several of the wives not only have individual friendships with women, but maintain a group friendship and support network disguised as a bridge club. This club seems to be quite literally a women's support group, and is recognized as such by the women, but it functions informally, as opposed to a formal task-oriented support group such as the one to which Sheila White belongs. Judith Foster talks about what her bridge group means to her:

> I've known the women in the bridge group for a long time. We have all been here now for quite a long time. We all met each other when. We've watched each other's children grow up. We know each other well. If someone has a problem that gang will hang together and help each other out and I think it serves the extended form of family. . .sisters maybe. . .I just enjoy it. It's a place where I can exchange community news. We go through what's happening with everyone's children; it's my child-sharing activity in a sense. . . . There's a bit of problem solving done when someone is having difficulty and they sometimes don't know how to pursue it. We have people with all kinds of backgrounds and so the nurse gets certain questions and the classroom teacher gets certain questions. . . . I think we do a lot of sharing and I think we do our share of publishing the news of what's going on in the community. . . .

Michael sees Judith's card-playing as merely a vehicle for her association with friends, and Judith agrees. Katherine Abbott, Joyce Johnson, and Diane Kelly belong to a bridge group also, and expressed similar feelings. They mentioned the fact that the groups have been together a long time, that they have many things in common, including age and family situation. Diane Kelly noted that seven of the eight women in her group are now working while none were working when the group started. She attributes this to changing family circumstances,

> We talked about everybody working and concluded we reached the age where we needed to get ready to put somebody through college or were already doing so.

The pattern of common vs. separate friends is quite similar for the couples. Most of their friends are other couples and are common to both spouses. This obviously serves to reinforce their monogamous lifestyle and prevents individual spouses from devoting too much energy to non-family relationships. Few husbands maintain what they consider to be close separate friendships, and several voiced the opinion that they feel little need for that kind of relationship; nor, in their opinions, do most men. They think women have more of a need for intimate same-sex friendships than men do since men find outlets through work, and are less inclined to share personal material. This view is, of course, the dominant one in our culture. Women are seen as the emotional barometers of families and are more prone than men to seek close friendships as vehicles for maintaining contact with the world outside of children and family. Several men did say, however, after thinking about it for a while, that there were friends to whom they would go if they needed someone to

talk with. The difference between the men and the women seems to be that for the men, sharing intimacies with a friend is a special occasion to be indulged in only under unusual circumstances, while for the wives it is an ongoing activity.

A prime source of friends and social activities for couples is the children. Participation in the children's activities has provided the couples access to a wide social network. Several of the boys play hockey and football, and the parents, especially the fathers, participate through membership in the Hockey Association and football clubs. This automatically gives the parents opportunities to make contact with other parents with common interests. Daughters have athletic and artistic interests as well that facilitate their parents associating with other families.

Because of their long-standing acquaintance with similar families, the parents interviewed here know many people with whom they can discuss the oldest child going away to college, and most parents find that it has been and still is important and useful for them to share their feelings about this with their friends; useful for their friends as well as for them. Many of the themes discussed so far in this chapter are illustrated as Michael and Judith Foster talk about sharing with friends feelings about Harold going away:

Michael: We have friends whose kid went to college and we've seen the parents four or five times since. There is a mutual joy in sharing the experiences. Both kids play football for their schools. One night we were with them. We were both interested in finding out the scores of their respective teams. The other fella was calling up the local newspaper to find out.

We have that kind of mutual interest.

Judith:     Everybody is very interested in what's happening.
            "How did you feel about it?" That's been asked a
            lot.

Michael:    . . .I'm absolutely _amazed_ how many people inquire
            about Harold and also inquire about him rather fre-
            quently. . . . Having never had a son or daughter
            go to college before I wasn't particularly _aware_ of
            the fact that that would become that much of a con-
            versation point. I actually wonder sometimes whe-
            ther I have been neglectful, whether I have actually
            inquired about other's children.

Judith:     We talked with the Abbotts who are close. We play
            bridge and belong to the same church. One reason we
            get so many inquiries is that other families are
            anticipating their having to deal with it and want
            to see how we do it. Other parents whose kids are
            gone already are offering themselves to us as sup-
            port. Harold's going away seems to be an important
            issue for our social group.

Michael:    Do you think we give off clues that it's important
            for us to talk about it?

Judith:     As I say to people when they ask is, "Well, you
            asked the right question." Friends recognize that
            this topic makes us happy. It brings a light to our
            eyes.

Michael:    . . .Judith and I are both known as people who have
            a rather strong family orientation and they do see
            that light sparkle in your eyes when they ask you
            about your child. Maybe there is a reinforcement
            there. . . . I told people it was really hard for
            me to see Harold go. I told work associates as well
            as friends. One football coach told me, "That's not
            surprising; that's a very common reaction. That's
            one of the toughest things (another friend) ever
            did!" I think that when you talk with people about
            this you find that there are some other people who
            feel that way about it too. _I_ think it helps to be
            able to talk with people about that. Did you talk
            with your bridge friends?

Judith:     Oh yes! Quite extensively. I'm sure that they had
            to listen one whole evening while I orated on it.
            I'm sure they were glad to do that. I'm sure they
            were glad that was over with and said, "Well, we're

through that and it's somebody else's turn." As one
of the girls said, "Well, we're really missing him
but it's not as bad as I thought it was going to be"
. . .it really <u>was</u> not as hard as I thought it was
going to be. I thought I would find it harder than
I do. I miss him but it wasn't too difficult. A
friend of mine tells me how much she misses <u>her</u> kid
even though the kid comes home a lot. I see a dif-
ference in reactions of members of our social group
to their kids leaving.

Katherine Abbott finds comfort in being able to share her feelings with
the bridge group and with individual friends:

After his surgery I was just so glad that he was well enough
to go that that took care of some of the sad part. I've ex-
pressed this to my friends. In my bridge group there are
children who have gone away to college for the first time.
Peter's two best friends went away. It comes up every time
we get together. One friend has a son who has a girlfriend
like Peter does and he comes home to see her. This comes up
a lot between us. With others it might be academics. We
share the fact that we can't do much about them; this is their
lives. . .kind of agreeing, "Yes, this is the case and we
can't change it." It makes me feel like I'm not the only one
going through this and just having another opinion.

Katherine also acts as a supportive resource for her friends:

One of my friends whose oldest is in junior high school always
wants to know things that I'm doing cause she knows it's com-
ing up for her. She's interested in how we decided on a col-
lege.

Richard Abbott talks with his friends too:

I have some colleagues I eat lunch with and one has a girl go-
ing to (college). We talk about it. It serves an indirect
purpose in learning about practical problems. You know from
letters and stuff how things are going but it's always nice to
know how other people's children are faring.

The Kellys and the Porters are friends (both oldest boys play football),

and the couples have shared their feelings about the oldest leaving
with each other:

> I talk things out with Diane. It goes in cycles. Sometimes
> we don't see each other for a while. I've shared with her
> thoughts about the boys and their going away to school; last
> year about applying to colleges and will they be accepted and
> how to pay for it. Common problems, sickness of relatives;
> stuff like that. We shared feelings about the oldest going.
> Bill and Tom and Diane and I sat there frequently at night
> talking about our feelings about their going away. Getting
> away from the girlfriends in particular. They're too young
> to be that serious about girls. We were relieved to get them
> out of town and on their own for that reason. Diane's back-
> ground is similar and so are the family situations. She's
> like a sister (Susan Porter).

Diane shared her feelings with her bridge group as well as with the Por-
ters:

> A few women have kids leaving, some will have soon. I shared
> the fact of it being a new thing having him go away; like
> what to do with his room. I read an article in the paper
> about how their room becomes like a shrine and I shared it
> with another group member. The group gives me companionship.
> We have much in common. Our parents are all the same age.
> They have trouble with health and retirement. We share steps
> along the way with the kids growing up.

The Robinsons are another couple who get support from friends in adjust-
ing to the oldest going away:

> We were at a dinner party with several couples whose kids were
> in college and we talked about the letters we got. We talk at
> great length about the kids. I asked if they were anxious to
> come home. Jessica's not sure about continuing in college.
> I ask for advice and get their opinions if they've been through
> what I'm going through (Jane Robinson).

Donald Robinson said that he talked with friends "in general terms"
about Jessica going away:

I talked with people who know a number of schools. I talked about my feelings with some people at work.

Rose Patterson talked about her feelings in her bridge group and with close friends:

> I talked about Joe's leaving in the bridge group. Other wo-
> men had kids leaving too. When are they going? What are they
> taking? Who are their roommates going to be? Stuff like
> that. It gave me some perspective. I didn't talk too much
> about my feelings. I did with my close friends. One friend
> has two sons leaving. I asked her what her feelings had been
> and found they were the same as mine. Knowing I'm not alone
> in my feelings and could talk them out. My friend's kid was
> 17 and a senior when his parents went to Japan. She remem-
> bered getting on the train and leaving her first-born son here
> all by himself. She said she'd never forget the look on his
> face. That was traumatic to her. I don't let some of those
> feelings come up because I don't know if I can handle it.

George Patterson, like several of the other husbands, spoke with friends and colleagues in general terms.

The parents' comments about sharing their feelings and questions with friends seems to imply not just mutual support but comparison as well. That is, parents compare their own situation and experience to that of their friends, and this comparison helps them to develop some perspective on how they are reacting to a major change in the family structure. It also helps to establish their status within their peer group as successful parents, or as vicariously successful through the accomplishments of the children. In this sense there may be a competitive quality to the sharing that parents do with each other, although this aspect was not mentioned by anyone. One may assume this element exists to some extent in the parents' peer group since it is a common factor in many social groups. However its presence does not negate the

value of having friends with whom parents can share their feelings, nor does possible jealousy or envy negate the usefulness of having some outside reference point with which to compare one's own standing in the community.

