

Looking Forward to Adolescence: Mothers' and Fathers' Expectations for Change

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Although it is well documented that the relationship between parents and children changes during adolescence (e.g., see Steinberg, 1990; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), the causes for the change are often unclear. Parents may believe the content or quality of the relationship itself will change. They may also believe their own efficacy in terms of their ability to influence their child will change as their children mature.

Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn (1991) present several models of varying complexity that have often been used in the adolescent development literature for explaining changes in parent-child relationships during adolescence. They recommend using a more complex model that includes physiological, psychological, and sociological variables. For example, biological changes, changes in the child's social cognitive processes and identity formation, along with parental expectations for change and familial characteristics are suggested as factors that in combination influence the change in parent-adolescent relationships. Although literature exists on how each of these factors might individually affect the parent-child relationship, Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn (1991) suggest that research needs to examine such factors as the pubertal status of the child, the sex of the parent and child, and the quality of the current parent-child relationship in predicting changes in parent-child relationships.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the studies on changes in parent-child relationships during adolescence. First, mothers and fathers differ in their beliefs and expectations about their sons and daughters concerning how their relationship with their child will change during adolescence (Buchanan, Eccles, & Becker, 1990). Buchanan et al. found that parents were more concerned about the effect of adolescence on their daughters than on their sons. Further, mothers viewed adolescence and the concurrent biological changes more negatively than did fathers. Although some parents do believe their child will be more difficult during adolescence, why parents believe this is not clear.

A second conclusion from the adolescent literature indicates that pubertal status, that is whether the child is early or late in developing, clearly is related to changes in the

parent-adolescent relationship (Steinberg, 1987; J.P. Hill, 1988). The relationships appear to change most acutely at the apex of these biological changes (Steinberg & Hill, 1978). Although Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn (1991), in reviewing the pubertal development literature, suggest that parental responses to pubertal development affect their current relationship with their adolescent, it is unclear how or if pubertal status has any effect on parental expectations for changes in their relationship with their child in the future. Do parents who have early maturing children expect their relationship to worsen in the future? Do parents whose children have not yet matured expect a more positive outcome for their relationship with their adolescent?

A third conclusion from this body of literature is that the history of family conflicts prior to the transition to adolescence is critical in predicting later parent-adolescent conflicts (Montemayor, 1983; Collins, 1988). Families that encounter the most problems during the child's adolescence are those that have had the most conflicts prior to the transition period. It is consistent to conclude, then, that parental expectations about future adolescent-parent relationships should also reflect current relationships. Parents who report having more conflicted and distant relationships with their children should also report concerns that these relationships will worsen in the future. But what of parents with close positive relationships with their children? Do they follow the above line of thinking and believe these relationships will continue to be positive throughout adolescence, or do they adopt the stereotype that their relationship with their child will be negatively affected by the advent of adolescence?

An important dimension of the current parent-child relationship that has not been explored extensively in the literature is the role of parental self-efficacy in understanding parental beliefs about their children in adolescence. Self-efficacy refers to the belief that certain behaviors lead to certain expected outcomes, and that one is capable of carrying out those behaviors (Bandura, 1977). Parenting self-efficacy refers to how competent and confident parents feel in handling their children's problems (Johnston & Mash,

1989). The influence parents feel they have over their children's lives now may also be an important aspect of parental self-efficacy. Parents' beliefs about the influence they have may be a factor in determining parental expectations about their relationship with their children in the future. Parents who feel less influential or efficacious with their children should feel that they will have even less influence over their children during adolescence and that they will have more problems with their adolescent children than parents who feel more influential or efficacious.

In summarizing the research on parent-child relationships at puberty, Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn (1991) conclude that although pubertal status may have an effect on parent-child relationships, between-family characteristics need to be explored vis-a-vis these pubertal changes. For example, families with varying amounts of conflict prior to the onset of puberty may respond differently to the changes associated with puberty. Parents with a more positive relationship with their child or who feel more efficacious in dealing with their child may respond differently to their child's emerging adolescence than parents with less positive relationships and who feel less efficacious. What, then, is the link between pubertal development, current parent-child relationship, and future expectations about adolescence?

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, we examine differences between mothers' and fathers' expectations for how their children will change during adolescence. We are interested in whether or not mothers and fathers view their future relationship with their children differently, and whether or not there are differences in expectations for sons and daughters. We are also interested in how much influence mothers and fathers think they have now and will have in the future in terms of their children's behavior and the relationships their children will have. Second, building on Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn's suggested model, we examine the impact of current parent-child relationships and child sex differences on mothers' expectations for future relationships taking pubertal status into account.

