

# Perceived Parent–Child Relationships and Early Adolescents' Orientation Toward Peers

Andrew J. Fuligni and Jacquelynne S. Eccles

This study examined the links between children's perceptions of the manner in which they and their parents adjust their relationships during early adolescence and early adolescents' orientation toward parents and peers. A sample of 1,771 children completed self-report questionnaires during the spring of their 6th and 7th grades. As predicted, early adolescents who believed their parents asserted and did not relax their power and restrictiveness were higher in an extreme form of peer orientation. Also as predicted, those who perceived few opportunities to be involved in decision making, as well as no increase in these opportunities, were higher in both extreme peer orientation and peer advice seeking. Discussion focuses on the importance for parent–child relationships to adjust to early adolescents' changing developmental needs, as well as the implications of early adolescent peer orientation for later development.

As a transitional period in children's development, early adolescence represents a time of significant changes in children's relationships with both their peers and their parents. Children have increased unsupervised contact with peers and begin to place greater importance on their approval, views, and advice (Brown, 1990). At the same time, they spend less time with their parents and appear to distance themselves emotionally from them (Collins & Russell, 1991; Larson & Richards, 1991). These simultaneous processes seem to be important components of the negotiation of the power balance and authority in parent–child relationships that takes place during adolescence (Steinberg, 1990; Youniss, 1980). For most early adolescents, parent–child relationships need to begin providing greater mutuality and more opportunities for adolescents' participation in decision making (Baumrind, 1991). While many families likely make these adjustments successfully, others may not. The manner in which families handle this transitional period should have important implications for the roles parents and peers play

in children's development during adolescence. This study examines individual differences in children's perceptions of the manner in which children and their parents adjust their relationships during early adolescence, as well as the links between these adjustments and early adolescents' orientation toward parents and peers.

As children enter early adolescence, they begin spending more unsupervised time with friends and other peers than they had before. Along with a rise in unsupervised age-mate interaction during school hours when children enter junior high school (Higgins & Eccles-Parsons, 1983; Simmons & Blyth, 1987), the amount of time spent with peers after school also increases during early adolescence (Brown, 1990; Larson & Richards, 1991). In fact, time spent with peers during early adolescence can often eclipse that spent with parents and other family members (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). Early adolescents also become more concerned about peer acceptance and popularity and begin to turn to their friends more often as sources of advice and comfort (Gould & Mazzeo, 1982). Research has shown that children's susceptibility to peer influence rises and peaks during early adolescence. For example, when presented with hypothetical dilemmas, early adolescents are less likely than preadolescents to resist peer pressure to select antisocial and neutral courses of action (Berndt, 1979; Bixenstine, DeCorte, & Bixenstine, 1976; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). Steinberg and Silverberg also found that the percentage of peer-oriented children—those high in peer conformity and high in emotional autonomy or detachment from parents—increases from late childhood to early adolescence.

In some ways, it appears that children's increased orientation toward peers during early adolescence is at the expense of their closeness to their parents. Steinberg and Silverberg (1986) found that whereas the percentage of peer-oriented children increased from late childhood to early adolescence, the percentage of adult-oriented children decreased. They speculated that during this period, children "trade" a dependency on parents for a dependency on peers. In fact, a converging body of research has shown that children disengage and distance themselves somewhat from their parents during early adolescence.

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Numerous studies have shown that along with an increase in conflict, both early adolescents and their parents report less closeness, cohesion, and engagement with one another than before (Collins, 1990; Collins & Russell, 1991; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991).

The evidence of the changes in peer and parent-child relationships during early adolescence suggests that early adolescence is a critical period of transformation in children's relationships. Early adolescents may orient toward peers while distancing themselves from their parents because their peer relationships fit some of their developmental needs better than their relationships with their parents. Increasingly able to think abstractly and to use complex reasoning, early adolescents are likely to seek opportunities and settings in which they can practice these new skills, establish forms of independent thinking, and develop their own identity (Baumrind, 1991; Youniss, 1980). Parent-child and peer relationships differ in the provision of these opportunities because they differ in the power balance between the members. Parent-child relationships are inherently asymmetrical, usually dominated by the parents; peer relationships, in contrast, can be more symmetrical and egalitarian (Buhrmester & Furman, 1986; Youniss, 1980). During early adolescence, children become sensitive to this difference (Eccles, Buchanan, Midgley, Fuligni, & Flanagan, 1991; Higgins & Eccles-Parsons, 1983; Youniss & Smollar, 1983). Because of the unequal power balance of parent-child relationships, early adolescents may feel that opportunities for independent thinking and activity are limited in these settings. Meanwhile, the relative lack of unilateral control over one another within peer relationships may lead early adolescents to invest increased amounts of time and attention in their friendships.

The waxing of peer orientation and the waning of closeness with parents, however, does not appear to be permanent. The heightened susceptibility to peer influence during early adolescence decreases through middle and late adolescence (Berndt, 1979; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). In addition, parent-child relationships, instead of being discarded during early adolescence, appear to be renegotiated into more interdependent relationships during middle and late adolescence. Many observers point to the decreased closeness during early adolescence as "temporary perturbations" in parent-child relationships (Collins, 1990; Steinberg, 1990). These temporary disruptions are thought to stimulate the development of more mutual, interdependent relationships. Most early adolescents do not wish to withdraw completely from their relationships with their parents. Instead, they want greater control over their own lives and their personal decision making. To achieve this goal, they strive toward a balance between independence from and connectedness with their parents—a process known as *individuation* (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Hill & Holmbeck, 1986). Parents recognize their children's heightened skills and developmental needs and begin to relax earlier restrictions and provide more opportunities for independence and involvement in decision making. Through such transformations in parent-adolescent relationships, parents retain their critical roles as important sources of comfort, support, and advice into late adolescence and adulthood (Kandel & Lesser, 1972; White, Speisman, & Costas, 1983).