It seems logical that the wives would feel more need to share feelings and search for perspectives since raising the children has been their major activity. Husbands as a rule searched for practical information, although most shared some feelings as well. For the wives, the support they have received, and continue to receive, from women in the same position, seems to be a significant factor in their successful adjustment to the oldest child leaving home. To know that their hopes, fears, uncertainties, and confusions are shared by other women, and that others have made successful adjustments must be very comforting. The fact that they are adjusting to an essentially successful result, and can bask in and share the pride of friends and neighbors, also seems to play an important role for wives; certainly this is true for husbands.

## Community Involvements

In addition to friends and colleagues, family members are connected to the community through involvement in various social institutions. Participation in school activities of the children obviously is a major source of involvement for parents and has allowed them to follow the growth of the children in concrete, socially defined steps. They have seen the oldest child succeed academically, socially, athletically, and culturally in school and have experienced the family's first high school graduation ritual.

The church is another community institution in which families participate, and which provides support for their chosen values and lifestyles. Many of the children, including several of the oldest, have belonged to church youth groups where they have opportunities to develop peer relationships, community involvement, and leadership skills. This has also been true for the parents, many of whom have held or now hold positions of responsibility in church organizations. For most of the families the church has been an important context for family activity and has been woven into the fabric of their daily lives.

Although the church has not played a direct role in helping families adjust to the oldest child leaving home it has functioned as a social institution in which the children relate to the larger community and which provides feedback to families about the growth of the children. Harold Foster comments on the role of his former church youth group in helping his sister Lynn, as well as other members, to mature:

> . . .Lynn conducted herself more maturely in every way. People in the (youth group) have told me that she's coming into her own as a leader. I'm sure it has to do with me going away cause I was in it too. People told me it was a general phenomenon in the group. The younger siblings were in the background when the older ones were there. Now they've moved to the foreground.

Judith Foster said that the church and its youth group helped provide Harold with the kind of values that gave her confidence in his ability to live on his own without supervision.

Membership in the local church offers these families an important potential resource of people and facilities which helps family members integrate their lives and channel their energies into the community in

which they live.

To summarize, it appears that these families utilize the social networks of which they are a part to help them make adjustments to their changing family situations. Other parents offer emotional support and practical information as well as hold themselves up as concrete examples of others in the same position. The parents clearly feel they "belong" here, and seem to draw strength and sustenance from that sense of belonging.

CHAPTER XI

INTRA-FAMILY CHANGES

(Barbara) seems more grown up when she comes back. She seems
more responsible; you know, like her work habits. She's more
disciplined in school work. She does things that she wants to
do more without asking others' opinions (Julie White).

So far we have explored the long-term adjustments parents are mak-
ing as individuals, and as marriage partners, to their children growing
up and beginning to leave home. We have considered the family as a
sub-system of the community, and how the larger social system is uti-
lized by parents as a resource in adjusting to growth and change. It is
within the context of this long-term process that the oldest children
choose a college, and leave home, and that families adjust to the ab-
sence of this member. In this chapter we will examine changes that take
place within the family; between the oldest and siblings, between the
oldest and parents, and between parents and the remaining children. To
set the stage, let us look at what choosing a school and leaving for
college was like for these families.

## Choosing a College

Deciding where to go to college is a significant aspect of leaving
home. It involves finances, distance from home, and potential life-
style, among other things. For these families the choice was made more
significant due to the easy proximity of several colleges literally
right down the street. It would have been very convenient and comfort-
able for the oldest child to go to the local university. Certainly it

would have been cheaper than going away. These factors make it all the more impressive that the oldest children purposely chose an out-of-town school. Even though all the parents have been to college, and several are university professors, choosing a college seemed to entail a fair degree of chaos, guesswork, and turmoil. Parents acted as consultants to their children, and often as prods to activate them. The Whites' experience was fairly typical:

Morton: It seemed a very difficult business, what Barbara should do. Sheila and I seemed not to have strong opinions about how life should be led. . . . We started out almost as blank slates. There was no family connection with any school, no strong reason why she should stay here or go there. . . . One couldn't ignore the conventional advantages of having gone to a good school. She was reluctant to consider schools at a distance. It seemed logistically sensible to consider places we could actually take day trips to.

Inter.: Was Sheila an active part of this discussion?

Morton: Oh yes, we all were but because I was the person with the experience I suppose I took the lead in all this. Everything was checked out almost to excess, it seems to me. Always trying to get Barbara to be more active than she was. . . . The choice was between M. and B. Finally we left it to her. We were both very impressed when she gave the reasons why she wanted to go to B. Barbara came to us from the M. dorm and said, "I want to go to B. The reason is because I feel that it's more like an extra year of high school here. It's really not like being away." We were very impressed; almost to the point of feelings of tears after being able to make such an assessment, almost against her immediate interest. . . . We immediately accepted and that was that. . . . We really didn't know what we wanted. We were prepared for either decision. I thought she was going to stay out of simple conservatism. I'm still impressed when I think of it that she made the decision she did. It doesn't matter where she goes cause it's all a gamble. You never know.

Barbara discusses _her_ reasons for going away:

It's different. I'd get more of the whole college experience
being away. At M. I lived in a dorm but could go home any
time. I did the laundry at home. I want to be in the same
boat as everybody else.

Other families mentioned the collaborative nature of the search. The
parents and the oldest child talked about colleges, and visited some
schools together. Several children visited schools alone as well. The
families discussed educational philosophies, finances, and other as-
pects of the decision, but in the end the children were left alone to
make the final choice. There was hesitancy, uncertainty, and doubt, as
well as eager anticipation, but the children considered the academic
programs, social life, location, and other factors, and made the best
choice they could. A crucial factor in their decisions was their desire
to be responsible for their own lives. Like Barbara White, the other
oldest children expressed a need to be on their own. Most parents prac-
ticed a combination of centrifugal intervention and centrifugal re-
straint, and were impressed by their children's ability to make the de-
cision.

## Leaving for College

When it was time for the oldest child to actually leave, family
members experienced a variety of emotions. Along with pride and a feel-
ing of success, many felt a strong sense of sadness. Joyce Johnson's
reaction was an interesting mixture of feelings:

All the other kids were going back to school too. . . . . All

of a sudden it was time for him to go. We made no big deal about it. You go for a week and then decide where to live. Just bring a few things. It wasn't like sending him to California with clothes for a year. . . . Every now and then I'd think I should be doing something; my first child is going away to college. I should be feeling something. I was kept busy by the other kids. Paul took care of everything that had to be done which was another sign that he was ready to go. Never dreamed he would have done that. I couldn't go with him when Steve took him down. When he left, Mary said, "'Bye, Paul. See you in four years". . .and I came in and got busy and just broke into tears and cried and cried. "What on earth is the matter with me? My first son is going to college and so I'm feeling sorry for myself. I've earned it." It's kind of delicious to cry sometimes. That was the only big reaction. I was conscious of it for the first week.

It was not always the mothers that felt intense emotions. In the Foster family it was Harold's father, grandfather, and sister who had a hard time seeing him go:

It was very, very difficult for me to leave Harold. The idea of his going to college appealed to me. I felt good about the school and happy for Harold. I wished I was going myself. I was happy until a few days before he left. It wasn't a happy trip. When I had to leave him there it was one of the toughest things I've done. I miss Harold but it's OK now. I feel fine (Michael Foster).

Judith Foster's sadness at Harold's departure was relieved by her ability to identify with Harold's experience. Several parents indicated that they could identify with what their children were doing, and this seemed to help them adjust to the child's absence from home. Since the college experience was not foreign to them, they could vicariously enjoy the children's new lives.

The oldest children themselves had mixed reactions. While most were eagerly looking forward to the experience of being on their own, they suffered from homesickness for a while. Barbara White's reaction

was the strongest. The way in which her parents handled it reflects a healthy balance of emotional connectedness between family members, and active fostering of Barbara's independence:

Morton:   We took her to school and dropped her off. She
          started calling in the middle of the day in tears
          just a few days later. She got uncontrollable waves
          of homesickness. She called every day for a while.
          She came home the first week for a long weekend.
          Sheila took her back. Barbara said she knew she
          would get over it but wanted to come back before that
          happened. She could see it was temporary; if she
          stayed long enough it would be bearable and she would
          enjoy it. She had some valid complaints. . . . Her
          original decision was to go for self-discipline. It
          was too easy here. There wasn't independence at M.
          So in a way she set herself up--properly, I think--
          for a separation crisis. It happened very intensely.

Inter.:   What was your reaction?

Morton:   I was feeling intense sympathy but I was also somehow
          proud of the strength of her emotion; the connected-
          ness with us that it indicated that I have never
          really been sure of. I was also pretty confident
          that nothing drastic was going to happen. It would
          settle down. Even if it didn't, we could handle it.

Sheila:   I was pleased with the directness of it. I got angry
          because phone calls were at inconvenient times and
          said to call back and she wasn't there.

Morton:   It was logistically very clumsy and so I said that
          she had to call Sheila. She had waves of sadness
          that came over her unpredictably. Sheila was getting
          fed up and she told her a specific time when she had
          to call.

