Family Factors and Young Adult Transitions: Educational Attainment and Occupational Prestige

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In this chapter we examine the idea that the processes of continuing education beyond high school and launching a career pose challenges for young adults that are related to the processes of achieving autonomy while maintaining relatedness with parents as adolescents. We focus on educational attainment and occupational prestige as two markers of the success of the transition to early adulthood and explore three central questions: (a) Are qualities of parent–adolescent interactions predictive of high school completion? (b) Are qualities of parent–adolescent interactions predictive of later education and occupational success? (c) Are qualities of marital interaction in families with adolescents predictive of any of these outcomes? In the first section of this chapter, we briefly review the literature on the relationship among family background characteristics, educational attainment, and subsequent occupational prestige. We emphasize the family as a primary context for development, focusing on the association between family background and young adult outcomes. The second section discusses links between parenting and young adult academic and career achievements and illustrates these relationships with a sample of adolescents who were first observed with their families at
age 14, and then assessed in terms of educational and occupational outcomes 11 years later at age 25. In a third section we focus on parents’ marital dynamics in this same sample and examine the longitudinal relationship of marital behavior to the adolescents’ subsequent education attainment and occupational prestige.

During early adulthood, many individuals try out their first adult life structure by committing to their first careers (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978). Educational and occupational decisions, at this juncture, represent major developmental tasks and can be considered extensions of the earlier stage-salient developmental task of adolescence—becoming an autonomous individual. The process of developing autonomy and achieving identity during adolescence also involves maintaining family relationships (Campbell, Adams, & Dobson, 1984; Collins, 1990; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Hauser & Levine, 1993; Hill & Holmbeck, 1986; Steinberg, 1990) and continues into young adulthood with parents exerting influences on the process and its resolution (e.g., Campbell et al., 1984; Grotevant, 1983; Hauser & Greene, 1992; Josselson, 1987).

The quality of parent–teen relations also appears to continue as a major influence on adolescents as they separate from their parents and begin the process of becoming adults (J. A. Hoffman, 1984). Positive family relations have been linked to less loneliness when leaving home, better adjustment to college, higher college grade point averages, and better peer relationships in college (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russell, 1994; Frank, Pirsch, & Wright, 1990; Hoffman & Weiss, 1987; Kenny, 1987; Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Lapsley, Rice, & Shadid, 1989; Lopez, 1991; Lopez, Campbell, & Watkins, 1988, 1989a, 1989b; Moore, 1987; Rice, Cole, & Lapsley, 1990). Parents also play a significant role in their offsprings’ completion of college, in that the behavior they model (e.g., being employed in a profession that requires higher education) seems to have direct effects and is reflected in the values internalized by their children (Bank, Slavings, & Biddle, 1990). We propose, then, that educational attainment and occupational prestige, viewed as measures of young adult development, are longitudinally related to both family characteristics and qualities of family relations.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE

Many different conceptual models of adult educational attainment have been explored in which intergenerational factors play a major role in academic success or failure (Hauser & Featherman, 1977; Haveman, Wolfe, & Spaulding, 1991; Hill & Duncan, 1987; Rumberger, 1983, 1987). It is well documented that students who come from relatively small, intact, middle-class families, where they are expected to succeed, go further in school, and ultimately obtain relatively high-prestige jobs in comparison to their peers. Adults with higher levels of education are more likely to be employed; they also have increased opportunities for professional advancement (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 1994; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1993a). In 1992, the unemployment rate for adults 25 years old and over who had not completed high school was 11.4%. This was in contrast to 6.8% for persons with 4 years of high school and 3.2% for individuals who had obtained at least a bachelor’s degree (NCES, 1993b). The types of employment opportunities available to individuals also vary by educational attainment. In 1992, over 62% of the adults employed in managerial and professional specialties had at least a bachelor’s degree, whereas the majority of persons employed in service occupations, precision production, farming, forestry, and fishing had only a high school education (NCES, 1993b). Earnings are also directly affected by education. Between 1980 and 1990 earnings increased 78% for men with 5 or more years of college, but only 30% for those with 1 to 3 years of high school (NCES, 1993b). It is especially important, then, to understand the processes underlying the intergenerational transmission of educational attainment to gain a better understanding of later occupational outcomes.