The scenario just described, however, presupposes that fami-

lies successfully negotiate children's transition into early adolescence. Although many families likely do, others may not (Baumrind, 1991; Eccles et al., 1991). Adjustment during transitional periods, such as early adolescence, is often difficult, posing "a challenge for the entire [family] system" (Minuchin, 1985, p. 294). Increased opportunities for autonomy and mutuality must, in a sense, be "earned" by early adolescents. Parents may be less willing to provide these opportunities if they do not feel that their children can handle them and still develop successfully. This may be because parents simply believe that high levels of restrictiveness are best for children's development. Studies have shown that many parents do retain this restrictiveness through adolescence (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991). It may also be that because of difficult temperament or behavioral problems, children may invite greater parental control and fewer opportunities for autonomy during early adolescence. Patterson and his associates (e.g., Vuchinich, Bank, & Patterson, 1992) have identified the cyclical process by which child behavior and parenting can affect each other. They have suggested that difficult children can elicit autocratic parental discipline, which in turn may produce problematic behavior in the children.

Because early adolescence is a normative period of heightened attachment toward peers and decreased closeness with parents, a lack of increased opportunities for mutuality and decision making in parent-child relationships should be linked with an even higher orientation toward peers. For some children, if their attempts at interdependence with their parents meet with little success, the normal distancing that occurs during early adolescence may turn into more of an alienation from parents. This may also be true for early adolescents whose parents increase or do not relax restrictiveness because of the early adolescents' temperamental or behavioral problems, as Patterson's theories about cyclical processes would suggest. As a result, both of these groups of early adolescents may turn to their relationships with their friends as their primary source of guidance and support (Baumrind, 1991; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Ryan & Lynch, 1989; Youniss & Smollar, 1983). In support of this suggestion, Devereux (1970) identified a group of peer-oriented sixth graders who came from overcontrolling home environments that "drive their children into their peer group by making the home a place in which the child would prefer not to spend his time" (p. 106).

A number of studies exist in which investigators have focused on the relations between parental permissiveness or neglect and susceptibility to peer influence. Bronfenbrenner (1967) and Condry and Simon (1974), for example, found that peer-oriented youth receive less parental support than adult-oriented youth. Similarly, Steinberg (1987) found that parental permissiveness was related to susceptibility to antisocial peer pressure, and Dornbusch et al. (1985) found a relation between permissiveness and involvement in deviant behavior.

While important, these studies provide an incomplete picture of the interplay between parent-child and peer relationships during adolescent development. These studies largely focused on parental monitoring of adolescents' behavior, demonstrating that parental neglect is associated with a greater susceptibility to peer influence, attesting to the benefits of parental supervision. But in the present study, we were interested

in the dimension of parental control within the perceived *relationships* between parents and early adolescents—their interactions and ways of relating to one another—aside from parental monitoring and supervision of behavior. Although greater parental monitoring of behavior appears to be beneficial for early adolescents' development, high levels of parental control within their day-to-day interactions may not be. We wished to examine individual differences in the manner in which early adolescents and their parents adjust the power balance in their relationships and the links between these adjustments and early adolescents' orientation toward parents and peers. As far as we know, Devereux (1970) is the only investigator who has yet examined this possible link between parent-child and peer relationships.

First, we examined the associations of two types of peer orientation—*peer advice seeking* and *extreme peer orientation*—with early adolescents' perceptions of two aspects of their relationships with their parents at the seventh grade: *parental strictness* and *decision-making opportunity*. We expected early adolescents who perceived greater parental strictness and less decision-making opportunity would also report higher levels of peer advice seeking and extreme peer orientation.

Second, we examined the relation between perceived developmental changes in parent-child relationships and early adolescent peer orientation. In these analyses, *changes* in the level of parental strictness and decision-making opportunity during the transition into early adolescence, from sixth to seventh grades, were used as predictors. We predicted that students who perceived either no change or an increase in parental strictness and either no change or a decrease in decision-making opportunity would also report higher levels of peer advice seeking and extreme peer orientation as compared with students who perceived a decrease in parental strictness and an increase in decision-making opportunity.

We also included a measure of *parental monitoring* to examine the relations between the two dimensions of parent-child relationships and peer orientation after taking into account the degree of parental supervision of early adolescents' behavior. We predicted that in contrast to the associations with parental control in parent-child relationships, parental monitoring of adolescents' behavior would be associated with lower levels of peer orientation. In an attempt to examine the role of problematic adjustment and behavior on the part of early adolescents in these relations, we also included an independent measure of *adjustment to junior high school* to attempt to control for parental restrictiveness in response to these problems and the independent effects of these problems on peer orientation.