Methods

Participants

Eccles and her colleagues are conducting a large-scale longitudinal study in 12 schools, in four primarily white, lower-middle to middle class school districts in a midwestern urban community. The study began with groups of children in kindergarten, first, and third grades; to date, it has followed these children for four years at which time the cohorts were in third, fourth, and sixth grades. The children, approximately two-thirds of their parents, and their teachers participated by completing questionnaires and interviews annually. The study examines many issues including children's achievement self-perceptions and activity choices in various domains and the roles that parents and teachers play in socializing these beliefs. The issue of adolescent development and behavioral choices are also explored. The data presented below was obtained from the sample of children who were in the sixth grade during the fourth year of data collection.

We surveyed 137 mothers and 76 fathers about their expectations for what their relationship with their sixth grade child would be like when the child becomes an adolescent. Sixth grade children have experienced different degrees of pubertal changes associated with adolescence. In particular, many girls have completed the biological changes they will experience, while others have not even begun the process. Consequently, we chose sixth graders as our target sample so that we could examine the effects of different pubertal states on parental beliefs and expectations.

Measures (See Appendix 1 for individual items)

Using 7-point Likert scales, parents rated their current relationship with their child in terms of how close or conflicted they felt the relationship was. Parents also rated their expectations for how their child would change over the next two years regarding family relationships, peers, personality, and interests. These expectations were factor analyzed and five factors emerged: expectations that the child would be more positive (responsible and adultlike, $\alpha=.72$), emotional ($\alpha=.74$), separate from the family

($\alpha=.69$), concerned with what others think ($\alpha=.71$), and would get into more trouble ($\alpha=.80$). Further, parents rated two separate series of items concerning how much they felt they could influence their child's behaviors and interests currently and when their child becomes an adolescent (ages 13-16).

Additionally, mothers rated several items related to pubertal change on a scale from 1 (not begun) to 3 (a lot). These items were derived from the Petersen et al. scale for pubertal development (Petersen, Crockett, Richards, & Boxer, 1988). A summary pubertal development score was computed. Scores ranged from a low of 7 (not yet begun developing) to a high of 21 (fully developed).

Results

The five scales of parents' expectations for change, as well as items relating to the influence parents expect to have over their adolescent, were entered into separate 2 (parent sex) by 2 (child sex) Anova's (see Table 1). The child's gender was a significant predictor of parents' expectations that their child will become more emotional: parents of daughters reported that they thought their girls would become more emotional during adolescence than parents of sons. There was also a main effect for sex of parent in

Table 1
Parental Expectations for Parent-Adolescent Relationship and Influence

ITEM:	SEX OF PARENT X SEX OF CHILD								
	girls			boys			sex effect	par. effect	inter-action
	mo	fa	mo	fa	mo	fa			
5 factors:	x	x	x	x	x	x			
- positive kid	4.68	4.72	4.61	4.78	4.66	4.98	p<.001	p<.05	
- emotional	4.15	4.20	4.08	3.56	3.62	3.46			
- separate	4.65	4.60	4.75	4.64	4.81	4.34			
- others	5.55	5.66	5.37	5.53	5.60	5.41			
- trouble	2.84	2.79	2.92	2.96	3.02	2.87			
How much influence will you have over your child in the future in the following areas:									
- get child to stay out of trouble in school	5.25	5.32	5.13	5.25	5.27	5.23			
- help child get good grades in school	5.12	5.09	5.17	5.14	5.18	5.09			
- prevent child from getting in with the wrong crowd	4.90	5.00	4.73	4.97	4.96	4.98			
- get this child to associate with friends who are good for him/her	4.79	4.97	4.50	4.88	4.94	4.76	p<.05		
- prevent child from doing things you do not want him/her to do outside of the home	4.82	4.84	4.79	4.97	5.09	4.78			
- get this child to resist the pressure from friends to do things you disapprove of	4.85	4.94	4.71	4.95	4.99	4.89			
- increase this child's interest in school	4.80	4.81	4.77	4.78	4.81	4.73			

parent reports of expected influence over getting their child to associate with friends who are good for him/her: mothers expected they would be more influential than fathers in this area. Two significant sex of child by sex of parent interaction effects were also obtained. Fathers of boys appear to expect that their relationship with their boys will

become more positive in the future in comparison to fathers of girls, while mothers' expectations do not appear to change. Additionally, mothers of sons and fathers of daughters reported more concern that their child will become more separate from the family during adolescence than parents of same sex children. This sex of child effect appears stronger for fathers than for mothers.