Sheila:   I figured that would do several things. One it would
          teach her how to cope, you know, live through until
          she could call; she would have the security that she
          could talk to someone; it would relieve her own an-
          xiety that we weren't able to talk to her; and I
          hoped that one call would do it. She called only
          once and then it was OK.

Jessica Robinson also suffered a bout of homesickness, which her

parents recognized as "mid-semester blues." Even though they missed her, they realized that she needed to be away to lessen her dependence on them.

Several parents saw their oldest child as outgoing and gregarious, and missed the excitment of the child's activities. At the same time they welcomed the peace and quiet:

> I was ambivalent. I was ready to not have the constant chaos at the house. I knew life would be simpler but I wasn't sure how it would be without him cause I've never been without him. I didn't miss him the first few months. I was relieved. It was quieter in the house; less turmoil. I didn't have to face his problems directly. . . . It was definitely quieter for me. I wasn't as harried. Dinner schedule was looser. There was less laundry and less cleaning (Rose Patterson).

## Changes in the Oldest Child

The maturation of the oldest child continues, and seems to accelerate, after the child goes to college. Virtually everyone interviewed commented on this growth. The oldest children themselves, their parents, and their siblings all noticed changes. The oldest children were seen as more adult, more responsible, more grown up than they were just a few months before. Jessica Robinson's comments were typical:

> I feel like I changed. I think you get older and you grow up more. There isn't always someone there to tell you what to do and I like that cause you feel more independent. . . . I would have changed at home too but it's more noticeable to my parents because I've been away.

Peter Abbott's parents talk about changes they see in him:

> Katherine: He seems like a grownup now and I find it different. It's a change from before he went away.

Richard: There is a maturation process which <u>does</u> occur when you get out on your own and have to do it for yourself.

Katherine: He seems more appreciative of things; for example, the laundry.

Richard: He is normally fairly quiet and when I went to pick him up I found that Peter was talking to a variety of people. Kids clam up when their parents are around.

Susan Porter feels that:

> . . .the biggest thing in Larry's growing up is this year in college. He has matured fantastically. He introduced us to his friends at school. He wouldn't have done this last year. His biggest growth has been since he's gotten away from us and seen something of life. We're pleased that he's succeeded and matured. He's outgrown his friends who've gone to M.

That the growth of maturity and autonomy can be accelerated when the child goes <u>away</u> to school is indirectly confirmed by Westley and Epstein (1969), who studied emotionally healthy college freshmen. Although their sample had somewhat similar backgrounds and family patterns to those in this study the children lived at home during their freshman year, and were found to be still fairly dependent on their parents. Their growth as described in the study seemed to be slower than that of the present adolescents, who were physically separated from the family.

## Changes between the Oldest and Siblings

One of the ways in which parents see their oldest child gaining maturity is in the manner in which they relate to their siblings. Once

the oldest children were away in college and had established some distance and independence from the family, the relationships between them and their siblings underwent subtle but definite changes for the better. Every family seemed to undergo this shift. The relationships were described as generally good before the oldest left, although there were the inevitable tensions and competitiveness between children living together. The general character of the change involved a reduction of the competitiveness between siblings and an increase in affectionate interaction. Julie White feels that she and her sister Barbara

> . . .get along much better since she is gone when we see each other. I don't have to live with her. As we got older it got better. Things that she talked about when she was becoming a teenager she wouldn't want to talk to me about. Now she does.

Barbara senses a difference too. Her siblings treat her differently around their friends; she is something of a status symbol for them because she is away at school. She also fights with them much less than she used to.

Jane Robinson noticed changes in Jessica's relationship with her sister Diane:

> As they get older they are getting to be friends. It's a plus. It really warms your heart to see that. They like each other as people.

Katherine Abbott is another parent who sees changes in the relationship between the oldest and siblings:

> When he went away to school he seemed to get more interested in each of the other children. In each letter he'll ask spe-

cific things about each of them. He didn't show interest before. I thought that was a sign of maturity.

The Porters noticed a similar change in Larry's interaction with his siblings:

> Since he's gone he's friendlier at home, especially with his siblings. When he was home there was more friction. Larry seems to have more respect for his younger siblings now. He writes letters to them. I didn't think this would happen (Bill Porter).

This improvement in sibling relationships provides an interesting corollary to Steirlin's conclusions about mutual individuation and ongoing communicational relatedness between the oldest child and the parents. It is a sign that the oldest children have come to feel secure enough in their autonomy from the family to maintain and even initiate contact with siblings without concern that they would be pulled back into the family as children.

## Changes between the Oldest Child and Parents

The relationship between the oldest children and their parents continued to move rapidly in the direction of an adult-to-adult one, rather than child-to-adult, both in terms of their perceptions of the relationship, and in terms of their behavior toward each other. The Robinson family exemplifies this process:

Donald: We get along fine now that (Jessica) is out of the house.

Jane: We just got back from a parents' weekend. We know now she realizes what she took for granted cause she doesn't have them now.

Inter.:   How did that happen?

Jane:     She made a comment about it being nice that we took
          her out to lunch so she didn't have to pay.  She has
          more awareness of those things.

Jessica feels that:

I can talk to my parents more as an adult now.  They include
me in conversations more and don't hide as much.  They want
my opinion too which makes me feel older.  I can talk more
with each individually.  They trust me; maybe more than they
should.  They just got a new car and they gave it to me.  I
don't have a curfew either.

A freer and more open communication process is one characteristic of the

change in relationships.  The Abbotts commented that Peter seemed more

communicative about school since going away.  Like the Robinsons with

Jessica, they impose no curfew on him now when he comes home.

Paul Johnson describes the change in his relationship with his

parents:

They've accepted my going away to school and coming back and
going away. . . . .  Normal now is at school.  That's forced
upon them.  I'm treated more as a separate adult.  They offer
me drinks at dinner and beer is available.  I don't like it
but it's a signal they treat me not as one of the kids.  In
high school it was still a unit of five going from 1st to 12th
grade.  Now I definitely feel different.  I've been away.

The Porters notice a big change in their relationship with Larry.

He and his father communicate much more openly.  On his part, Larry

senses a definite shift in the way his parents, especially his father,

treat him:

When I'm home now I'm out almost every night but my father
hasn't said anything.  It's surprising; in the past things

would have caused incidents that don't now. He doesn't agree
with things I do or say but he realizes that he can't dictate
too much anymore. It's good. Everybody is more comfortable.
The relaxed feeling helps avoid confrontations over silly
things. My relationship with my father has a way to go but
it's more comfortable. We can talk more. He doesn't push
anymore. It's pretty much agreed that we can respect each
other as individuals. . . . It's a matter of getting rid of
old images. I'm still a child and a member of the family but
also an adult. I can deal with my mother on a more adult
level. Nobody has really changed; just different perceptions
and loosening up.

The change in the interaction between the oldest child and the
parents seems the result of individual growth by the child while away
at school, and recognition and acceptance of the child's new status and
maturity by the parents. The pressure of the oldest child's presence
in the home is gone and parents' day-to-day concerns center on the re-
maining children.

## Changes in the Remaining Children

While the oldest children are maturing and becoming independent
adults, the other children are growing as well. As long as the oldest
lives at home, s/he tends to be the dominant child. This was true in
all the families in this study. There is only so much psychological,
behavioral, interpersonal space available to be filled in a family, and
the oldest, being the first to experience most things, generally seems
to take more space than any other individual child. Certain privileges
and responsibilities belong to the oldest child as criteria for ful-
filling a particular role in the family.

The departure of the oldest child leaves a void into which the
next child moves. This shift is impelled by two forces: 1) the physi-

cal and psycho-social maturation of the child; 2) the definition of the child as the new "oldest child" by the parents, and by the child him/herself.

The experience of the Foster family is a good example of this process:

Judith:      . . .we see Lynn is now relating more as the third
             adult in the family, and we are relating to her more
             in that role and she is a good bit younger; and see
             all this is coming at her at a younger age than it
             did for him.  She is 15½ and I think at 15½ she has;
             well she's kept less a child than he was at 15½.
             But she always was running to keep up with him.
             That was her greatest ambition in life.  We try to
             explore more things with her; talk to her more.  The
             one who talked a lot is gone so actually we talk
             more to her. . . .  She's growing up in front of my
             eyes and I'm saying to myself I really respect her
             opinions.  She has goals; she knows what she wants;
             she knows what she thinks about a lot of things.  I
             sure admire that she knows what she's about.  That's
             what I think is the nice part about anyone going off
             is that you have a chance to focus in on the next
             one.  The time that's spent as a group is so differ-
             ent than the time spent with anyone individually.

Inter.:    How is Lynn changing?

Judith:    Perhaps she's not changing as much as I am examining
           and watching more carefully and I'm more tuned in to
           what she is doing.

Michael:   Independence is a partial factor.

Judith:    I think she's maturing.  She's poised; she's a quiet
           girl and not very talkative.  This may be her person-
           ality or it may be part of the developmental phase.
           I don't know.  I just see her as more of an adult.
           It might be because she's moving into being the old-
           est one in the family.  It might be me.  It might be
           the way I'm viewing her.

Michael:   Yeah.

Judith:    She is more independent at this stage than he was.
           Is that right, Michael?

> Michael: I think so. . . . She is more assertive in a quiet way. She is intent on doing her thing more than Harold was.