Educational attainment and intergenerational transmission of income that are closely linked to occupational prestige have been studied from multiple perspectives, including demographics, economics, education, psychology, and sociology (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Becker, 1981; Hill & Duncan, 1987; Hogan & Astone, 1986). Much of the research on this subject relies on large-scale surveys (e.g., Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Hill & Duncan, 1987; Sewell & Hauser, 1975) so the information gathered in these studies has been largely based on self- and parent reports (see Brooks-Gunn, Brown, Duncan, & Moore, 1994, for the contents of current national surveys issues). Other factors that have been considered include rank in high school class, perceived expectations of significant others (parents and teachers), educational and occupational aspirations, family structure, sources of family income, and parents’ education and occupations (Hill & Duncan, 1987; Sewell & Hauser, 1975). Although these studies underscore the relationship between family background characteristics and educational attainment and occupational prestige or earnings later in life, they offer little data on the possible link between family dynamics and educational and occupational outcomes.

Family contextual variables appear to influence young adult outcomes but it is also important to look beyond them to see how the family
processes may mediate the effects of family background. Parental socioeconomic status (SES), for example, is related to children's educational attainment and prestige and earnings in adulthood. The effects of parental SES on offsprings' actual occupational prestige, however, appear to be largely transmitted via the educational attainment of the younger generation (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Duncan, 1966; Duncan & Hodge, 1963; Eckland, 1965; Hodge, 1966). If the family environment supports educational attainment, the negative effects of low parental SES on occupational outcomes may be diluted. The relationship of SES to educational attainment, in turn, may be more complex than the simple fact that middle- and upper class families have the financial resources to support advanced education. Family economics are related not only to actual income but also to the ways in which resources (time, money, aptitudes) are allocated in the family (L. W. Hoffman, 1984). Middle- and upper class families tend to allocate their resources in ways that promote the advancement of their children (Becker, 1981; Becker & Tomes, 1986; Coleman, 1988), which may be a reflection of parental values.

PARENT-ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIPS AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE

Darling and Steinberg (1993) presented a contextual model of parenting whereby parental goals and values affect both parenting style and parenting practices. In this model, parenting practices are seen as having direct effects on adolescent outcomes; however, these effects are moderated by parenting style and the effects of parenting style on adolescents' openness to socialization from their parents. Parenting style provides a context within which socialization occurs. In this section we first consider parental goals and values, and then discuss the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship as potential influences on young adult educational attainment and occupational prestige. In particular, we consider the parenting context both as a mediator of parental goals and values and as having direct effects on young adult outcomes.

Goals and Values

Parents' goals for their children, which are related to adult outcomes, may be confounded with SES. Economic hardship, for example, may make parents more pessimistic about their children's futures (Galambos & Silbereisen, 1987) and consequently lower their goals for their children. Parental encouragement, which may be difficult for parents who are financially stressed, however, is the variable that has been most frequently related to educational attainment and occupational success in late adolescence and adulthood (e.g., Borda, 1960; Ihinger-Tallman, 1982; Kahl, 1953; Marjoribanks, 1989; Rehberg & Westby, 1967; Sewell & Shah, 1968). This variable is usually assessed in the form of self-reports (see Ihinger-Tallman, 1982, for an exception) in which the children or adolescents are asked about the educational plans and desires their parents have for them, and about parental pressure to do well in school. By measuring parental encouragement in this fashion, researchers are attempting to directly access parental values. Sewell and Shah (1968) found that parental encouragement added substantially to the variance in educational goals explained by SES. In these models of individuals' plans for college, however, there is still a portion of the variance that is not explained indicating that additional constructs, such as parenting style, could enhance the prediction of expected educational attainment and occupational goals.