Correlations and paired t-tests between parents' reports of the influence they have now, and the influence they expect to have when their child enters adolescence (ages 13-16), suggest that the influence parents believe they hold now is significantly related to the influence they expect to have in the next few years (See Table 2). Further, parents' expectations for the influence they will have in the future is significantly lower than at present. Separate scales for the current and future influence items were created and alphas were calculated. A Cronbach's alpha of .86 was found on the scale for current influence and .90 on the scale for expected influence in the future.

Table 2
Parental Efficacy: Influence Now and in the Future

How much influence do you have over your child now and in the future in the following areas:	N	Mean (Now)	STD. DEV. (Now)	Mean (Future)	STD. DEV. (Future)	Paired T-Test	CORR. COEFF
-get child to stay out of trouble in school	285	5.97	1.06	5.25	1.23	11.77***	.600
-help child get good grades in school	285	5.63	1.08	5.13	1.20	8.30***	.616
-prevent child from getting in with the wrong crowd	284	5.47	1.20	4.93	1.27	9.02***	.667
-get this child to associate with friends who are good for him/her	284	5.21	1.19	4.83	1.22	6.67***	.682
-prevent child from doing things you do not want him/her to do outside of the home	284	5.47	1.23	4.90	1.21	8.70***	.588
-increase this child's interest in school	284	5.00	1.30	4.79	1.21	3.76***	.717
-get this child to resist the pressure from friends to do things you disapprove of	284	5.32	1.12	4.90	1.17	6.69***	.575

***p<.001

The next set of analyses explore the relationships among the variables and test the mediating and moderating hypotheses laid out in the introduction. First, correlational results are presented, and then the results from the path analyses for each dependent variable are summarized. The full correlational table is presented in Table 3 below and the full path models are presented in Figures 1-5.

Table 3
Correlation Matrix for All Variables

	Pubertal status	Worried about child	Conflict relationship	Positive relationship	Current parent influence	Positive child	Separate from family	Get into more trouble	More emotional	Future influence
Child sex†	-.39**	.08	-.09	.12	-.04	-.05	.09	.08	-.24**	.01
Pubertal status		.17*	.25**	-.15	-.17*	-.10	.14	.17*	.27**	-.15
Worried about child			.52**	-.30**	-.24**	-.15*	.29**	.57**	.32**	-.27**
Conflict relationship				-.43**	-.15*	-.15	.27**	.42**	.48**	-.14
Positive relationship					.21**	.20**	-.05	-.29**	-.21**	.28**
Current parent influence						.33**	-.25**	-.36**	-.18*	.80**
Positive child							-.27**	-.30**	-.31**	.42**
Separate from family								.53**	.51**	-.36**
Get into more trouble									.60**	-.44**
More emotional										-.25**

*p<.05 **p<.01 †1=girls 2=boys

Correlational results

Inspection of the correlation matrix suggests the following direct effects of child characteristics on mothers' reports: child's pubertal status is positively related to mothers' being worried about their child, mothers' perceptions of conflict with their child, and mothers' expectation that their child was likely to get into more trouble and become more emotional in the future; in contrast, child's pubertal status is negatively related to mothers' sense of parental efficacy (current parent influence). As one would expect, a child's perceived pubertal status was related to the child's sex: girls were seen as more developed than boys. Child's sex was also related to the mothers' expectations that their child would become more emotional in the future: mothers' were more likely to believe that this was true for daughters than for sons. In addition, there were significant zero-order relations among all of the mothers' responses for current relationship and expectations for future relationship, and these correlations were in the direction one would expect.

Path analytic results

Path analyses were conducted to test the hypothesis that the effects of pubertal status and child's sex on mother's future expectations is mediated by the association of pubertal status with the current parent-child relationship and the mother's current sense of parental efficacy. The path analyses also show the strength of each predictor, controlling for the effect of all other predictors in the model. These results are illustrated in Figures 1-5. Given that pubertal status only has a direct effect on two of the five indicators of future expectations (get into trouble and more emotional, see Table 3), the test for mediation is only relevant to these two criterion measures.

In order to test whether the model differed for boys and girls, we performed separate path analyses for the two groups and examined the differences between the unstandardized path coefficients. Since no differences emerged, we combined the data for the two groups and ran the path analyses on the entire sample using column-wise

sequential regression analyses to estimate the path coefficients for each model.

The first step in these path analyses was identical for each of the five dependent measures. At this step, the four indicators of the current parent-child relationship and the mothers' sense of parental efficacy were regressed on the mothers' estimates of the child's pubertal status and on the child's sex. Pubertal status was positively related to how worried the mother was about the child currently ($\beta=.23$, $p<.01$) and how conflicted the mother reported the relationship was ($\beta=.25$, $p<.01$). Pubertal status was also negatively related to the mothers' sense of parental efficacy ($\beta=-.22$, $p<.05$). Interestingly, once pubertal status was controlled for, mothers reported a more conflictive relationship for sons than for daughters ($\beta=.18$, $p<.05$). This sex of child effect was not evident in the zero-order correlations, perhaps due to the confounding of child sex with pubertal status.