The Fosters provide some interesting evidence that it is the <u>role</u> of the oldest that is taken up. Judith discusses how she and Raymond, age 11, almost unconsciously move Raymond into the role of "oldest boy":

> I see the second boy, Raymond, who is 11, really moving into the role that Harold had with me. I realize now what I did. I was upstairs and I had my hands full and I needed some help and I'd just bellow, "Harold". . .he was not surly or sullen and so he'd always come and do it. Raymond now Harold's gone, "Raymond," or I have to go do something and I'm gonna need a hand or I'm gonna get the car or something. Raymond is falling into more of those sorts of roles. We talked about it one day. His friend was here and I asked him, "Raymond, takes these rugs out and give them all a shake for me." His friend kind of looked and grinned and said, "Harold's gone now poor Raymond is left with all the sloppy tasks Harold did," and Raymond smiled as though, "Well, yeah, that's kind of natural, isn't it?"

The Johnsons are another family which exemplifies this shifting of roles:

> After Paul left the first thing I noticed--I'm not looking for these things--Mary's role changed so much. She missed him quite a bit at first, I think. But all of a sudden she became an adult. Steven and I would be talking and Mary would sit down and talk with us. She has become more interested in what we do. There was a big change in Mary after Paul left. With Paul gone she felt she was the head oldest sibling. . . . She's 17 years old one day and 27 years old the next and 7 years old the next. We've had some very involved, close talks that I didn't believe we could have. I'd wake up Steven and tell him. Something has happened in our relationship where we will always be mother and daughter but are much less that now than a month ago. We talk to each other as friends.

Mary senses the changes in her role and in herself:

I do stuff that Paul did. I keep my family in line. They're
frankly not conscious about the environment, like electricity
and lights. My brother used to bug the kids about it. Now I
do it cause he's gone. I'm depended on more to babysit. . . .
I don't know if it's Paul going or just growing up. I always
felt Paul as my shadow in high school. I was one year behind
him. I had to live up to his expectations. The same teachers
would expect me to do the same as him. We're different peo-
ple. If I did something in high school he knew. It's not
true now. . . . My relationship with my parents is getting
better. Last year I saw them as parents. I didn't see them
as people. They were the authority. People who would always
say no if I wanted to do something fun. It may have to do
with Paul's going away. I'm not sure. This year I'm begin-
ning to see them as people.

As in the Foster family, the Johnson's second oldest boy took over the

role of "oldest boy" after Paul left:

Joseph takes being the oldest male very seriously. He'll do
anything for me. It's different from the past. He does
things without being told. I think it's because he sees him-
self in an entirely different way. He's also grown up phy-
sically a great deal this year. I'm sure it's all because
Paul has gone away (Joyce Johnson).

And so the process continues, with the second children having their

turn as oldest in the house, and having models and expectations based

upon, though not necessarily the same as, the experiences of the oldest

children. The second oldest are preparing to leave soon themselves, and

the next in line will take over, albeit in a smaller household.


Other Changes

In addition to changes in the relationships between family members,

a number of other changes took place in most families. Some were quite

obvious and specific, while others were subtle and ephemeral.

Most parents felt that, with the oldest out of the house, things

were quieter and more relaxed.  There were fewer telephone calls, less commotion without the oldest and his/her friends running in and out, and for mothers, less cooking, laundry, and housework.  There were fewer decisions to be made about rights and privileges, because norms had been established with the oldest.  Although each child's individual needs and assets are recognized, precedents have been established, and so issues seem more easily resolved.

Several people, parents and children alike, sensed that, although things were obviously different without the oldest around, they did not seem all _that_ different.  There were no _major_ or _fundamental_ differences, but all the little changes added up to a changed atmosphere.  Families adjusted to new routines quickly and with little disruption.

One obvious change in some families involved a redistribution of children throughout the increased living space.  The oldest children had their own rooms, and in some families another child took over their room.  In other families the oldest child's room remained available to them when they came home for visits.

Most parents mentioned that the time and energy they spent on the oldest child was redirected towards the other children.  This was pointed out in previous sections of this chapter, and certainly seems to be an appropriate development.  Michael Foster commented that:

> There is more time to talk about what the other children do.
> I spend a lot of time with the kids. . . .  The time that I
> would spend alone with Harold is now available to the other
> kids.

When the oldest children come home for visits they find it quite

easy to move back into the family. Changes that take place still leave room for the oldest to re-enter, but as we have seen, they are really adult visitors, and not children in the manner they were before they left. George Patterson comments on the permanence of the change:

> . . .in my opinion he's flown the coop and no way is he coming back into this household as a real child in the family. He may come back as a visitor, he may come back for a year as he works. I think he'd drive us both insane. A member of the family sure he is, but as that close mother-father relationship to a child I think that ended the era just as I waved goodbye to him, which is a sad thing even though he's got to do it.

The most impressive aspect of the changes described in this chapter is the ease and naturalness with which they occur. The families are characterized by both flexibility and stability, which allows them to adapt to change without being overwhelmed by it. Things seem different but not too different. If a family were to experience massive change when the oldest left, it would not be a very secure family. It requires a delicate coordination and intermeshing of all the forces within and without the family to prepare children to take appropriate space and re-sponsibility at the time it is offered to them. The parents in these families are able to orchestrate these myriad forces to produce harmon-ious change and growth.

CHAPTER XII

THE FUTURE

. . .so many things can happen I just don't see the point in
getting set ideas about the future (Katherine Abbott).

There's always got to be something out there to accomplish
(Steven Johnson).

All the parents know that their children will one day be gone. As
we have seen, they are well on their way in making healthy adjustments
to the beginning of this process. Most parents have given some thought
to the future, both in terms of what they would like to accomplish in
the next few years, and in terms of the problems they are likely to
face.

In general, these couples see their major task as doing what they
can to insure their children's education. They want to see the children
established as adults with lives of their own, and will do what is ne-
cessary to aid them. For most of these couples this will take several
years. The shift to post-parental life will be a gradual one, and this
will probably cushion the effects of not having the children at home.
Further, they are anticipating being grandparents, and some may very
well be so before the last child leaves. This too should help ease the
way when the children leave.

As they look toward the future parents must face their own aging,
their responsibilities to their aging parents, and their adjustment to
a childless household.

# C H A P T E R   X I I

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Aging

The parents, being for the most part in their forties, are aware
that they are aging, and that their bodies are no longer as young as
they once were. They expressed no desire to recapture their youth, al-
though at the same time most attempt to stay in good physical condition,
and they are concerned about their health. In general they seem to ac-
cept their middle-age status and the physical limitations to go with it,
though they do not particularly like it:

> I'm 46 years old and I notice my body slowing down, particu-
> larly with the youngest. I don't have the physical stamina
> or patience. I pretty much feel comfortable with it. I have
> no great desire to be 20 again. I know that in 14 years I'll
> be 60. It hits me hardest in relation to Robert. He'll be
> 18 when I'm 60. I don't feel that I'm too old to do what I
> want. I live one year at a time (Donald Robinson).

Donald's wife, Jane, expresses a similar mixed attitude:

> I don't like (aging) much. I think I get annoyed at myself
> that I can't do what I used to. I don't worry about being old
> but I'm afraid of it. I started jogging in May. I like that.
> There's all kinds of things that I would have liked to have
> done that I don't see myself doing now like jump from an air-
> plane or learn how to fly. I realize I probably won't do them
> but they aren't very important. At 39 I feel there's time
> left. I'd like to know what else I could accomplish.

Some parents related thoughts about aging to their oldest child being in
college:

> You almost start feeling old when you realize that your oldest
> is already going off to college. Each stage indicates that
> you are getting older (Richard Abbott).

The fact that Joyce Johnson has a child in college tells her she is ag-

ing but that knowledge is balanced by the dividends from not smoking:

> I don't think aging bothers me. There's nothing you can do
> about it. I feel a lot better physically cause of quitting
> smoking. I will have a much fuller life cause of quitting.
> Every single day is so full and so exciting. I never felt
> this before and I do now. Well, you can't feel that you're
> getting old when you feel like that and you've never felt it
> before. I don't feel that I'm old enough to have a child in
> college. This is always a surprise to me. My children are
> no longer little so I <u>must</u> be getting older.

Susan Porter is another parent who does not <u>feel</u> old enough to have a
child in college:

> I don't feel as old as I am. I don't <u>think</u> of myself as being
> as old as I am. This is the first year that I'm beginning to
> realize that I'm no longer 26 years old. I have back trouble
> but I swim every day. When Larry graduated I thought, "When I
> graduated from high school my mother was old but I'm not <u>old</u>."
> I feel too young to have a kid in college. I can't really be-
> lieve that I'm in my forties. Mentally I feel 10 years young-
> er. I do notice the physical change.

Neugarten's conclusion that men and women's definitions of their
age status are tied to work and family events respectively seems to re-
late to the person's definition of self and of their social function:

> I was playing bridge last night and one of the girls is going
> to be a grandmother. I think only in the sense that I relate
> to others that are aging. Does it trouble me that I have a
> birthday or that I'm thinking of 46, 47, or 50? No, I don't
> really think anything about that. Friends comment on my <u>rela-</u>
> <u>tive</u> youth cause I have a young child and they have kids gradu-
> ated from college. I always come off as the junior member of
> some of these groups even though I'm not. I think women talk
> in these terms just a bit. I think that's one thing that work
> does. I don't think age becomes as much an item in thought
> when you work as it does for my friends who are more interested
> in domestic affairs; who like to sew and do around the house
> and have done that all the time and that is their major inter-
> est. They think more in terms of those processes maybe than I

do. I'm sure that I will at some point but I don't think I've reached that point cause I don't really feel old (Judith Foster).