In addition, given that several studies have suggested that boys and girls react differently to both parent-child and peer relationships, these analyses also examined gender differences in the relations between parent-child relationships and peer orientation. For example, Gould and Mazzeo (1982) found girls to be more likely to rely on friends as sources of advice than boys. Berndt (1979) and Steinberg and Silverberg (1986), however, found boys less likely to resist antisocial peer pressure. Other research, however, suggests a lack of gender differences in the relations between parent-child relationships and deviancy. Dornbusch et al. (1985) found the relation between permissiveness and deviancy to be similar for boys and girls. The

same was true for the relation between permissiveness and susceptibility to deviant peer pressure in Steinberg's (1986) study of latchkey children. These studies make clear the need to look at the processes under investigation in this report separately for girls and boys.

## Method

### Sample

The data used in this set of analyses were collected in the spring of the subjects' sixth and seventh grades as part of a large-scale, multi-wave longitudinal study of adolescent development (the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions, or MSALT). The 1,771 subjects attended 12 predominantly White, lower-middle to middle income school districts in southeastern Michigan. All districts had a K-6, 7-9, and 10-12 grade configuration. The sample was fairly evenly divided by sex, with 54% girls and 46% boys. Although not ethnically diverse, the sample's socioeconomic distribution closely approximated that of the general population.

### Measures

The adolescent subjects filled out questionnaires during math class periods in the spring of sixth and seventh grades. The questionnaires focused on many issues considered important during adolescence, such as family and peer relationships, achievement motivation, future expectations, self-concept, and values. Questionnaires were completed on 2 separate days at each grade. Measures of perceived parent-child relationships were completed on the first day at each grade, whereas measures of parental monitoring and peer orientation were completed on the second day only at the seventh grade.

Adolescents' teachers also filled out questionnaires in which they rated early adolescents on a number of dimensions of academic and psychological adjustment. In this study, we used a measure that tapped teachers' judgments of early adolescents' adjustment to junior high school.

*Perceived parent-child relationships.* Perceived parent-child relationships at sixth and seventh grades were measured with seven items from a modified version of Epstein and McPartland's (1977) Family Decision-Making Scale (FDM). This measure was used because it was thought to include often-cited important dimensions of parent-child relationships during early adolescence. Validity of the original measure was established by its relation to children's independence and attitudes toward school (Epstein, 1983). We changed those original FDM items that used a 2-point, true/false format to a 4-point format to capture a broader range of parent-child relationships.

Principal-components factor analysis, followed by an orthogonal rotation, suggested two distinct factors among the seven items. The factors and the associated items and loadings are presented in Appendix A. The first factor, *parental strictness*, included five items that assessed early adolescents' perceptions of parental control and power assertion in their relationships. It should be noted that this construct does not represent the positive aspects of parental control, such as monitoring and supervision. Rather, it measures the amount of parental autocratic domination of the relationship. The second factor, *decision-making opportunity*, included two items that measured the perceived opportunities available for participating in decision making with parents. The items represent the perceived responsiveness by parents to early adolescents' needs for supportive opportunities for decision making.

We constructed scales for the two factors by taking the mean of the individual items, resulting in a minimum score of 1 and a maximum of 4. Analyses of internal consistency suggested both scales to be of adequate reliability (Cronbach's alpha: *parental strictness* = .62; *decision-*

making opportunity = .60). Although modest, these coefficients have been suggested to be acceptable for research on family relationships (Grotevant & Carlson, 1989). A similar version of one of these revised FDM measures, decision-making opportunity, has proved its validity by its relations to adolescents' independence and motivation at school, adolescents' self-consciousness and self-esteem, and changes in the work status of adolescents' families (Flanagan, 1989, 1990; Yee & Flanagan, 1985). Means and standard deviations of these measures are presented in Table 1.

**Perceived parental monitoring.** To account for parental supervision of early adolescents' behavior, students completed a measure consisting of four items regarding the extent to which their parents monitor their nighttime activities out of the home (see Appendix A). We constructed the scale by taking the mean of the individual items, resulting in a minimum score of 1 and a maximum of 7. Although this measure does not tap all aspects of parental monitoring, it is expected that parental supervision of early adolescents' nighttime activities overlaps considerably with supervision of other aspects of their behavior. Reliability analyses indicated the scale had good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .69).

**Peer orientation.** To account for the possibility of both positive and negative types of peer orientation, we used seven original items to assess early adolescents' orientation toward peers at the seventh grade. Three items were created to measure a positive type of peer orientation, *peer advice seeking*. We included this construct to determine if parent-child relationships influence children to turn to their friends for personal and instrumental support. Seeking advice from friends can be a positive attempt to compensate for unsatisfactory relationships with parents. The items, instead of forcing adolescents to choose between parents and peers, allowed for a range of the relative difference in the extent early adolescents turn to parents and peers for advice. In addition, instead of considering parental and peer influences to be antagonistic to one another, the items allowed subjects to indicate they rely on both parents and peers equally for support by selecting the midpoint of the scale. The four other items were created to measure a more negative aspect of peer orientation, *extreme peer orientation*. We included this construct to determine if parent-child relationships can lead to a type of peer orientation in which early adolescents place such a high importance on their relationships with their peers that they would sacrifice developmentally positive aspects of their lives to maintain these relationships.