Reports of Parenting Context

There may be other dimensions of parenting, besides parental encouragement and expectations that relate to young adult occupational and educational achievements. Specifically, the emotional climate of the family as communicated to the adolescent can effect the adolescent's receptivity to parental values (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Generally, research in educational achievement supports this position. Parenting style (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987), parents' personal adjustment (Forehand, Long, Brody, & Fauber, 1986), and communications between parents and children (Forehand et al., 1986; Masselam, Marcus, & Stunkard, 1990) all influence adolescent behavior and performance in school. Positive communication between parents and adolescents differentiated teens who were successful in the public school system from teens who left the public school system to receive additional help (Masselam et al., 1990). Multiple aspects of parenting style—acceptance, psychological autonomy, and behavioral control—also contribute to high school success (Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989). Adolescents from indulgent homes are frequently less engaged in school than adolescents from authoritative homes (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991). Additionally, Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, Ritter, and Dornbusch (1990) found that, after accounting for family demographics, permissive parenting was associated with dropping out of high school.

In a similar vein, affective qualities of the parent-adolescent relationship have been implicated in the area of career development. Enmeshment in the family system has been linked to adolescents' difficulties in mastering career development tasks (Penick & Jepsen, 1992). Lopez and
Andrews (1987) speculated that overinvolvement on the part of parents may impede college students' career decision making. They see the process of committing to a career as requiring a transformation in family functioning that would simultaneously facilitate adult identity formation and psychological separation from parents. Overinvolvement on the part of parents, according to this formulation (Lopez & Andrews, 1987), may have negative consequences in career development. College students who exhibit the most career maturity and progress in committing to careers, however, report high levels of emotional support and attachment to their parents (Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, & Palladino, 1991; Kenny, 1990). Thus, adolescent achievement seems to be best promoted in families in which parents are not overinvolved with their teens (i.e., they allow sufficient autonomy), but nevertheless maintain close supportive relationships with them.

In the literature reviewed thus far, we have shown that family characteristics relate longitudinally to young adult education and career outcomes and that qualities of the parent–teen relationships have significant relationships to concurrent adolescent educational achievements and career development. Nearly all of the studies previously described rely on reports of family behavior. In this study we redress some of the gaps in the literature by observing family interactions during middle adolescence and reporting on the relationship between observed qualities in family interactions and actual young adult career outcomes.

Observations of Parent–Adolescent Interactions

Sample Characteristics. In this study, 77 teenagers and their mothers and fathers participated. The adolescents were either high school freshmen (ninth grade; \( N = 38 \)) or had a nonpsychotic, nonorganic impairment and had been psychiatrically hospitalized at age 14 (\( N = 39 \); mean age = 14.5 years). Most of the hospitalized adolescents carried diagnoses related to conduct problems or depression. The families in both groups were predominantly upper middle class (mean SES = 2.08, \( SD = 1.07 \); Hollingshead, 1975) and all subjects were White. Subjects from the high school and psychiatrically hospitalized group did not significantly differ in terms of age, gender, birth order, or number of siblings; the only demographic criterion on which the samples differed was SES (higher for the high school sample). The sampling procedure was used to examine adolescents across a broader range of levels of social functioning than would typically be available in a representative sample. Psychiatric hospitalization at age 14 was thus used as a criterion to obtain a sample likely to be at lower levels of family and individual functioning. (A more complete description of sampling procedures and rationale is provided in Hauser, Powers, & Noam, 1991.)

Adolescents and their families participated in a revealed-differences task (Srodtbeck, 1951). They were paid $30 for their participation in the family session. Family members were first interviewed separately about Kohlberg moral dilemmas and then brought together to discuss issues they disagreed about. Participants were asked to take up to 10 minutes to discuss their first disagreement and, if possible, to resolve it. Families were then presented with a new disagreement to discuss. This procedure continued for 30 minutes, with disagreements presented to alternate which family member was in the minority in a disagreement. The family interaction was then coded using the Autonomy and Relatedness coding system (Allen, Hauser, Borman, & Worrell, 1991), which yields a rating for each family member's overall behavior toward each other family member in the interaction (e.g., separate ratings for adolescents' hostility toward mothers and for mothers' hostility toward adolescents). The coding system is described in greater detail later.