Judith's comment also points up the role of friends in determining where she is in her own development. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, people's comparisons of their friends' situations with their own are important yardsticks by which they measure their lives.

The parents are all physically, intellectually, and socially active, and they see themselves as being "in the middle of life," with time left to enjoy new interests. This helps keep them young in spirit. At the same time they sense the "irretrievability" of life:

I really feel I'm in the middle of life and I'd better do the things I want to do now because what follows is another stage which can be very nice I suspect; getting older; but I think one has to kind of do what you want to do and I think I'm at that point (Judith Foster).

Again, parents compare their own feelings and circumstances to those of their friends and neighbors:

I've had very distraught thoughts about death; the finality of it. I start thinking maybe I've only got another 30 years left. You don't think about those things until you start to get up to this age and you begin to see people that you know dying even at my age. I've seen people my own age and even younger die of heart attacks. I had a close friend die of cancer; my neighbor. I went through it with him. Hardest thing I ever saw (Tom Kelly).

Aging of Grandparents

Friends and neighbors are not the only people whose illnesses parents think about. Their parents are reaching the age where couples are

beginning to feel some responsibility for their welfare. Just when parents find themselves with increased time and space, and can anticipate less day-to-day management of their children's lives in the future, they are faced with the fact that their own parents are or will soon become dependent upon them to varying degrees. Several parents see their own parents as substitutes for their children in the sense that as the children become less and less dependent the grandparents will become more and more so, possibly to the extent of living with them. The White's experience is typical:

> Morton: They've all got to the point where one way or another we feel a new pressure or concern. Things are happening to them which call forth that sense; illnesses; not severe but enough to give us a hint as to the next few years.

> Sheila: We've talked about his mother living with us. I don't know what his father is like. He is 79 and just showing signs of age now. I'm particularly aware of our parents taking the place of the kids in terms of my responsibility to them because it will fall on me. I'd like some space. 1 want some time for professional growth but I feel wrapped up in the responsibility and burden of my parents.

> Morton: She has four siblings so she can get some space. My father isn't dependent on me because he has his own wife. The real problem is my mother and stepfather. They have the least emotional and financial resources.

The Porters too have thought about their responsibility to their parents:

> Susan: We could have Bill's father live with us because he is easygoing but his mother would be trouble. She gets worse with age. She's a very dependent person. She must go either here or to a nursing home. She forgets things. We hate to face it. We can see things coming that we don't want to have to face some day. We

wouldn't want to put them in a nursing home. We're
just getting to where we're independent of the kids
and it's the age-old problem of older parents.

Bill:  It's in the background. They would come here before
we would send them to a nursing home. It would change
our lives.

Couples face important and painful decisions about responsibilities
to their parents in the coming years, and seem to be preparing them-
selves for that time. Since they are not a major burden at present,
however, couples can look forward to some time when being, in Lidz's
phrase, "in the center of the stage," includes some freedom to spend
time and energy on their own pursuits.

## Plans for the Future

As the children continue to grow up and leave home parents are be-
ginning to fantasize about how they would like to spend their time in
the future. Spouses expressed a desire to spend more time together.
Wives talked about continuing to develop their newfound personal and
professional activities to fruition, and husbands shared thoughts about
retirement. The Whites are one couple that is looking forward to the
future:

I'd like to feel that we will continue to develop. I mean I
have serious intentions to be a therapist. It's related to my
personal life. My professional development will make our re-
lationship stronger. I really like the idea of our having a
lot of time together. I have fantasies of lying in bed late
and having nice little dinners for two. I have more honeymoon
fantasies of what it will be like after the children are gone
than I did before. More sense of the richness of our relation-
ship. . .(Sheila White).

Judith Foster shares her thoughts about the future:

> I think what happens as your family changes is that you grow
> more dependent on each other for your time itself is spent
> more with that one individual. We spend little time alone.
> I'll continue to get to know him. I look forward to being
> able to do things with just the two of us. I miss that. I'm
> jealous of people I know who spend more time alone with each
> other. Both of us are always going to have to have something
> that we enjoy doing. We'd drive each other crazy if we had
> nothing separate to do. . . . I really think you have to sort
> of establish a new relationship.

Jane Robinson sees the next few years as a time of decision for

her:

> I've had the kids in the house for a long time. I've been a
> mother for a long time. . . . The past few years I've re-
> alized that I've got to decide where I'm headed. I've liked
> what I've done but I can see it's coming to an end and I feel
> that I've got a couple of years when Robert needs me but I'd
> like to prepare to do something else. We've talked about me
> going back to school; not to take anything in particular but
> the idea that I'd like to go. I don't particularly want to
> get a 9 to 5 job just for the sake of getting out of the
> house. . . . I don't really feel the passage of time but
> I'm aware of it.

Katherine Abbott has similar feelings:

> It's hard for me to make these decisions. I wonder what I
> will do, work full-time or what. At this point I'm not doing
> a thing about it. Should I be? This is in my mind. I can't
> see myself just sitting <u>home</u> when the children are all away
> at college. I don't want to go back to school. I'm doing
> the right thing for <u>now</u> but maybe I should be preparing for
> later.

Neither woman works full-time at present but they both are beginning to

think about what they will do for <u>themselves</u> when the children are gone,

and one can hear the uncertainty and anxiety in their voices and words

when they face this change in their lives.

The Johnsons, like the Fosters and Whites, expressed a desire to spend more time with each other:

> . . .I'd like to travel with Joyce alone. We still enjoy each other's company. I expect it to get better, happier, different, more exciting, more challenging. . . . We want to develop activities that we can do together (Steven Johnson).

The Kellys' hopes for the future are similar to those of the other families, but are complicated by the fact that they have a deaf daughter:

> . . .Tom and I look forward to the time when we can be together more. I can think of what it will be like with no kids. We get feelings this year with just one at home if he's out we've had dinner together without any kids in the house and said this is what it's going to be like. It will be a gradual adjustment. Irene may be at home after the other kids leave. If not when the last one leaves it's not a thing you get used to overnight but we will be busy enough doing things. Irene will be home in two years. I don't know what she'll do yet. Our anxieties and concerns center on her. . . . We would rather not have to maintain a parental role but we expect to longer than if she were a hearing child (Diane Kelly).

The parents in this study are at different points in their thinking about the future. Some wives, e.g. Sheila White and Susan Porter, are already actively pursuing new interests and careers. Others, like Katherine Abbott and Jane Robinson, are just beginning to face the reality of a future without children in the house. Most husbands anticipate continued professional activity and more time to devote to their marriages. Virtually every husband recognizes the need of the wives to branch out, and though they expect that the adjustments will sometimes

be rocky none seems afraid of the task. They have weathered crises before, and they appear eager to share new experiences with their wives.

## Models for Old-Age and Grandparenthood

Most parents mentioned that they look forward to being grandparents. They appear to base this positive outlook on their childhood experience with their grandparents, and on their observations of their own parents in relation to their children. Their parents seem to serve as both models of productive adjustment to old-age and grandparenthood, and of unproductive adjustment as well. Judith Foster is one parent who feels she has had good models for being an older person:

> . . .I have my folks here and I see this as an ongoing process all my life. I've always lived more with older people than with younger people. I never knew babies till I had my own, so older people are not strange to me and not so different. I think I must have a really good sense of, as I look at each stage of my life I sort of see something that's really nice about it. My folks are, they enjoy life a great deal. They are 78 and 75. They enjoy life; it's not a drag. The old folks that used to live with us, they were quite a pleasure to be with. I don't have the feeling towards old people that they were a drag on my existence as a younger person. I hope I'll be able to go to my kids and be interested; without making myself obnoxious. Also old folks weren't the problems that I hear other people explain. Sometimes you have good teachers you don't have to be that way yourself. You follow the models you have sometimes it works out OK.

Katherine Abbott consciously uses her parents as models for grandparenthood:

> I think about the kids being married. When the grandparents visited over the holidays I started putting myself in their role of going to visit the children and seeing how this would be. I was putting myself in their role and I hadn't really done this before. I started doing it because Peter is so

serious about his girlfriend. I talked with my mother-in-law about the fact she won't do things for herself though she wants to and uses her husband's work as an excuse. "Why don't you go? You don't have to be a martyr; it would help your relationship. You can't live everything for the other person." I think of this.

Diane Kelly bases her positive expectations of grandparenthood directly upon her experience with her own grandmother:

I think grandparenthood is very rewarding. This is based on the fact that I had such good grandparents. I talked with my grandmother more than with my mother. She influenced my life a lot. She lived long enough to know her grandchildren and be in the home.

The Porters' own parents provide them with contrasting models:

Susan:    I remember my own mother who had a job and kept busy. It was harder for Bill's mother who never even drove a car and was home-oriented all her life. It was really a shock when her youngest left home. That's why I wanted to keep working to keep stimulated. She doesn't knit, sew, or have outside interests. I don't want to be like that. I want to have enough outside interests so that I don't sit home in a rocking chair.

Inter.:   Can you think of being a grandmother?

Susan:    Yes. I have an attic full of toys I'm keeping. I think about it once in a while. Again, I do it cause of the model set up by Bill's mother. My grandfather was a model for staying active. My grandmother was the opposite.

Bill:     They serve as a model for me too. My father at 75 still hunts.

The parents seem to know what they must do to remain productive and happy in the years after the children leave home. They have seen their own parents and grandparents make sometimes successful and sometimes

unsuccessful adjustment, and this has provided them with clear aims for the future. Whether they will be able to fulfill their hopes depends upon many factors, such as the successful launching of their children and the avoidance of serious illness. If past experience is any indication, most of the couples interviewed in this study will make the future work reasonably well for them.