At the next step in the path analyses, each of the five criteria variables were regressed in separate analyses on all of the six predictors in the left two columns of the model. As predicted by the mediational hypothesis, there were no direct effects of pubertal status on any of the five indicators of mothers' future expectation. Each of the five figures is summarized briefly below.

Figure 1 shows the path analysis for mothers' expectations that their child would become more mature, more confident, and more fun to be around (Positive child). This expectation was predicted only by mothers' current sense of parental efficacy.

Figure 2 shows the path analysis for mother's expectations that their child would move away from the family (Separate from family). This expectation was predicted positively by mothers' current worries about her child and by mother's reports that the relationship is conflictive; it was also predicted negatively by parents' current sense of parental efficacy.

Figure 3 shows the path analysis for mothers' expectations that their child is likely to get into trouble in the future. As predicted, the relations between puberty and this

expectation is mediated by the association of puberty with the mothers' current worries about their child and the mothers' current sense of parental efficacy. The more worried a mother is now about her child and the less efficacious she feels now, the more likely the mother thinks it is that her child will get into trouble in the future.

Figure 4 shows the path analysis for mother's expectations that their child will become more emotional in the future. Again, as predicted, the relation between puberty and this expectation is mediated by the association of puberty with the mothers' current view of how conflicted the parent-child relationship is: The pubertal status of one's child has no direct effect on this expectation once the proposed mediators are added to the model. Pubertal status is related to mothers' perception that their relationship with their child is conflicted, and, in turn, mothers who rate their current relationship as very conflicted are more likely to expect their child to become more emotional in the future. In addition, mothers of daughters are more likely to expect their child to become more emotional in the future than mothers of sons.

Figure 5 shows the path analysis for mothers' confidence in their ability to influence their child in the future. Not surprisingly, this expectation is predicted most strongly by the mothers' current sense of parental efficacy. In addition, their expectation is predicted positively by the mothers' perception that she has a positive relationship with her child at present.

In order to examine whether moderating effects were also present, we computed two new regression equations, this time including interaction terms (see Baron and Kenny, 1986, for suggested methods of analysis). First, to test whether varying levels of current worry about a child moderates the effect of pubertal status on concern that s/he will get into trouble in the future, we entered the interaction term pubertal status x worried about the child into the regression equation. Second, to test whether current conflict moderates the effect of pubertal status on expectations that the child will be more emotional in the future, we entered the interaction term pubertal status x current conflict

into another regression equation. In neither case was the interaction term a significant predictor of trouble in the future or more emotional in the future. Pubertal development status acted in the same way in its impact on future expectations at all levels of current worry and conflict.

Conclusions

This research found that there were few differences in how parents of boys and parents of girls expected their children to change during adolescence and how much influence parents thought they would have over their children in the future. The only gender difference we found was that parents of daughters thought their girls would be more emotional in the future than parents of sons. Further, mothers and fathers did not differ considerably in their views about how their children will change and how much influence they thought they would have in the future. However, fathers of boys reported that they thought their relationship with their sons would become more positive in the future, while fathers of girls reported that they thought their daughters would become more separate from the family. These findings about fathers' expectations are somewhat consistent with those of Buchanan et al. (1990) who found that parents of daughters believed adolescence would be a more negative time than did parents of sons. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that we found very few child sex effects or parent sex effects. Research that has found gender differences in parent-child relationships have tended to use observed family interaction patterns around problem-solving (Steinberg, 1981) and questionnaire data that assessed amount of actual perceived conflict (Steinberg, 1987). Our findings suggest that parental expectations about adolescence do not play a role in differentiating these reported gender differences.

Many studies have examined the effects of pubertal status on current parent-child relationships. Other studies have explored the history of family conflicts prior to and after the transition to adolescence. Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn (1991) suggest that research in adolescence should focus on combining physiological as well as other familial variables in explaining parent-adolescent relationships. Results of this study support the need to look at these variables conjointly in explaining mothers' expectations for change.

Our findings indicate that at sixth grade, pubertal status is significantly related to negative aspects of the current parent-child relationship including being worried about the child and conflict. It is also related to mothers feeling less influential in the child's life. These findings are consistent with the findings of Steinberg (1987) and J.P. Hill (1988). Also consistent with the adolescent literature is our finding that the current relationship is associated with mothers' expectations about the future parent-adolescent relationship. It is particularly interesting to note that how efficacious a mother feels is significantly related to several future expectations, including having a positive relationship with the child. The fact that efficacy is also significantly correlated with both positive and negative aspects of the current relationship suggests that it may be an important factor in understanding parent-child as well as parent-adolescent relationships.