Principal-components factor analysis of the seven items, followed by an orthogonal rotation, suggested two distinct factors. As shown in Appendix B, these factors reflected the two types of peer orientation used to generate the individual items. Scales were constructed for the two factors by taking the mean of the individual items, resulting in a minimum score of 1 and a maximum of 5 for advice seeking and a minimum score of 1 and a maximum of 7 for extreme peer orientation. Analyses of internal consistency suggested that both scales had adequate reliability (Cronbach's alpha: peer advice seeking = .73; extreme peer orientation = .62). The means and standard deviations of these two measures are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
Means and Standard Deviations of All Measures

Measure	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Parental strictness	2.42	0.58
Decision-making opportunity	2.55	0.72
Parental monitoring	5.38	1.19
Peer advice seeking	2.67	1.08
Extreme peer orientation	3.11	1.17
Junior high school adjustment	2.44	0.39

**Adjustment to junior high school.** Teachers rated early adolescents' adjustment to junior high school by completing a measure composed of four items that tapped students' ability to get along with peers and their general adjustment to junior high school (see Appendix B). The mean was taken of these four items, resulting in a minimum score of 1 and a maximum of 3. The scale had good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .72). The mean and standard deviation are presented in Table 1.

### Gender Differences and Intercorrelations

*T* tests revealed that boys perceived slightly greater parental strictness than did girls,  $t(1,769) = 2.60, p < .01$  (girls:  $M = 2.38, SD = 0.59$ ; boys:  $M = 2.45, SD = 0.56$ ), whereas girls perceived greater parental monitoring than did boys,  $t(1,769) = 9.67, p < .001$ , (girls:  $M = 5.63, SD = 1.14$ ; boys:  $M = 5.10, SD = 1.19$ ). There was no gender difference, however, in perceived decision-making opportunity,  $t(1,769) = 0.87, p > .01$  (girls:  $M = 2.56, SD = 0.75$ ; boys:  $M = 2.53, SD = 0.69$ ). *T* tests revealed gender differences in both aspects of peer orientation. Girls preferred to discuss problems and plans with both friends and parents, as compared with talking primarily with parents, to a greater degree than boys,  $t(1,769) = 7.44, p < .001$  (girls:  $M = 2.84, SD = 1.04$ ; boys:  $M = 2.46, SD = 1.09$ ). Boys, however, seemed to be more willing to forego achievement-related activities and disobey their parents for the sake of friends,  $t(1,769) = 3.93, p < .001$  (girls:  $M = 2.99, SD = 1.15$ ; boys:  $M = 3.21, SD = 1.16$ ). These gender differences in peer orientation are consistent with those found in previous studies suggesting that girls are more likely to use friends as sources of advice, whereas boys are more likely to conform to negative peer pressure (Berndt, 1979; Gould & Mazzeo, 1982; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). Teachers reported lower levels of adjustment for boys than for girls,  $t(1,769) = 7.75, p < .001$  (girls:  $M = 2.50, SD = 0.35$ ; boys:  $M = 2.36, SD = 0.42$ ).

Parental strictness and decision-making opportunity showed a small, but significant negative relation with one another ( $r = -.22, p < .001$ ). Parental monitoring was significantly related to parental strictness ( $r = .27, p < .001$ ) and only slightly to decision-making opportunity ( $r = .07, p < .01$ ). In addition, peer advice seeking and extreme peer orientation showed a small but significant relation to one another ( $r = .19, p < .001$ ).

Junior high school adjustment was slightly related to decision-making opportunity ( $r = .07, p < .001$ ) and parental monitoring ( $r = .12, p < .001$ ) but not to parental strictness ( $r = -.03, p > .01$ ). It also showed significant negative relation to extreme peer orientation ( $r = -.15, p < .001$ ) but not to advice seeking ( $r = -.04, p > .01$ ).

### Results

We initially randomly split the sample into two equal subsamples to conduct replication analyses to test the robustness of results. These initial analyses did show replication—no observed effects were significantly different between the two subsamples. There were also duplicate patterns of significance in the two subsamples. Therefore, we then recombined these subsamples into the original larger sample to make the best estimates of the population. The results presented here come from analyses of the intact sample.

#### Perceived Parent-Child Relationships at the Seventh Grade

Perceived parental strictness, decision-making opportunity, and parental monitoring at the seventh grade were each split at the mean to break the sample into two groups for each measure:

high and low.<sup>1</sup> To control for the shared variance between the outcome measures, we used a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test the hypotheses of the study instead of separate analyses of variance for each outcome, thereby minimizing the occurrence of duplicate and redundant significant results.

In addition to examining the bivariate relations of parent-child relationships and parental monitoring with peer orientation after controlling for the effects of each other, the MANOVA enabled us to test the interactive relations of the parent-child variables with early adolescent peer advice seeking and extreme peer orientation. Investigators are increasingly suggesting that instead of considering dimensions of parent-child relationships as having only linear effects of adolescent outcomes, researchers should analyze how different dimensions moderate the effects of one another (e.g., Cooper, 1988). For example, theory and research on authoritative parenting is based on this interaction perspective. Parental supervision appears to be most beneficial for adolescents in the context of high versus low levels of parental acceptance (Lamborn et al., 1991). In this study, we tested for interactions to determine whether the context of parental strictness in which involvement in decision making took place moderated the relation of decision-making opportunity with peer orientation. Likewise, we wished to determine if the relations of both of these variables with peer orientation depended on the amount of parental monitoring.

The multivariate tests of the three-way MANOVA were first performed, followed by univariate tests of each measure of peer orientation. Because large sample sizes such as the one used here tend to make even very small effects statistically significant, the alpha level for significance was set at the  $p < .01$  level.