# C H A P T E R   X I I I

## CONCLUSIONS

The families in this study are successful families, but what does the word "successful" mean when applied to a family? At its most basic level it means that the family remains intact on a day-to-day basis. Beyond this it means that over the long-term the family accomplishes its major tasks as a unit within a particular social structure. The tasks include providing physical and emotional security for its members, socializing the children into the prevailing cultural values, interpersonal modes, and economic structures, and providing the intimate arena for the unfolding developmental processes of its subsystems.

The forces which allow and enhance the successful accomplishment of family tasks include the personal strengths and resources of family members, the support families receive from the social institutions in which they are immediately imbedded, and the congruence between the characteristics of the family and the dominant forces in the culture at large. Families intereviewed here are in an excellent position to accomplish their function in society. The family members are as a rule intelligent, physically and emotionally healthy, skilled in areas that are economically and socially valued in our culture. They are in the mainstream of middle-class American society and have access to all the resources necessary to move through successive stages of individual and family development. What we have thus described are families that are very likely to succeed in performing those tasks set for them by the developmental stage in which they find themselves at present, i.e. the

launching of children and the ongoing adjustment of remaining family members to this process. Nevertheless, success is by no means inevitable for any family, and it behooves us at this point to re-examine some of the factors which have been highlighted in previous chapters, in order to fully understand their role in helping these families initiate the launching process.

First, the parents have a strong, primary commitment to the family as the social unit within which they will live out their lives. This commitment stems from their positive experience growing up in their own families of origin, and from the fact that in their early years as adolescents and adults, the vast majority of the culture supported, even demanded, family life. The effects of this choice are that parents are willing to sacrifice some personal satisfaction in order that the larger unit may succeed. Tom Kelly remains in a job he does not really like because his family likes where they live and his deaf child can get an education. Jane Robinson delays her emancipation from the house because she feels her young son needs her. Rose and George Patterson submerge their personal differences so they may raise and educate the children. Virtually every parent makes major financial sacrifices so that their children may attend the college of their choice, when it would be easier and cheaper for them to go to a local school. Whether these sacrifices are ultimately worthwhile or not, the point is that parents are willing to make them because the family is their primary concern. This ethic is a basic value of the parents in these families.

## The Role of the Community

Erikson (1968), in discussing the developmental crisis of adolescence, mentions the role of the larger society:

> In any given period in history, then, that part of youth will
> have the most affirmatively exciting time of it which finds
> itself in the wave of a technological, economic, or ideolog-
> ical trend seemingly promising all that youthful vitality
> could ask for.
> Adolescence, therefore, is least 'stormy' in that seg-
> ment of youth which is gifted and well trained in the pursuit
> of expanding technological trends, and thus able to identify
> with new roles of competency and invention and to accept a
> more implicit ideological outlook. . . . And indeed, it is
> the ideological potential of a society which speaks most
> clearly to the adolescent who is so eager to be affirmed by
> peers, to be confirmed by teachers, and to be inspired by
> worthwhile 'ways of life' (p. 129-130).

Van Gennep, quoted earlier, points out the essential role of society throughout the life cycle. It is difficult to overestimate the role played by the community in influencing the outcome of developmental processes in families. The community includes friends, neighbors, institutions such as the church, schools, civic organizations, interest groups, political and governmental bodies, as well as actual or potential sources of employment. The privileges and responsibilities of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, are defined by the community, and an individual's judgment of where they are or should be developmentally is made largely on the basis of feedback from the community. In fact, it has only been through technological and social changes in American culture that adolescence as a distinctive period in the life cycle has even emerged (Demos & Demos, 1969).

Neugarten and Datan (1973) view individual developmental issues in

terms of the implicit and explicit age-status structure of the culture,

which determines people's sense of "social time":

> The age-grade system institutionalizes cultural values and
> constitutes a social system that shapes the life-cycle.
> Every society has a system of social expectations regarding
> age-appropriate behavior, and these expectations are inter-
> nalized as the individual grows up and grows old, and as he
> moves from one age stratum to the next. There is a time when
> he is expected to go to work, to marry, a time to raise chil-
> dren, a time to retire, even a time to grow sick and die (p.
> 59).

What does this society actually provide people to help them through

developmental stages?  Minuchin (1974) feels that in relation to fami-

lies with adolescents social institutions other than the family are tak-

ing over guidance and education but

> society has not developed adequate extrafamilial sources of
> socialization and support. . . .  Western society does not
> have clearly differentiated functions for adolescents.  When
> the family releases its children, it releases them to inade-
> wuate supporting systems.

This seems especially true of lower socioeconomic class families, whose

children are often poorly trained by society's socializing institutions

for full participation in the culture.  Lack of appropriate educational

services, non-existent employment opportunities, and a social welfare

system that encourages passivity and dependence all conspire to make

productive adolescent and family development difficult for these groups.

Certainly this is true for many families with adolescent children.  How-

ever, to the extent that American middle-class culture does have extra-

familial supports for adolescents, the oldest children interviewed in

this study seem to have those supports available to them.  The oldest

children have all experienced successive re-definitions by the community, in the direction of adulthood. Obtaining a driver's license, working in part-time or temporary jobs, learning how to relate to the opposite sex in more and more "adult" ways; all these involve sanctioning and support by the community, both legally and informally. To the extent that this particular community makes available to its members the dominant institutions of the larger society, and to the extent that they take advantage of those opportunities, these children fit Erikson's description of those adolescents most likely to "succeed," i.e., meet the expectations, in the culture. The community has given them opportunities to "buy into" the mainstream, and they have taken advantage of these chances. Their success in school, indeed the very fact that they are attending college, attests to the congruence between their values and abilities and the opportunities offered to them by society. Erikson points out that where congruence does not exist, where opportunities for adolescents to incorporate positive skills and values into their newly forming adult identities are lacking, individual psychopathology and antisocial behavior, with their potential for escalating into a concretized deviant identity, result, as well as family problems. It is also true, however, that satisfied people are not likely to initiate change. This sample of adolescents is relatively conservative and traditional in outlook, and a society needs a certain number of discontented youth to promote change and adaptation to new circumstances.

The oldest children participate fully in community life. They play organized sports, belong to churches and affiliated youth groups, and provide their parents with motives and vehicles for involvement in com-

munity affairs.

The feedback parents have received from different parts of the community has prodded them to readjust their perceptions of the oldest children. As their perceptions have shifted to seeing the children as more mature, parents have adjusted privileges and responsibilities to correspond to the children's new status. The family, as the primary group responsible for the socialization of children, is the link between the individual and the community, and integrates feedback on their children's development into day-to-day living situations. Erikson virtually ignores the family as the crucial intermediary. Yet the family determines to a great extent the relationship between the growing individual and the community. Conversely, the community affects in large measure the relationships within the family. There is no way to fully understand individual development without considering the family as the interface between the person and the culture. Since Erikson proposed his schema for individual development this view has come to be widely accepted in the mental health fields as well as in academic fields such as sociology. Byng-Hall and Miller (1975) state the basic idea as follows:

> There is a constant flow or interchange between individual
> family culture and the collection of ideas, values, and prac-
> tices that make up the wider culture. Although every family
> is unique, its members internalize and conform to values that
> are widely held. If they deviate from these in certain basic
> areas, the law of the land will impose limits and sanctions.
> At the same time, law is man-made and is slowly but constantly
> changed to reflect changes in social attitudes about what is
> considered to be deviant behavior. Thus each family influ-
> ences the values and beliefs which become institutionalized
> and part of conventional behavior, and is in turn influenced
> by them, in a kind of reciprocal relationship (p. 66).

The burgeoning field of family therapy operates under the explicit assumption that the family is the basic unit of society, and is the prime agent of socialization and cultural transmission (Howells, 1975). Individual development, both normal and pathological, is understood in the context of family development within a community which may help or hinder that development. According to this view the family is "an open sociocultural system in transformation." It is seen as requiring continual restructuring as it goes through stages of development. It "adapts to changed circumstances so as to maintain continuity and enhance the psychosocial growth of each member" (Minuchin, 1974). We have seen how the community aids the development of the oldest children in the families in this study. Further evidence for this general view of the relationship of family to community is supplied by examining the part played by the community in the adjustment of parents to their children growing up and beginning to leave home. While the oldest children are moving toward adulthood the parents are facing their own developmental changes, which are occasioned both by the maturation of the children and by the parents' entrance into middle-age. It is important to realize that these two processes are not inevitably linked in time. The very juxtaposition of adolescent maturation and the sociobiological phase of middle-age is culturally determined.

Erikson's rather abbreviated discussions of the developmental issues of middle age, i.e., generativity vs. stagnation, and of the community's role in resolving this crisis, provide no detailed description of the process involved. It is interesting to note, though, that he includes productivity and creativity under the rubric of generativity,

since it is clear from the parents' statements that much of their adjustment involves searching for new ways to be productive, creative, and needed. This seems especially true for the wives, who have a much greater readjustment to make than the husbands.