The adolescents were interviewed again as young adults when they were 25. Seventy-three of the adolescents originally in the study provided us with information. One subject was deceased. Seventy-two subjects provided information about educational attainment, 65 provided information on their current jobs, and 71 provided information about their most important job. Occupational success is assessed in terms of occupational prestige rather than current earnings. Many of the subjects were currently in training status where their occupational prestige and job responsibilities were considerable but their earnings had not yet stabilized. Occupational prestige for both current jobs and most important jobs was coded by two raters who assigned prestige scores to the occupations listed by the subjects. The prestige scores were taken from the 1989 General Social Survey update of the NORC scale scores (Nakao, Hodge, & Treas, 1990; Nakao & Treas, 1990). Disagreements between raters were resolved by conferencing. For those subjects who were currently enrolled in full-time, professional degree programs, their current occupations were coded as corresponding to the occupation for which they will qualify when they complete their degree requirements. This approach was chosen because these subjects were already engaged in tasks associated with the completed degree (teaching at an institution of postsecondary education, finishing internships, etc.).

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1One person did not provide educational information, one person did not provide information about the most important job, and one other person said that no job had been important. Eight persons were currently not working—one was disabled, two were enrolled in school and did not specify a degree program, and five were unemployed.
In relating educational attainment and occupational prestige both to demographic and family interaction variables it is important to assure that the effects found were not artifacts of the two-group selection process for the study. To guard against this possibility, adolescents’ history of psychiatric hospitalization at age 14 was controlled for in all correlations reported, and always entered as the first term in multiple regression analyses.

As already mentioned, previous research has documented the relationship between SES and educational attainment (e.g., Sewell & Hauser, 1975). In this sample, parental SES was significantly correlated with reported level of young adults’ educational attainment ($r = .40, p < .001$) and occupational prestige ($r = .44, p < .001$) at 25 years of age. Educational attainment and occupational prestige were significantly correlated ($r = .50, p < .001$), as expected.

Consistent with other past investigations, birth order was related to educational attainment (Mare & Chen, 1986) with earlier born adolescents (low birth order) achieving higher levels of education ($r = -.26, p < .05$). Birth order was not related to occupational prestige of the current job.

**Autonomy and Relatedness and Young Adult Outcomes.** Several recent reviews have examined transitions in family relationship during adolescence (Collins, 1990; Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Steinberg, 1990). There is a general consensus that rather than abrupt changes there are gradual transformations in family relationships around issues of autonomy, parent-child conflict, and the manifestation of parent-adolescent harmony (Steinberg, 1990).

The Autonomy and Relatedness coding system (Allen et al., 1991) is particularly sensitive to these issues. It is used to classify interactional behaviors into three primary scales including: (a) exhibiting autonomous-relatedness, which sums ratings of behaviors expressing and discussing reasons behind disagreements, confidence in stating one’s positions, validation and agreement with another’s position, and attending to the other person’s statements; (b) undermining autonomy, which sums ratings of behaviors overpersonalizing a disagreement, recanting a position without appearing to have been persuaded the position is wrong (thus ending the discussion), and pressuring another person to agree other than by making rational arguments; and (c) hostile conflictual behavior, which sums ratings of behaviors undermining relatedness by overtly expressing hostility toward another member, or by rudely interrupting or ignoring a family member. Intraclass correlations for the three scales were .84, .82, and .70 for exhibiting autonomous-relatedness, hostile conflictual behav-

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2 Because high SES in this study was represented by low values, the values were reversed to make the presentation of results more logically consistent.
low-SES families expressed more behaviors that undermined autonomy when speaking with their mothers ($r = -0.40, p < .001$). Because SES was related to family interaction style it was always entered into our models before the family interaction variables. This way we were able to examine the relationship between the styles of family interaction over the effects of SES.

Eighty-one percent of the current sample completed high school. Consistent with results of prior research (Rumberger, 1983, 1987), in this current sample, there was a trend for the females to show higher rates of high school completion, $t(51.7) = 1.93, p < .06$. Of the subjects who did not finish high school, only one subject was from the nonhospitalized group; all others were from the psychiatric group. In the psychiatric group approximately one third of the subjects did not complete high school. Females in the psychiatric group were more likely than the males in this group to complete high school, $t(25) = 2.82, p < .01$.

