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Adolescence Into Young Adulthood: The Perspectives of Parents as Their Children Grow  
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**Adolescence Into Young Adulthood:  
The Perspectives of Parents as Their Children Grow Up**

Previous research has established the importance of parents' attitudes in influencing their adolescents' behaviors and self-perceptions of ability as they move through childhood and adolescence (e.g., Eccles, Jacobs, & Harold, 1990; Jacobs, Finken, Griffen, & Wright, 1998). Recently, Fletcher, Elder, and Mekos (2000) suggested that parents are likely to play an important socializing role in their children's lives as they enter young adulthood. Much less is known, however, about longitudinal patterns of parents' perceptions of their children as they become young adults. Using both quantitative and qualitative data, the current study explored the relationship between parents' beliefs about their children during adolescence and parents' current perceptions of their children as young adults. In addition, the study examined differences between mothers' and fathers' descriptions of their young adult children, with regard to outcomes such as career choice and relationships. Parents who were optimistic about their adolescents' futures, and talked to their adolescents about the future were expected to report more overall pride as their children realized those expectations, than parents who felt less optimistic.

**Method.** This study used data from a large, longitudinal investigation (Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions; MSALT) of adolescents' and parents' beliefs during adolescence and young adulthood. During the first wave of data collection, adolescents were members of 143 sixth grade math classrooms located in 12 school districts in primarily White middle- and working-class suburbs outside of a large Midwestern city. The analyses reported here are based

on items drawn from the surveys parents completed during the fifth and sixth years of the study that assessed their beliefs about their adolescent children. These responses were related to parents' beliefs about their young adult children during the ninth year of data collection, when children were approximately 27 years old. Scales used in these analyses were created by averaging across 2-12 items (all alphas > .64). Answers to open-ended, qualitative questions from the ninth year of data collection are also reported here.

**Results and Discussion.** All variables of interest were subjected to regression analyses. As predicted, mothers who were proud of their adolescents' academic achievement during high school ( $b = .23$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and reported optimism about their adolescents' futures ( $b = .21$ ;  $p < .05$ ) were significantly more likely to report feelings of pride about their young adult children. Similarly, fathers who were proud of their adolescents' academic achievement during high school were significantly more likely to report feelings of pride about their young adult children ( $b = .40$ ;  $p < .01$ ). However, fathers' feelings of optimism about their adolescents' futures were not related to later feelings of pride. In addition, child's gender was not significantly related to parents' general perceptions of pride.

Also, as predicted, mothers who talked to their adolescent children about the future were significantly more likely to report feelings of pride about their young adult children ( $b = .17$ ;  $p < .01$ ). This pattern did not exist for fathers. However, fathers who talked to their adolescent children about the future were significantly more likely to report that their young adult children had pursued expected careers, as compared to fathers who did not discuss the future with their adolescent children ( $b = .20$ ;  $p < .10$ ). This pattern did not exist for mothers. Once again, child's sex was not related to parents' perceptions.

Next, to help us achieve a better understanding of the beliefs parents have about their children as they enter early adulthood, the current study assessed parents' qualitative responses to open-ended questions about their young adult children. First, parents were asked to provide descriptions of their young adult children. Interestingly, although some parents reported turmoil

during adolescence, perceptions of their young adult children seemed to be positive. For instance, many parents said things such as, "He had a bad temper and was angry as a child and as a teenager. However, it has all worked out and he has made improvements in his attitude and relationships with family and friends." Other parents said things such as, "My daughter and I did not get along very well during her teen years because we were too much alike. But now that she is older, we have a better understanding of each other, talk and communicate better, and even joke around." Some parents seemed to be disappointed in their young adult children. These parents said things such as, "When she was growing up she was really smart and never had to be reminded to do her homework. I don't know what happened. With all she had going for her, she never finished college." Finally, we asked parents to describe the qualities they were most proud of about their children as young adults. Mothers were significantly more likely to be proud of their children's personality qualities and family relations, and fathers were significantly more likely to be proud of their children for being successful in their careers.

The results of this study indicate a consistent relationship between parents' earlier beliefs about their adolescent children and current perceptions about their children as young adults. In addition, the analysis of qualitative data illustrates the ways parents' perceptions develop as their adolescent children become adults. Most parents report positive characteristics when describing their young adult children; fathers are more likely to focus on career and educational outcomes, while mothers describe their young adult children's personalities and relationships.

## References

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