Research on middle-age, expanding on Erikson's work, has begun to examine in detail the changes that individuals and couples go through during this time (Frenkel-Brunswick, 1968; Gould, 1972; Jacques, 1965; Levinson, 1974; Neugarten, 1968; Sheehy, 1974). Sheehy has integrated much of this research in her book, "Passages," the very popularity of which attests to the growth of and interest in the topics of middle-age and life-cycle development. The emphasis in her work, as in much of the research in this area, is on the personal, internal struggles of middle-aged individuals and couples. In a general sense the families interviewed in this study fit nicely into the overall picture of middle-aged developmental tasks that Sheehy paints:

> If the average couple is to find refreshment in midlife, the earlier division of roles between breadwinning husband and caregiving wife needs renegotiating. It is much easier said than done, of course. Realistically, whether or not a wife has marketable skills depends on the life pattern she has followed up to now. Subjectively, the questions are: Does she want, or dare, to try them out? Is he willing to watch his wife go into independent orbit, or does he fear the competition? She has to face the female's inner timidity problem. He has to contend with the male's Atlas complex (p. 284).

We have seen the Kellys struggle with these issues. We have seen other families dealing with these issues at different points in the process. The tasks are clear. But again, the community's role needs highlighting in order to fully understand this phase of adult development. After

all, adult development no more exists in a social vacuum than does ado-
lescent development.

The community affects the parents' adjustment through two modes.
One way is by providing opportunities for relatively intimate interper-
sonal contact, i.e., individual friendships, and group affiliations such
as Sheila White's support or Judith Foster's bridge group. This contact
allows parents entrance into an expanding network of people and ideas,
fosters sharing of information and emotional reactions, offers the per-
spective of people who are experiencing similar issues, and provides a
forum for problem solving. The peer group seems as necessary to middle
age growth as it is to adolescent growth.

The second way in which the community affects parental adjustment
is in the extent to which it offers parents constructive alternatives
to parenting, ego-enhancing activities, and a positive definition of
what it means to be middle-aged. For women, opportunities for meaning-
ful, productive work (either in the form of a job, career, or some other
non-paying activity) are fundamental needs. All the women interviewed
who work work not only for money but because they feel a need to be use-
ful, to be interested in others, to be interesting to others and to
themselves. Lopata (1966), in interviews with 1000 housewives, found
that as children left home many sources of rewards and prestige were
lost. At this point differences in life satisfaction were expressed de-
pending on the availability of alternative activities and expectations.
Higher socioeconomic status women, who had a number of potential activ-
ities to choose from, indicated greater happiness than those from lower
economic status, who saw themselves as "having to go to work." One

might speculate from these results that it is not work per se that is important, but rather the chance to do something personally meaningful, as when Joyce Johnson quit smoking. Jobs, however, seem to be increasingly the choice for women, and thus the economic health of a community becomes as crucial an ingredient in affecting parents' adjustments as it is in contributing to the passage of adolescents into adulthood.

Like their oldest children, this particular group of women are perhaps somewhat unusual in that they have access to whatever facilitating, supportive structures exist in this culture, but they are not at all unusual in terms of the issues with which they have to deal and the decisions they must make.

The extent to which the community facilitates wives' adjustment to children leaving home is the extent to which it forestalls some types of marital discord, and potentiates others. The difficulty of husbands' adjustment to children leaving home depends in part on the ease with which wives adjust, and in part upon their own feelings of self-worth and productivity which, in turn, are tied to job satisfaction. This is dependent upon the economic community's messages to them regarding how much their acquired skill and experience are worth. Tom Kelly has seen younger men with less experience claw their way past him, and feels doubts about his self-worth which are exacerbated by his wife's very success in her job. The other husbands as a rule are feeling successful and worthwhile at present and can adapt to their wives' success without going through a personal crisis. (Although some of Michael Foster's comments indicated that a few years ago he was in the same position as Tom Kelly.) If the community did not offer wives support, these hus-

bands would have a different set of problems to deal with in addition to
their individual issues. Sheehy points out that men are particularly
vulnerable to middle-age difficulty regarding their adolescent children
leaving because it is in middle-age that many men first allow themselves
to experience and express the emotional side of their nature. They want
to be close to their children just as the children are getting ready to
leave.

One might comment briefly at this point on the role of the women's
liberation movement as an attempt to create community support structures
for women, both in an economic and social sense. While the movement has
wider origins and implications, its development may be seen partly as a
response to the changes in society which have resulted in women having
many productive years left after the children have all left home. Mo-
therhood is no longer enough partly because it takes up less of a wo-
man's life span than in the past. Issues such as equal employment op-
portunities, equal power in the political arena, and equal pay for equal
work, are clearly intended to provide women with community support for
expanding their lives and making full use of their potentials. They
also help to change society, and as the laws, customs, and expectations
of the culture change, so will the lives of individual families, making
the midlife crisis perhaps less traumatic for women and couples in the
future.


Internal Adjustments

In addition to highlighting the role of the community in helping
the parents begin the launching of children, the interviews with parents

pointed to an internal, psychological process that many parents went through as they adjusted to the oldest becoming more and more autonomous. This process involved: 1) observation of other people in roles or behavior patterns that are expected or potential activities for parents; 2) discussion or sharing of feelings or thoughts related to these roles (though not always directly or consciously); 3) fantasizing oneself in those roles, imagining oneself doing or feeling what those observed are doing or feeling (Brim & Wheeler, 1966). This process was not a linear one; the elements interacted with and fed into one another.

Just as the second oldest children often use their older siblings as trailblazers, so the parents use relatives and friends as both positive and negative mirrors in which they reflect their own images of themselves. Talking with friends, listening to their stories about how they are adjusting to children leaving home, measuring friends' feelings and reactions against their own, observing their friends in new roles, are all important tools for parents as they see their own family relationships changing. An example is found in the way in which parents are beginning to prepare for a future family role, that of grandparent. Most parents were quite explicit in stating that they observed their own parents and grandparents and imagined themselves in their place; this included both their memories of the past and their current interactions with their parents, who have now been grandparents for a long time. Katherine Abbott imagines herself visiting her married children, and talks with her mother-in-law about the latter's doing things for herself; an issue with which Katherine is struggling right now. Diane Kelly, and Susan and Bill Porter, indicated that their experiences with

their own parents in grandparent roles had direct bearing on their expectations for grandparenthood.

Of course this use of parents is coupled with the influence of friends, mass media, and other sources of information which define the expectations of grandparenthood. This process is strongly affected by the community. Essentially it is the community which provides much of the "raw data" which enters into parents' fantasies, thoughts, and observations. It provides people for comparison, sets the parameters and expectations for different roles, and, of course, is the arena in which people test out the roles that have been presented to them (Brim & Wheeler, 1966; Deutscher, 1962; Neugarten & Weinstein, 1964).

The interviews with these families suggest that preparation for future roles requires exposure to those potential roles, and opportunities to "practice," or to create an internal "fit" between expectations for the future and the person's image of him/herself in fulfilling those tasks. One might speculate that this process occurs at all the major transition points discussed in this study. Parents used friends with young children to help them become parents when the first child was born; the first child serves in a trailblazing capacity for younger siblings; the parents' own parents do the same in relation to being grandparents; parents use and are used by friends to help each other enter new roles.

## Clinical Implications of This Study

Just as the study of mental illness or emotional problems can teach us about healthy functioning, so the study of the successful development

of families can provide insights relevant to clinical work with families and individuals who are experiencing problems.

A theoretical orientation which takes into account developmental processes in families, and the convergence of parents' and children's individual developmental crises, allows the clinician to view what may be serious problems in a way which emphasizes the normality of the issues, as opposed to seeing them as manifestations of mental illness or of an abnormal process.

One is likely to focus on the relationships of family members to each other, and on their perceptions of each other, in order to free up a developmental process which may be "stuck" because, for example, the parents have not been able to allow an oldest child the autonomy which their growth necessitates. (A recent survey at a local clinic for adolescents and their families revealed that fully 90% of the adolescent clients were oldest children whose families were dealing with this very problem.) An adolescent who is failing in school, disobeying at home, and acting out in the community, may be responding to a lack of congruence between his or her developmental needs, the available opportunities and roles in the community, and/or an inability on the parents' part to make appropriate perceptual and behavioral shifts. Under these circumstances a therapist might attempt to help the family by providing support for parents in exploring their own issues while aiding the adolescent in finding positive interests and outlets, or by helping family members negotiate new rules and expectations congruent with their development stage (Minuchin, 1974).

Milton Erikson (Haley, 1973) was a therapist who approached indi-

vidual problems in this developmental context and who guided his clients toward overcoming developmental hurdles. An example of his approach involved an adolescent girl whose parents were so overprotective that they built an extra room onto their house so she could live there after she married. The parents did her laundry and sewing while she was in college, and supervised her weekends. The girl felt trapped and was afraid she could not be independent of her parents, so she asked Erikson for help. He worked only with the parents. In brief, he convinced them that grandparenthood would be much more pleasant for them if their married daughter were not living in the same house. They decided to rent the extra room and save the money for the education of a future grandchild. Thus, a situation that was frought with potential hostility or emotional stress was resolved by helping the family to free its developmental process at a crucial point.

Another implication of this study for clinical work is that we are led by the results to take seriously the effects of economic, social, and political or legal issues on people's mental health, and on their ability to successfully negotiate developmental transitions. The connections between individual problems and the social problems of the larger society become clear as we examine the role the community has in people's lives. Problems such as increasing adolescent crime, alcoholism, and drug abuse, as well as depression, divorce, or alcoholism in middle-aged people, can be traced in part to the lack of productive roles, clearly delineated transition rituals, and community supports in this culture. Therapists need to be aware of these issues when diagnosing and treating individuals and families who are in pain, and espe-

cially when dealing with community agencies involved with clients, such as schools, welfare agencies, courts, etc. (Howells, 1975; Minuchin, 1970, 1974).