Our study did not find that pubertal status is related directly to parental expectations for changes during adolescence. However, mothers whose children are more physically developed tend to worry more about their children and feel less efficacious in dealing with their children. As worry increases and efficacy decreases, mothers' expectations that their children will get into more trouble in the future increase. Further, mothers whose children are more physically developed report more conflict with their children. In turn, as levels of conflict rise, mothers' expectations that their children will become more emotional during adolescence increases. We also found that

pubertal status exhibited the same influence on mothers' expectations for change regardless of the level of current worry or conflict.

Future research should examine other variables that may relate to expectations for change. For example, family supportiveness and parental warmth may affect parent expectations for their adolescents. Additionally, a longitudinal approach to questions involving the impact of pubertal development and family relationships on change would better explain the history of the family's relationship and how it impacts expectations. Further longitudinal analyses would also explain how expectations for change actually impact on future relationships.

Appendix 1 - Measures used

Pubertal status:

1=Not at all 2=just started 3=A lot
(Fully developed=21 points; Not at all developed=7 points)
We used mother's ratings only

Growth spurt
Hair becoming more oily
Appearance of pimples
Appearance of underarm hair
Appearance of pubic hair
Increase in muscle strength (boys)
Genital development (boys)
Breast development (girls)
Menstrual period (girls, 1=no 3=yes)

How much **influence** do you have **now** ($\alpha=.86$) and in the **future** ($\alpha=.90$) in the following areas (2 separate questions):

- get child to stay out of trouble in school
- help child get good grades in school
- prevent child from getting in with the wrong crowd
- get this child to associate with friends who are good for him/her
- prevent child from doing things you do not want him/her to do outside of the home
- increase this child's interest in school
- get this child to resist the pressure from friends to do things you disapprove of

Current parent child relationship

Indicate the extent to which each of these statements is true for you and this child now and in the recent past (factor analyzed into the following factors:

conflicted relationship ($\alpha=.85$)

I am worried that this child and I will have more conflicts this year.
There is a good deal of conflict between this child and me.
Even though being a parent can be rewarding, I am frustrated now while this child is at his/her present age.
This child and I have had more conflicts this year than last.
This child often argues with me about my rules or decisions for him/her.

worried about child ($\alpha=.73$)

I am worried that this child is up to something I don't like.
I am worried about the kinds of friends this child has.
I am worried that this child will get into more trouble this coming year than last.
I sometimes worry that I don't know where this child is or whom they are with.

positive relationship ($\alpha=.74$)

I find it interesting and educational to be with this child for long periods.
I am physically affectionate with this child.
I am emotionally close to this child.

Future parent-adolescent relationship

Rate how likely you think it is that this child will change in the following ways in the next two years:

Emotional (alpha=.73)

- S/he will be more difficult to get along with.
- S/he will be easier to get along with.
- S/he will have more emotional problems.
- S/he will become more moody.

Trouble (alpha=.81)

- S/he will be more likely to get in trouble in school.
- S/he will become more rebellious.
- S/he will be less interested in school.
- S/he will be more likely to get into trouble with his/her friends.
- His/her peers have a negative influence on him/her.

Positive child (alpha=.72)

- S/he will take on more responsibilities.
- S/he will take school work more seriously.
- S/he will be closer to me because we can share more adult interests.
- S/he will seek my advice more.
- S/he will become more self-confident and self-assured.
- S/he will be more fun to be around.

More separate (alpha=.70)

- S/he will socialize more with members of the opposite sex.
- S/he will be less concerned with what I think.
- S/he will resist my influence more.
- S/he will become less interested in doing things with the family.

Concerned with others (alpha=.71)

- S/he will be more concerned about his/her appearance.
- S/he will be more concerned about what his/her friends think.