Logistic regressions were used to analyze the data from only those subjects who were in the psychiatric group to see if adolescent-parent interaction variables contributed to the prediction of high school completion after accounting for SES, birth order, and gender. We expected that parental behaviors exhibiting autonomy and relatedness toward the adolescent and the same types of behaviors on the part of the adolescents toward their parents would be related to high school completion (Steinberg et al., 1989) for this group. Table 13.1 shows that exhibiting autonomy-relatedness in family interactions was associated with high school completion in the psychiatric sample for all adolescent-parent dyads except for mothers' behaviors toward the adolescents. Adolescents' behaviors toward their parents were the strongest predictors, perhaps indicating the importance of the adolescents' own feelings of autonomous-relatedness in determining their life-course directions. Similar logistical models were used to analyze parents' behaviors that undermined adolescents' autonomy and behaviors that were hostile and conflictual toward adolescents in the psychiatric sample. Fathers' undermining of adolescents' autonomy and the adolescents' gender were significant positive predictors of high school completion in this group of psychiatrically hospitalized adolescents ($\chi^2(4) = 14.12, p < .01$), standardized parameter estimates for gender = .63, $p < .05$ and for undermining autonomy = .67, $p < .05$.

We also examined overall educational attainment at age 25. Multiple regression equations (one for each of the parent-adolescent pairings on each of the autonomy and relatedness scales) were used to predict educational attainment. Psychiatric status, parental SES, and birth order were entered into each of the analyses prior to the measure of autonomous-relatedness. With these constraints, autonomous-relatedness directed toward fathers was the only significant predictor of educational attainment at age 25 (see Table 13.2). Psychiatric status did not significantly interact with the autonomy and relatedness scales. Because females achieved a higher level of educational attainment in this sample, the relationship between adolescents' behaviors exhibiting autonomous-relatedness toward their fathers and educational attainment also was examined for males and females separately. We found substantially similar patterns of results across gender.

In keeping with the literature on educational attainment, we hypothesized that exhibiting autonomous-relatedness in the parent-teen pairs would contribute to occupational success primarily through educational attainment. As noted earlier, educational attainment was correlated with current prestige of young adults' jobs. When the various parent-teen pairings of exhibiting autonomous-relatedness behaviors were entered into these regression equations after educational attainment, they did not

### TABLE 13.1
Predictors of High School Completion Among Psychiatrically Hospitalized Adolescents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicting High School Completion</th>
<th>Adol → Mother</th>
<th>Adol → Father</th>
<th>Mother → Adol</th>
<th>Father → Adol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth order</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.49*</td>
<td>.53*</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous-relatedness</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td>.78**</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.57**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2(4)$ for improvement over intercept model</td>
<td>14.44***</td>
<td>15.33***</td>
<td>9.25*</td>
<td>13.03**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Standardized estimates were obtained from logistic regression equations.

*p < .10. **p < .05. ***p < .01.

### TABLE 13.2
Relationship Between Adolescents' Exhibiting Autonomous-Relatedness Toward Father and Educational Attainment After Accounting for Psychiatric Status, Socioeconomic Status, and Birth Order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicting Overall Educational Attainment</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric status</td>
<td>-.41**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth order</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous-relatedness of adolescent → father</td>
<td>.22*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2 = .58**$

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01.
postsecondary education, demonstrating that they value education, generally have children who pursue postsecondary education (e.g., Borda, 1940; Ihinger-Tallman, 1982; Kahl, 1953; Marjoribanks, 1989; Rehberg & Westby, 1967; Sewell & Shah, 1968). Parenting style, by providing a context to support adolescent development, was also related to achievements in educational and occupational domains. Authoritative parenting is related to adolescent engagement in school (Lamborn et al., 1991). Similarly, college students who feel supported by their parents exhibit career maturity (Blustein et al., 1991; Kenny, 1990). Finally, in moving beyond a generalized parenting context to examine specific interactional behaviors, we found that autonomy and relatedness in parent–adolescent interactions is related to high school completion and overall educational attainment and occupational prestige in young adulthood.