The multivariate tests showed that parental strictness, decision making, and parental monitoring all had significant relations with peer orientation: parental strictness,  $F(2, 1762) = 14.12, p < .001$ ; decision making,  $F(2, 1762) = 32.63, p < .001$ ; and parental monitoring,  $F(2, 1762) = 34.25, p < .001$ . However, none of the two-way interactions were significant: Decision Making  $\times$  Parental Strictness,  $F(2, 1762) = 0.46, p > .01$ ; Parental Monitoring  $\times$  Decision Making,  $F(2, 1762) = 0.27, p > .01$ ; Parental Monitoring  $\times$  Parental Strictness,  $F(2, 1762) = 1.47, p > .01$ . The three-way interaction was also not significant,  $F(2, 1762) = 1.29, p > .01$ .

We then performed univariate tests to determine the relations of the parent-child variables with each aspect of peer orientation. The group means of peer advice seeking and extreme peer orientation, according to the levels of perceived parental strictness, decision-making opportunity, and parental monitoring are presented in Table 2. Perceived decision making was significantly related to peer advice seeking,  $F(1, 1763) = 45.44, p < .001$ , suggesting that early adolescents who perceived fewer opportunities for decision making in their relationships with their parents tended to turn less to parents and more to peers for personal and instrumental support than those who perceived greater opportunities. It should be noted, however, that even for those who perceived low decision-making opportunity, the mean for advice seeking remains below 3, suggesting that instead of totally rejecting parents as sources of advice, these students just turned to parents less and to peers more than other students. Neither parental strictness,  $F(1, 1963) =$

Table 2  
*Means and Standard Deviations of Peer Orientation According to Level of Parental Strictness, Decision-Making Opportunity, and Parental Monitoring*

Measure	Advice seeking			Extreme peer orientation		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>d</i>
Parental strictness			.07			.22
Low	2.62	1.03		2.96	1.11	
High	2.70	1.12		3.21	1.19	
Decision-making opportunity			.35			.31
Low	2.86	1.11		3.28	1.17	
High	2.48	1.01		2.92	1.12	
Parental monitoring			.03			.35
Low	2.68	1.09		3.32	1.14	
High	2.65	1.07		2.91	1.15	

$0.66, p > .01$ , nor parental monitoring,  $F(1, 1963) = 0.62, p > .01$ , had a significant relation with peer advice seeking.

All three parent-child variables had significant relations with extreme peer orientation: parental strictness,  $F(1, 1763) = 28.26, p < .001$ ; decision making,  $F(1, 1763) = 35.47, p < .001$ ; and parental monitoring,  $F(1, 1763) = 68.22, p < .001$ . Early adolescents who perceived high parental strictness and little opportunity for decision making reported a greater willingness to forego their parents' rules, schoolwork, and even their own talents to keep and to be popular with friends. Those reporting high levels of parental monitoring, however, reported less willingness to do these things.

To gauge the size of the relations between the parent-child variables and peer orientation, we expressed estimates of magnitude of the difference between the high and low groups in standard deviation units by  $d$ , as suggested by Cohen (1992) and Rosenthal and Rosnow (1984). Small, medium, and large effects are conventionally defined as .2, .5, and .8 of one standard deviation, respectively (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1984; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1989). As shown in Table 2, when the relations between the parent-child variables and peer orientation are significant, they tended to be in the small to medium range.

To determine whether the relations between parent-child relationships and parental monitoring with peer orientation are simply a function of students' adjustment or behavioral difficulties, we repeated the original MANOVA. This time, *adjust-*

<sup>1</sup> The large size of the sample may be thought to provide the opportunity to split these measures into thirds, thereby testing for a curvilinear relation between parent-child relationships and peer orientation. However, we believe these measures only capture one half of the parental control dimension. For example, our measure of parental strictness captures power assertion and restrictiveness. A low score on this measure only indicates an absence of this restrictiveness, not a lack of supportive parental control. Therefore, our measures enabled us to only test the linear relation between excessive control and peer orientation; we could not truly test for an overall curvilinear relation between parent-child relationships and peer orientation. However, we did split these measures into three groups in exploratory analyses and observed no significant curvilinear relations.

ment was included as a covariate to determine whether it removed the significant relations between the parent-child variables and peer orientation. Adjustment showed a significant relation with peer orientation,  $F(2, 1761) = 14.81, p < .001$ . Univariate analyses, however, showed the relation was significant for only extreme peer orientation ( $\beta = .12, p < .001$ ) and not advice seeking ( $\beta = .04, p < .001$ ). Even after controlling for adjustment, however, the relations between the parent-child variables and peer orientation remained significant: parental strictness,  $F(2, 1761) = 13.09, p < .001$ ; decision making,  $F(2, 1761) = 30.70, p < .001$ ; and parental monitoring,  $F(2, 1761) = 30.29, p < .001$ .

We conducted additional MANOVAs to determine whether any of the observed relations were different for boys or girls. None of the relations, however, significantly interacted with students' gender.

### Perceived Changes in Parent-Child Relationships From Sixth to Seventh Grades

To assess perceived changes in parent-child relationships, students' scores of parental strictness and decision-making opportunity at seventh grade were regressed on their scores from the same measures at sixth grade. The residual scores of these regressions were then used as indicators of change (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Residual scores were used instead of raw difference scores because residual scores are uncorrelated with the initial level of parent-child relationships, therefore giving a more reliable measure of change in parent-child relationships.