FIGURE 1: FACTORS INFLUENCING MOTHERS' EXPECTATION FOR A POSITIVE CHANGE

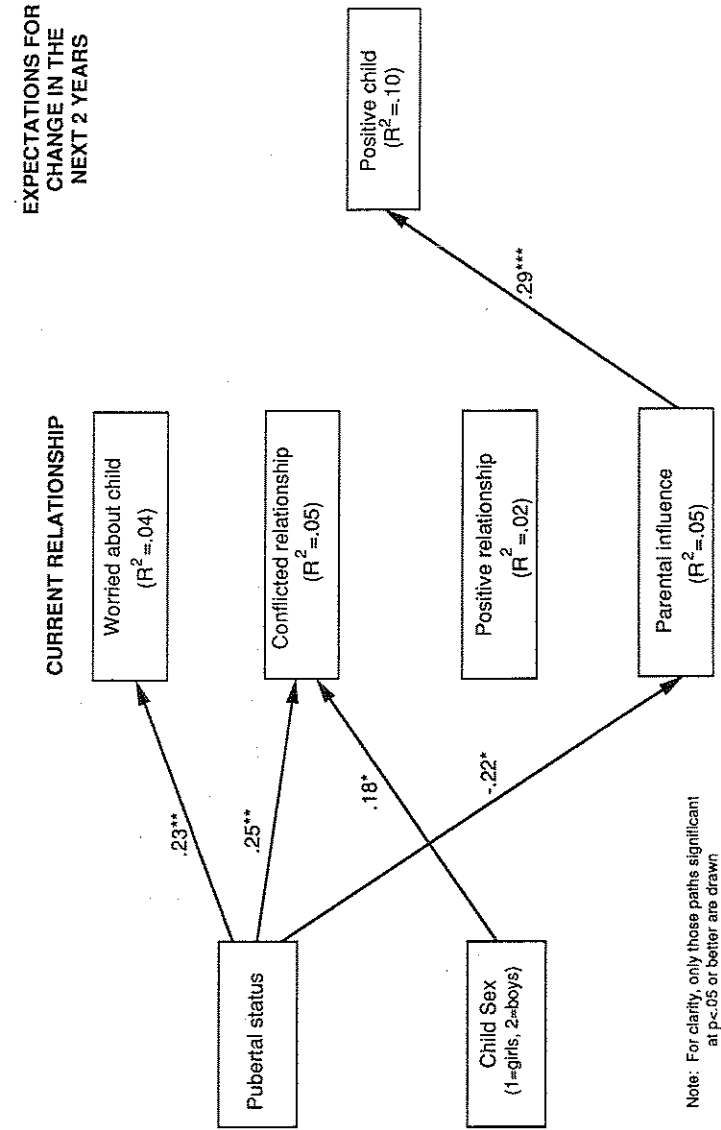


FIGURE 2: FACTORS INFLUENCING MOTHERS' EXPECTATION FOR CHILD SEPARATING FROM FAMILY

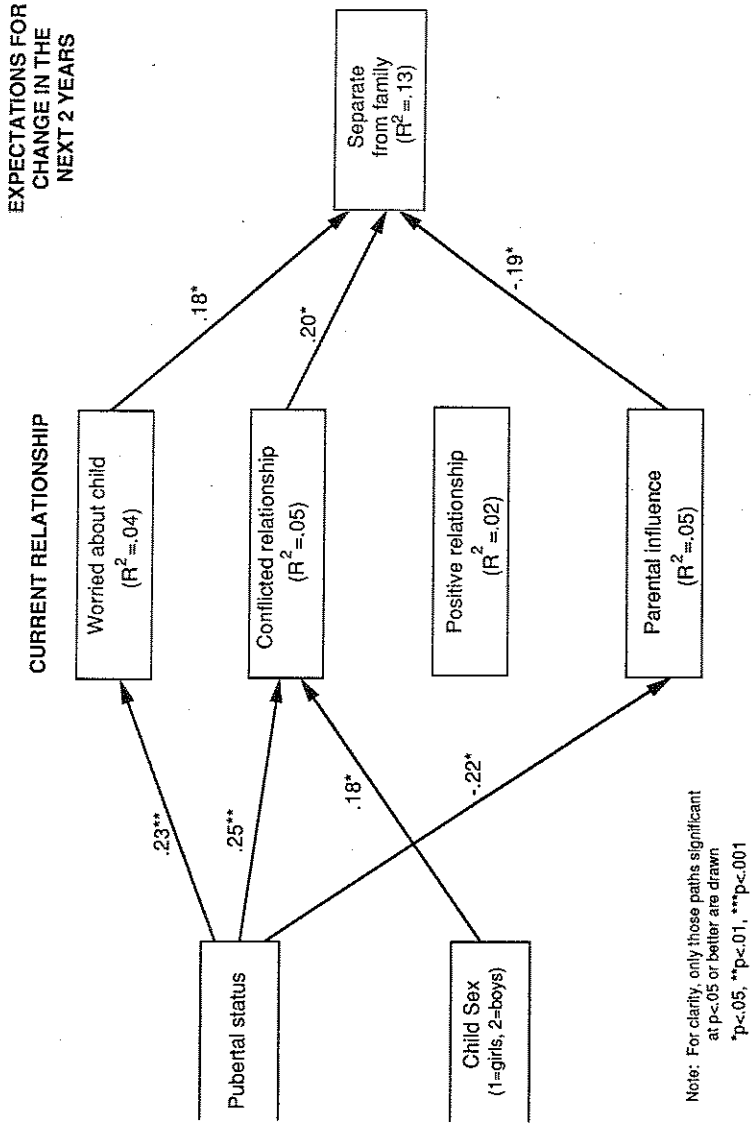