## Future Trends

Cultures, as well as families, develop and change. The families in this study are part of a vanishing breed in the sense that fewer and fewer families are having more than two children. More and more women are postponing childbirth in order to develop careers or meet educational goals, and couples now have as many as 25 years after the children are gone to be together. The characteristics of American families are changing, and those changes may have implications both for the nature of developmental transitions and for the kinds of resources necessary for productive transitions to take place. If a family has only one or two children the transition to a childless home can be much more abrupt. Parents may have only a very few years to adjust. On the other hand the adjustment may be less difficult because wives will have other ongoing sources of self-esteem and will be more prepared to live without children. Of course the longer people wait to have children the older they will be when the children are ready to leave home.

Changes in society's laws and customs may profoundly affect definitions of productive or appropriate roles for mothers, fathers and adolescents. It is impossible to predict what the problems and opportunitiesof the future will be, or what society will demand of its members, but families will probably continue to face their developmental tasks, and will need community resources, a sense of purpose and belonging, and

sources of support for their role in society, whatever that may be.

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# APPENDIX I

## Family Demographic Data

| Family | Name | Age | Yrs. Married | Occupation |
|--------|------|-----|--------------|------------|
| White | Morton | 48 | 19 | Professor |
| | Sheila | 45 | 19 | Graduate Student |
| | Barbara | 17 | | College Freshman |
| | John | 16 | | High School Senior |
| | Julie | 15 | | High School Sophomore |
| Foster | Michael | 46 | 19 | Professor |
| | Judith | 45 | 19 | Speech Therapist |
| | Harold | 18 | | College Freshman |
| | Lynn | 15 | | High School Sophomore |
| | Raymond | 11 | | Sixth Grade |
| | Leonard | 9 | | Fourth Grade |
| Robinson | Donald | 46 | 20 | Professor |
| | Jane | 38 | 20 | Housewife |
| | Jessica | 18 | | College Freshman |
| | Diane | 16 | | High School Junior |
| | Ruth | 13 | | Eighth Grade |
| | Robert | 4 | | |
| Abbott | Richard | 43 | 21 | Professor |
| | Katherine | 43 | 21 | Part-time Clerk in Religious Bookstore |
| | Peter | 18 | | College Freshman |
| | Linda | 16 | | High School Junior |
| | Sarah | 12 | | Seventh Grade |
| | Nancy | 11 | | Sixth Grade |
| Johnson | Steven | 44 | 20 | Dean |
| | Joyce | 43 | 20 | Housewife |
| | Paul | 18 | | College Freshman |
| | Mary | 17 | | High School Senior |
| | Joseph | 14 | | Eighth Grade |
| | Carol | 12 | | Sixth Grade |
| | Marjorie | 7 | | Second Grade |

| Kelly | Tom | 44 | 21 | Alumni Fund Raiser |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Diane | 40 | 21 | Saleswoman |
| | Barry | 18 | | College Freshman |
| | Irene | 16 | | Student at School for Deaf |
| | John | 14 | | Eighth Grade |
| Porter | Bill | 43 | 20 | Director of Physical Plant at local college |
| | Susan | 41 | 20 | Head Teacher at Church school |
| | Larry | 18 | | College Freshman |
| | Nancy | 17 | | High School Senior |
| | Barbara | 15 | | High School Sophomore |
| | Howard | 12 | | Seventh Grade |
| | Seth | 10 | | Third Grade |
| Patterson | George | 47 | 21 | Director of Food Services at local hospital |
| | Rose | 44 | 21 | Clerk at local hospital |
| | Joe | 19 | | College Freshman |
| | Edward | 16 | | High School Junior |
| | Tom | 14 | | Eighth Grade |

APPENDIX II

Interview Schedule and Topics

Interview #:

1. Introductory Interview

   A. Introduce myself--background and credentials
   B. Reasons for the study
      1. Clinical experience
      2. Previous research
   C. Description of study
      1. Number of hours
      2. Schedule of interviews
      3. Interview process
   D. Taping and confidentiality
   E. Answering any questions
   F. Gathering demographic data
   G. Arrange next interview

2. Husband and Wife

   A. How they met and what was their current life-situation?
      1. What was their level of autonomy from the family?
         a. Where were they living?
         b. Job; college
         c. Finances independent of family?
   B. Development of their relationship through marriage
      1. Attractions
      2. Work; school
      3. Social life
      4. Decision to get married
      5. Setting up first household
      6. First pregnancy and birth
         a. Nature of relationship with families
            1. How did parents participate in 4, 5, 6?

3. Individual Parent
4.

   A. Family background
      1. How were they raised in terms of autonomy?
      2. How did parents react to their leaving?
      3. Who else left and what were parents' reactions?
   B. Personal and professional life
      1. Current status and history
         a. Mother--feelings regarding work (or housework as work)
         b. Feelings regarding each parent's own accomplishments

c. What needs does work fulfill?
C. Perceptions of oldest child
  1. Development of oldest child
    a. Development of autonomy and maturity
      1. Critical incidents
        a. Boy/girlfriends
        b. Periods away from home
      2. Perceived changes since oldest is gone
        a. How did they react to the child's leaving and absence?
    b. Changes in relations with other children
D. Aging
  1. Acceptance of conflict over physical aging?
  2. Missed opportunities
  3. Perceived limitations of time or body
E. The Future
  1. Personal plans, hopes, concerns
  2. Regarding children--hopes, concerns
  3. Regarding marriage--hopes, concerns

5. Husband and Wife
6.

A. How do they see their current relationship?
  1. Changes since oldest is away?
B. Current relationships with children
  1. Contact with oldest child
    a. Phone--Who initiates? What topics?
    b. Letters--Who initiates? What topics?
  2. Changes in relations with other children
    a. More time spent on them?
    b. New responsibilities?
C. Relations with extended family
  1. Grandparents as:
    a. Sources of support
    b. Sources of responsibility
    c. Relation of grandparents with oldest child
  2. The Future
    a. Changed relations with grandparents
      Will they move in as kids leave?
D. Social Relationships
  1. Church and religion
    a. As sources of social-emotional support
  2. Other relationships
    a. Friends
      1. Joint/separate
    b. Professional colleagues
    c. Clubs, organizations
    d. Do they look to a, b, c for support, advice around personal issues and crises?
      1. Did they talk about oldest child's going away?

E.  Fantasies of future without kids at home

7.  <u>Oldest Child</u>

    A.  Perceptions of relations with and between parents
        1.  Child's perceptions of their own autonomy
            a.  Parents' role in its development
        2.  How the child perceives parents' reactions to his/her leaving
            a.  Coming home for visits
            b.  Other contacts
                1.  Phone calls
                2.  Letters
        3.  Perceptions of changes in the house
    B.  College Experience
        1.  Decision process in choosing college
            a.  Role of parents
        2.  What goals do they have in going away?
        3.  What responsibility do they feel towards parents and family?

8.  <u>Whole Family or Individual Siblings</u>

As an alternative to interviewing the entire family I may interview siblings individually if there are no young children, since the pilot couple suggested I would get much more information from their children that way.  I will try it and see how it works.

    A.  Other children's perceptions of changes in house since oldest is gone
        1.  In relations with parents
            a.  Do they get more attention?
            b.  Do they talk about different things?
        2.  In relations with siblings
            a.  Changing roles and responsibilities
            b.  Greater privileges?
    B.  Fantasies about the future
        1.  Increasing autonomy and privileges
        2.  Going away
        3.  Responsibility to parents
        4.  Do they see oldest as trailblazer for them?
            a.  Personally
            b.  In relation to parents' reactions to growth and maturity

## APPENDIX III

## Major Content Areas Emerging from the Interviews

1. Family history
2. Acceptance of parents' spouse and marriage by in-laws
3. Early support of marriage by in-laws
4. Parents' independence from family of origin
5. Parents' early relationships with their own parents
6. Birth of the oldest child and husbands' role in aftercare
7. Oldest child as trailblazer for siblings and parents
8. Anticipatory experiences for oldest child
9. Changes in oldest child since at college
10. Parents' perceptions of oldest as an adult
11. Current contacts between oldest and parents
12. Changes in household since oldest gone
13. Changes in intra-family relationships since oldest gone
14. Parents' support networks and talking about oldest leaving
15. Role of work for parents
16. Adjustment to wives' working by husbands
17. Outside interests
18. Feelings about aging
19. Feelings about future
20. Strengths of marriage
21. Marital stresses
22. Choosing college for oldest
23. Leaving for college
24. Immediate adjustments to oldest leaving by family members
25. Parents' identification with oldest child
26. Anticipatory experiences for parents
27. Parenting style, parents' perceptions of children
28. Parents' fostering children's independence
29. Parents' feelings of success as parents
30. Changing responsibilities of parenthood
31. Changes in second oldest child since oldest gone
32. Grandparents as models for parents
33. Parents' responsibilities to grandparents
34. Sibling relationships
35. Children's perspective on leaving home

APPENDIX IV

Dear Mr. and Mrs.

I am a doctoral student in clinical psychology, and am beginning
a research project aimed at exploring how families, especially parents,
are affected by having their children go away to college.

I have been asking local clergymen to recommend families whose
oldest child is leaving for college, and whom they feel are making a
successful adjustment. Reverend _____ mentioned your name to me,
and I am writing this brief note to give you an opportunity to think
about whether you would like to participate in this project. I will be
calling you in a few days and can at that time tell you more about what
is involved. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Yours truly,


Lewis Breitner