Seventh-grade scores of parent-child relationships were moderately correlated with sixth-grade scores: parental strictness,  $r = .48, p < .001$ ; decision making,  $r = .44, p < .001$ , suggesting some stability but also some change. Because of the amount of change in seventh-grade scores, it might be expected that analyses of change would replicate the original analyses of the actual level of parent-child relationships at seventh grade. Nevertheless, because of the small to moderate magnitude of the relations observed earlier, removing the variance due to stability could reduce the sizes of these original relations to insignificance, indicating that change between sixth and seventh grades is not associated with peer orientation. But if the relations remain significant, this would suggest that the associations between the actual seventh-grade scores and peer orientation may be due in part to the changes between sixth and seventh grade in parent-child relationships.

Subjects were then placed into one of three groups for each measure, according to the observed change in parental strictness and decision-making opportunity. We did this by splitting the residual scores into thirds. Subjects with scores in the bottom third were considered those who experienced a *decrease*, those with scores in the top third were considered to have experienced an *increase*, and those whose scores fell in the middle third were considered to have experienced *no change*. While this procedure resulted in placing in the no-change group some subjects with an observed residual score slightly different than zero, suggesting a minor change, it was thought that this process isolated only those subjects who experienced meaningful change, as opposed to attributing meaning to slight variation in subjects' responses from sixth to seventh grade.

To test the relations of changes in parent-child relationships with peer orientation, we proceeded with analyses in a fashion similar to that in the first set of analyses. Parental monitoring and adjustment at the seventh grade were again included in the analysis to account for their relations with the parent-child and peer orientation variables. The multivariate tests showed that both perceived change in parental strictness and perceived change in decision-making opportunity had significant relations with peer orientation: parental strictness change,  $F(4, 3502) = 5.50, p < .001$ ; and decision-making change,  $F(4, 3502) = 22.23, p < .001$ . As before, parental monitoring and adjustment had significant relations with peer orientation: parental monitoring,  $F(2, 1751) = 29.48, p < .001$ ; and adjustment,  $F(2, 1751) = 13.45, p < .001$ . Also as before, none of the two-way or three-way interactions was significant. Additional analyses also showed that none of these relations varied significantly according to early adolescents' gender.

The results of univariate tests of the relations between changes in parent-child relationships and peer orientation are presented in Figure 1. As indicated in the upper panel of Figure 1, perceived change in decision making was significantly related to advice seeking,  $F(2, 1752) = 35.31, p < .001$ . Scheffé group comparisons indicated that those who reported a decrease in decision making were higher in advice seeking than those who reported either no change ( $d = .28$ ) or an increase ( $d = .54$ ), whereas those who reported no change were higher than

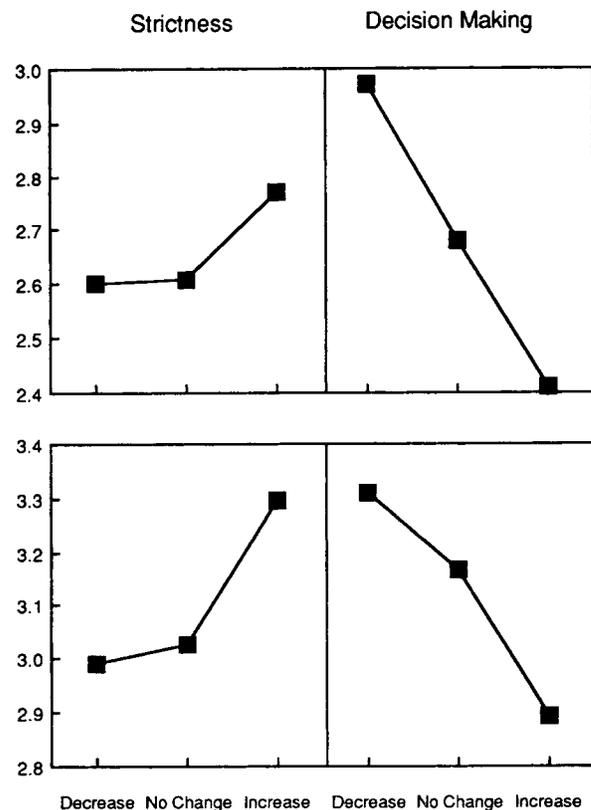


Figure 1. Effects of changes in parent-child relationships on advice seeking (upper panel) and extreme peer orientation (lower panel).

those who reported an increase ( $d = .26$ ;  $ps < .01$ ). Perceived change in parental strictness, however, was not significantly related to advice seeking,  $F(2, 1752) = 2.11$ ,  $p > .01$ .

The lower panel of Figure 1 shows the relations of perceived changes in parent-child relationships with extreme peer orientation. As indicated by the graph, perceived change in parental strictness had a significant relationship,  $F(2, 1752) = 10.04$ ,  $p < .001$ . Scheffé group comparisons indicated that those who reported a decrease or no change in parental strictness were lower in extreme peer orientation ( $ds = .22$  and  $.19$ , respectively) than those who reported an increase ( $ps < .01$ ). The relation of perceived change in decision making was also significant,  $F(2, 1752) = 15.57$ ,  $p < .001$ . Scheffé group comparisons indicated that those who reported either a decrease or no change in decision making were higher in extreme peer orientation than those who reported an increase ( $ds = .43$  and  $.28$ , respectively;  $ps < .01$ ).

We conducted a second MANOVA to determine whether the effects of perceived changes in parent-child relationships depended on the initial level of parent-child relationships at sixth grade. Perceived parental strictness and decision-making opportunity at the sixth grade were each split at the mean to break the sample into two groups for each measure: high and low. We then included these measures of parent-child relationships at sixth grade in the MANOVA to test whether they interacted with the perceived changes in parent-child relationships in affecting peer orientation. Results indicated, however, that none of these interactive effects were significant.