MARITAL DYNAMICS IN FAMILIES OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULT OUTCOMES

There are also a number of ways in which the interaction patterns in the marital dyad might relate to young adult outcomes. Lopez and Andrews (1987) suggested that one of the ways that parents may support individuation in early adulthood is to consolidate their marital relationship. Additionally, if parents’ relations with each other contribute to adolescents’ models of interpersonal relationships, then it would be expected that teenagers whose parents were supportive of each other and simultaneously encouraging of individual autonomy in their marriages will be better equipped to handle relational issues in the workplace. Conflict in the parents’ marital dyad, on the other hand, may also influence their adolescent’s subsequent occupational prestige. A large body of literature points to the negative effects of marital conflict on children (Emery, 1982; Feldman & Wentzel, 1990; Hetherington & Martin, 1986; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Peterson & Zill, 1986). Although some of the effects of marital conflict are related to school performance, most of the negative outcomes are less context specific. Marital conflict is more generally related to poor psychosocial functioning in children. By extension, parents’ marital conflict might contribute to lower occupational prestige in young adulthood.

We expected that the qualities of the marital relationship observed by the young adults during adolescence also would be related to their later career success. Table 13.4 shows that in our sample even after accounting for psychiatric status, parental SES, birth order, and educational attainment, marital interaction variables were significant predictors of occupational outcomes of offspring 11 years later. Mothers’ behaviors exhibiting

### TABLE 13.3
Relationships Between Undermining Autonomy and Occupational Prestige for Adolescent–Parent Pairs After Accounting for Psychiatric Status, Socioeconomic Status, Birth Order, and Educational Attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Prestige</th>
<th>Interaction with</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undermining autonomy</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>β</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent → Parent</td>
<td>-.31*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent → Adolescent</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Fs for the overall equations are significant at p < .05. Educational attainment was a significant predictor at p < .05 in these equations; there were no other significant predictors except undermining autonomy in any of the equations in this table.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

contribute to the prediction of either prestige measure, confirming the expectation that exhibiting autonomous-relatedness is related to occupational outcomes through its relationship to educational attainment.

Next we considered whether there were developmental consequences related to establishing a successful career trajectory as a young adult when individuals had not demonstrated autonomy with respect to their parents during adolescence. After accounting for psychiatric status, parental SES, birth order, and educational attainment, in our regressions we found that the adolescents’ behaviors that undermined autonomy in their families of origin during teenage years had a significant relation to later occupational prestige (see Table 13.3). Adolescents’ undermining of mothers’ and fathers’ autonomy was related to lower occupational prestige for young adults. Fathers’ undermining of adolescents’ autonomy also was associated with lower young adult occupational prestige. In predicting occupational prestige, even though parent and adolescent behaviors exhibiting autonomy and relatedness were mediated by educational attainment, the effects of undermining autonomy in family interactions appear more directly related to this young adult outcome.

### Summary

In this section we have explored the issue of parent–adolescent relationships and educational and career outcomes. Parental values, parenting style, and actual qualities of parent–adolescent interactions all relate to offsprings’ attainments. Parents who encourage their children to pursue
TABLE 13.4
Relationship Between Parents’ Marital Behaviors and Young Adult
Occupational Prestige After Accounting for Psychiatric Status,
Socioeconomic Status, Birth Order, and Educational Attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mother → Father</th>
<th>Father → Mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>β</strong></td>
<td><strong>β</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric status</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth order</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational attainment</td>
<td>.44***</td>
<td>.46***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibiting autonomous-relatedness</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.36***</td>
<td>.31***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric status</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth order</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational attainment</td>
<td>.46***</td>
<td>.44***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undermining autonomy</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>.33***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10. **p < .05. ***p < .01.

autonomous-relatedness toward fathers predicted young adults’ current occupational prestige and there was a trend for fathers’ behaviors that undermined mothers’ autonomy to predict lower prestige of young adults’ current positions. Marital hostility when our subjects were adolescents was not related to young adults’ current occupational prestige. When predictions for parents’ marital dynamics were examined by gender of child, we found little difference in overall patterns.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

We began this chapter by reviewing a large body of evidence showing that family background and parental encouragement are related to each other, and to adolescents’ later educational attainment and occupational success. We also examined family interaction styles, and found evidence to support the idea that qualities of family interactions have long-term developmental impact in these realms. Our exploration of this issue focused on the relationship of autonomy and relatedness in family interactions. Using observed family interactions of 14-year-olds and their parents, we found that even after accounting for prior pathology and family SES, not only were adolescents’ behaviors exhibiting autonomous-relatedness and undermining autonomy predictive of young adult outcomes, but parents’ behaviors both toward the adolescents and with each other also related to young adult outcomes.