FIGURE 3: FACTORS INFLUENCING MOTHERS' EXPECTATION FOR CHILD GETTING INTO MORE TROUBLE

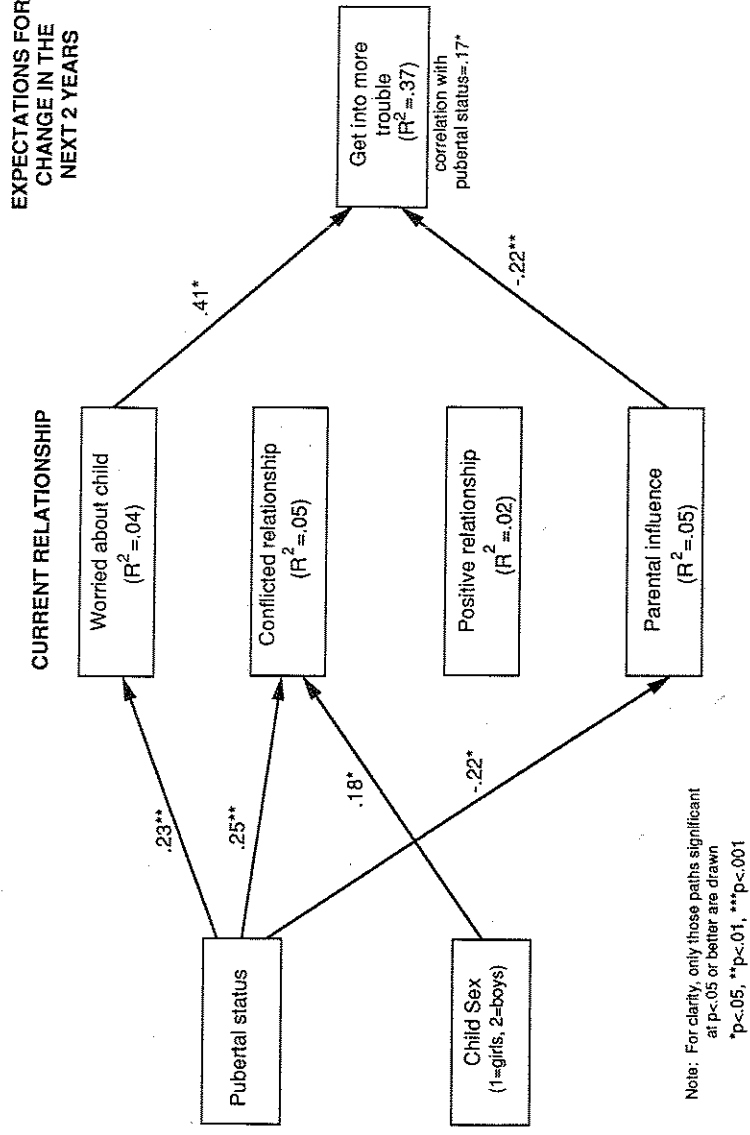


FIGURE 4: FACTORS INFLUENCING MOTHERS' EXPECTATION FOR CHILD BECOMING MORE EMOTIONAL