Again, we conducted additional MANOVAs to determine whether any of the observed relationships were different for boys and girls. Once again, none of the relations significantly interacted with students' gender.

## Discussion

Results suggest that the nature of parent-child relationships during early adolescence, as well as changes in these relationships during the transition into early adolescence, is related to the extent to which children orient toward peers. Early adolescents who perceive few opportunities to be involved in decision making, as well as no increase in these opportunities, tend to seek less advice from their parents and more from their friends about personal and future issues. In addition, if early adolescents hold these perceptions about decision making and feel their parents assert and do not relax their power and restrictiveness, they tend to orient toward peers to such an extent that they are willing to forego their parents' rules, their schoolwork, and even their own talents in order to keep, and be popular with, friends. Although the sizes of these relations tended to be in the small to moderate range, they were similar to the sizes of the relations observed in studies of authoritative parenting and adolescents' adjustment (e.g., Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991).

The relations between parent-child relationships and peer orientation remained significant even after controlling for the variance in both associated with parental monitoring. The relation between parental monitoring and peer orientation was in the direction opposite of that observed for parental strictness

and decision making: Early adolescents who perceived high levels of monitoring of their behavior by parents tended to be less extremely oriented toward peers. These results are consistent with those found in other studies suggesting that parental monitoring is associated with better adolescent adjustment (e.g., Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987). They also support the contention that it is early adolescents' perceptions of high parental control and power assertion within their relationships with their parents, and not parental supervision, that are associated with a lower orientation toward parents and a higher one toward peers.

Parental strictness and decision-making opportunity are often highlighted as critical dimensions in parent-child relationships during early adolescence (e.g., Baumrind, 1991; Eccles et al., 1991; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1983). As children enter early adolescence, they desire more mutual relationships that involve less parental domination than previously during childhood (Youniss & Smollar, 1983). Early adolescents who do not perceive this quality in their relationships with their parents may believe their parents do not acknowledge that they are maturing and deserve to be treated more like adults. Early adolescents may be more willing to sacrifice developmentally positive aspects of their lives for the sake of peer relationships, because the greater symmetrical quality of these relationships offer more chances for wanted mutual and egalitarian interactions.

Early adolescents also desire increased opportunities to participate in making decisions that affect their lives (Baumrind, 1991). Early adolescents who do not perceive these chances to be available with their parents may feel that their opinions and preferences are more likely to be regarded as valid when they discuss these issues with their friends. In addition, because they may feel that their friendships are the only relationships that afford them opportunities to explore and develop their own opinions and preferences, early adolescents may be more willing to sacrifice those things they feel threaten these friendships, such as parental rules and school achievement.

Because of the lack of complete longitudinal data for both parent-child relationships and peer orientation, questions about the direction of influence between parent-child relationships and peer orientation could not be conclusively answered. One possibility could be that high peer orientation leads to increased parental control in parent-child relationships. Because parents detect this orientation and fear the peer group will negatively influence their children, they may try to be more controlling and restrictive toward early adolescents. Another possibility is that temperamental or behavioral problems account for the association between parent-child relationships and peer orientation, although results suggested that the associations between perceived parent-child relationships and peer orientation exist independent of early adolescents' adjustment. It is also possible that each of these pathways exist, with different groups of early adolescents likely following different pathways. However, for most early adolescents, the extent to which parent-child relationships do or do not change during early adolescence may be the critical factor in this process.

It is not precisely clear why some parent-child relationships would change and others would not. As suggested by family

systems theory, entrenched patterns of interaction within families are extremely difficult to change, and all members play a role in their maintenance (Minuchin, 1985). Early adolescents may find it just as difficult as parents to introduce aspects of mutuality and decision-making opportunity. Parents themselves may be unwilling to relinquish aspects of control they have over their children, because they simply believe in autocratic parenting or because of temperamental or behavioral problems on the part of the child. But as the results of this study and the work of Patterson and his associates (e.g., Vuchinich et al., 1992) would suggest, even if problems of adjustment are implicated in the process, parental responses to these problems have independent relations with child outcomes, such as early adolescents' orientation toward peers. Patterson's work also suggests that these effects become increasingly reciprocal over time. Clearly, although the relation between aspects of parent-child relationships and peer orientation was demonstrated in this study, future research that incorporates complete longitudinal data on the factors of interest is needed to elucidate the process by which this association develops.

The lack of significant gender differences in the relations between parent-child relationships and peer orientation suggests that even though boys and girls may differ in the nature of their peer orientation (as shown by the *t* tests), the connections between parent-child relationships and peer orientation are similar for boys and girls. These findings are similar to that of Dornbusch et al. (1985) and Steinberg (1986) in showing that while there may be gender differences in the levels of particular outcomes, the associations of these outcomes with aspects of family relationships appear to be similar for boys and girls.

The long-term implications of an inordinate attachment to peers during early adolescence likely depend on the nature of the particular peer group. For example, the consequences of a heavy reliance on the advice of friends when making decisions about their personal lives and future should depend on the type of advice the adolescents receive. If an early adolescent's friends are achievement-oriented and tend to avoid deviant behavior, then relying on these peers may be a compensatory action for youths dissatisfied with their relationships with their parents, with few negative consequences. In contrast, if members of the early adolescent's peer group engage in deviant and antisocial behavior, then relying on these peers will be more of a risk factor. Work by Kandel and Lesser (1972) highlights the significant influence the composition of adolescents' peer groups have on both their involvement in deviancy and their future educational plans.