Summarizing the detailed analyses already described, we found that for high school completion of the previously hospitalized group and for educational attainment of the entire sample, the autonomy and relatedness between adolescents and their fathers were especially important in predicting educational achievements. In predicting high school completion, both adolescent behaviors toward fathers and fathers’ behaviors toward adolescents were important. In predicting educational attainment, adolescents’ behaviors toward their fathers had greater predictive power than the correlated behaviors on the part of the father.

Differences in father–adolescent and mother–adolescent interactions are not necessarily large (Collins & Russell, 1991), but the way adolescents interact with each of their parents may have different relationships to long-term educational outcomes. Other research suggests reasons why father–adolescent interaction differs from mother–adolescent interaction in predicting educational and occupational outcomes. Youniss and Smollar (1985) reported that adolescent interactions with fathers tend to have a relatively narrow focus—the domains of academic performance and future plans. Although adolescents discuss these issues with both parents, fathers’ realms of authority deal more exclusively with these areas where there are objective performance standards. The issues adolescents discuss with their fathers relate to becoming a productive member of adult society (Youniss & Smollar, 1985) so perhaps the way adolescents respond to their fathers is especially important for how they will ultimately function in these domains. It is possible that teens who respond positively to their fathers in a generalized problem-solving task, like the one in this study, are better able to do the same when discussing their own futures with their fathers or with males in positions of authority at work.

Fathers’ realms of influence typically deal with being a productive member of society but the strength of their influence is likely augmented by the quality of their relationship with their children. Other researchers have reported that fathers do not generally have very intimate relationships with adolescents (LeCroy, 1988; Youniss & Ketterlinus, 1987), but that when they do have such relationships this is important for adolescent functioning. Adolescents report fewer problem behaviors and higher self-esteem when they have intimate relationships with their fathers (LeCroy, 1988). Adolescents who exhibit autonomous-relatedness toward their fathers in the laboratory may have especially strong relationships. In this study, adolescents whose behaviors exhibit autonomous-relatedness toward their fathers have fathers who show the same types of behaviors toward them. It previously has been shown in this sample that fathers’ behaviors exhibiting autonomous-relatedness toward their teen-
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tigious jobs as young adults. These psychiatrically disturbed teenagers may have initially benefited from a restriction of autonomy, but may not have been able to achieve the psychological autonomy from their autonomy-inhibiting fathers that would allow them to develop the requisite psychosocial maturity to be successful in the workplace. Fathers who undermined their teenagers’ autonomy had children who at age 25 held relatively low-prestige positions. There also was a trend for fathers who undermined their spouses’ autonomy to have children who had less successful careers. It is possible that men who undermine their wives’ autonomy hold more traditional gender role attitudes and draw their self-esteem from being the breadwinner and head of the household (Hoffman, 1989). These men’s attempts to constrain their wives’ autonomy may also carry over to their children. How family members deal with autonomy in the family relationships, then, especially when fathers are involved, clearly has a relationship to later occupational success.

In studying occupational outcomes one needs to be particularly aware of cohort effects (Harmon, 1989). The first wave of data for this study was collected during the mid 1970s and the age 25 follow-up began in 1989. It is also important to be aware of the fact that the subjects’ career information was collected at a time when the United States was beginning a major recession. In interpreting the results of this study it is important to keep in mind that the data collected on one cohort may not generalize well to future cohorts growing up under different circumstances.

We first proposed that young adults’ educational and occupational achievements were related to the adolescent processes of developing autonomy while maintaining relatedness with parents. Using this principle to guide our research, we have shown continuities from the process of establishing autonomy in adolescence to educational and occupational attainment in young adulthood over and above effects of prior pathology and family SES. These relational processes should now be studied with samples drawn from different ethnic and socioeconomic groups to see if our findings generalize to these groups. Further research is also needed to delineate the specific process by which family interactions in adolescence become linked to educational and career achievements over time.

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