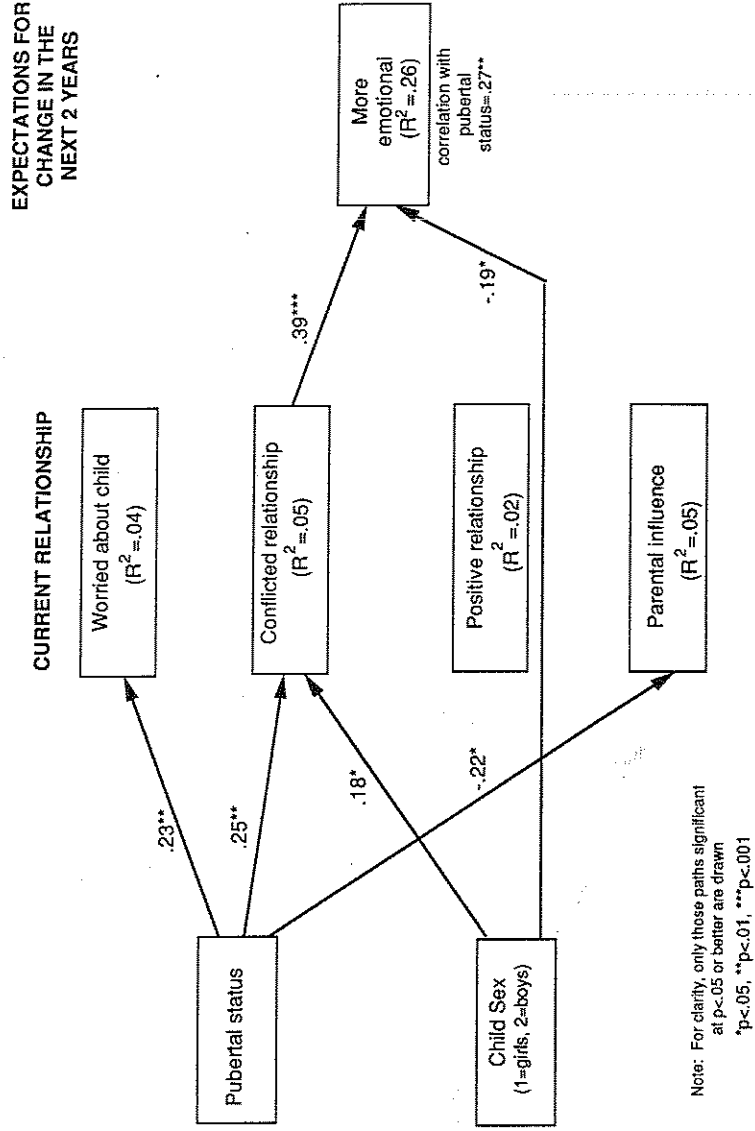
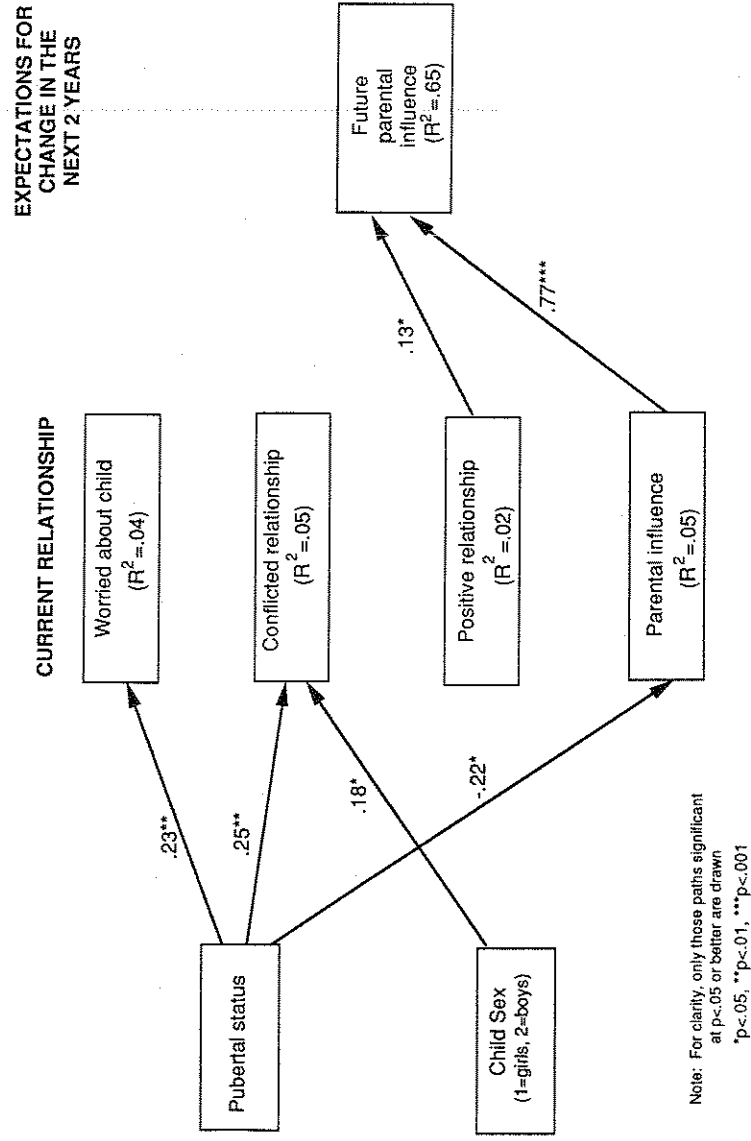


FIGURE 5: FACTORS INFLUENCING MOTHERS' EXPECTATION FOR FUTURE PARENTAL INFLUENCE



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