The implications of the more extreme form of peer orientation may be more serious. Although the mean levels of extreme peer orientation for early adolescents who perceived low decision-making opportunity and high parental strictness were not extremely high, these early adolescents were more likely than their peers to do almost anything to maintain relationships with their peers. As with the advice-seeking aspect of peer orientation, the prognosis for early adolescents high in this aspect of peer orientation should depend in part on the nature of their peer group. However, because they seem to be compliant to virtually any behavior their friends engage in, these adolescents may also be more likely to become involved in deviant peer

groups. If the maintenance of their friendships is dependent on whether they agree to participate in deviant behavior, they may be more likely to acquiesce to avoid losing their friends.

The long-term effects of alienation from parents and early adolescent peer orientation are also likely to be influenced by adolescents' continuing relationships with their parents. Research suggests that the negotiation of parent-child relationships is an ongoing process, continuing through late adolescence and adulthood (White et al., 1983). An inordinate alienation from parents and a heightened orientation toward peers during adolescence may be tempered by positive changes in parent-child relationships later on during middle and late adolescence.

Because of the exclusive use of children's reports of parent-child relationships, it can only be argued that their *perceptions* of their relationships with their parents are related to alienation and peer orientation. However, many theorists argue that the critical aspects of relationships include the cognitive representations of those relationships held by the members involved (e.g., Hinde, 1979). In addition, research has suggested that parent's and early adolescents' perceptions of their relationships can show little overlap, especially when they concern aspects of parental control and early adolescents' autonomy (Carlson, Cooper, & Spradling, 1991). Nevertheless, the use of multiple reporters or even behavioral observation in future research would provide additional important information about the processes examined in this study.

The applicability of the findings of these studies may be limited to the population from which the samples were taken: White, middle-class Americans. The hypotheses tested by the analyses were derived from previous research and theory also based on this population. Recent research suggests that the nature of parent-child relationships during adolescence may be quite different in other ethnicities and cultures. For example, the incidence of authoritative parenting in Asian-American families is lower and its relation to academic performance is weaker than in European-American families (Dornbusch et al., 1987). It is possible, in turn, that the relation between parental restrictiveness and peer orientation may be different in ethnic or cultural groups that have different traditions regarding the nature and acceptability of parental control.

During children's development, involvements in both parent-child and peer relationships provide the optimal mix of needed developmental experiences (Hartup, 1989). But as children enter adolescence, these relationships must adjust and change to fit children's changing developmental needs. This is especially critical in parent-child relationships, in which a lack of such a fit can be associated with early adolescents becoming inordinately oriented toward peers. Even though researchers today have recognized the importance of peer relationships in child and adolescent development, an excessive attachment to peers at the expense of parents during early adolescence may have negative implications for later development. But it may also have positive implications if adolescents find in the peer group what was lacking in their relationships with their parents. To examine this, future research should include more longitudinal investigations of the complex interplay between parent-child and peer relationships throughout adolescence.

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## Appendix A

### Items Used to Measure Perceived Parent–Child Relationships and Parental Monitoring

Measure/item	Factor loading
<b>Parental strictness</b>	
My parents want me to follow their directions even if I disagree with their reasons.	.57
I have to ask my parents' permission to do most things.	.51
My parents get upset if I disagree with them when their friends are around.	.52
My parents are ( <i>very to not very</i> ) strict.*	–.40
My parents worry that I am up to something they won't like.	.52
<b>Decision-making opportunity</b>	
How often do you take part in family decisions concerning yourself?	.68
My parents encourage me to give my ideas and opinions even if we might disagree.	.72
<b>Parental monitoring</b>	
When you go out on a school night, do you have a curfew?	.78
When you go out on a weekend night, do you have a curfew?	.71
When you are late getting home, do you have to call home?	.49
Do your parents warn you it is dangerous to go out alone?	.40

\* Item reversed when scale was computed.

## Appendix B

### Items Used to Measure Peer Orientation and Junior High School Adjustment

Measure/item	Factor loading
<b>Peer advice seeking<sup>a</sup></b>	
When I want to talk about my future job plans, or educational plans, I talk _____.	.77
When I want to talk about which school courses to take, I talk _____.	.63
When I want to talk about a personal problem, I talk _____.	.69
<b>Extreme peer orientation</b>	
How much does the amount of time you spend with your friends keep you away from doing things you ought to do?	.45
Would you act dumber or less talented than you really are in order to make someone like you?	.57

(Appendix B continues on next page)

It's okay to let your schoolwork slip or get a lower grade in order to be popular with your friends.	.76
It's okay to break some of your parents' rules in order to keep your friends.	.40
Junior high school	
This student fights or quarrels with other students. <sup>b</sup>	-.57
This student gets along well with other students.	.68
This student handles stress and frustration well.	.59
How well is this student adjusting to junior high school?	.69

<sup>a</sup> Response scale for peer advice seeking items was as follows: 1 = *mostly to my parents*, 2 = *more to my parents than to my friends*, 3 = *to my parents and to my friends about the same*, 4 = *more to my friends than to my parents*, and 5 = *mostly to my friends*.

<sup>b</sup> Item reversed when scale was computed.

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