A Prospective Longitudinal Study of
Family from Generation to Generation

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Abstract

This study explores the effects of family system characteristics on the children's families when they grow up and become parents themselves. Family systems have profound effects for individual family members. The study addresses the question of whether or not these effects continue into the next generation by influencing the families created by adult children. Also evaluated is the extent to which parental intentions to make specific changes can be successful. Families in two generations participated in home interviews during the midlife/adolescent family life cycle stage. During home interviews at both waves, family members completed a questionnaire describing their family. They then discussed differences of opinion about the family and jointly created a projective 'picture' of their family. Both family members' reports and coded measures from the family interaction process supported a continuity between family of origin characteristics and the next generation's families. Evidence was also found for the ability of both mothers and fathers to purposely change particular family characteristics, such as connection, individuation, or conflict, in their second generation families. These results support the usefulness of exploring connections between families of origin and families of procreation. They also suggest that helping parents focus on particular characteristics they wish to change from their families of origin may enhance their success in making those changes.

Key words: family relationships, intergenerational issues and relationships, adolescents, adult development

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Family is an near universal experience; the family creates a primary reality for children and adolescents as they absorb their culture (Clark-Stewart & Dunn, 2006). The models, thought patterns, expectations and meanings absorbed in the family pervade the rest of life, both through the filtering of perceptions and through expectations of what is and what can be (Litz, 1992). This study explores the continuities between family system characteristics of children's families and the families they create when they grow up and become parents themselves. We also look at agency, the ability of parents to intentionally improve on what they knew as children – the ability to create more connected, more individuated and/or less conflictual families when they themselves become parents.

Intergenerational Family Studies

Most of the research on family influence across generations has focused on the marital or parent-child dyads from either a social learning or attachment theory perspective (Putallaz, Costanzo, Grimes, & Sherman, 1998; Widom & Wilson, 2015). A primary focus has been on parental maltreatment as a precursor of antisocial behavior (Conger, Schofield, & Neppl, 2012) and the moderating influence of nurturing relationships (Conger, Schofield, Neppl, & Merrick, 2013; Herrenkohl, Kilka, Brown, Herrenkohl, & Leet, 2013; Schofield, Lee, & Merrick, 2013). Marital quality over time has also been a major focus (Gilford & Bengtson, 1979; Gottman & Notarious, 2000). Another interest has been family influence on wellbeing. Short term family effects have been observed on wellbeing in adolescence (L. G. Bell & Bell, 1982; Belsky, Lerner, &

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Spanier, 1984; H. D. Grotevant, 1997; Powers, Hauser, Schwartz, Noam, & Jacobson, 1983) and in young adulthood (Aquilino, 1997; White, Speisman, & Costos, 1983). Longer-term effects on wellbeing have been found by Roberts and Bengtson (1993), Rossi and Rossi (2000), L. G. Bell and Bell (2005, 2012), and L. G. Bell (2015). L. G. Bell & Bell (2005) found that the effects of parental resources (education and ego development) on the children's midlife wellbeing are fully mediated by the family system. Amato and Sobolewski (2001), reviewing the long-term effects of divorce and marital discord on adult children's wellbeing, found that parent-child relationships were an important mediator.

Prospective longitudinal studies allow an increased understanding of the transmission of marital and family patterns across generations (Booth & Edwards, 1989; Chen & Kaplan, 2001). Chen and Kaplan (2001) provide a model of a prospective longitudinal study in which subjects were interviewed during three lifecycle stages, early adolescence, early adulthood, and middle adulthood. They found that interpersonal relations, social participation, and role-specific modeling explained intergenerational continuity of constructive parenting. Using a prospective longitudinal design which included direct observation of parenting behaviors and child aggressiveness, Conger et al. (2003) found intergenerational continuities in angry and aggressive behaviors across three generations. There is also an expressed preference for studying family patterns across generations of the family evaluated at the same life cycle stage (Conger, Belsky, & Capaldi, 2009), although these studies have been rare. Kovan et al. (2009) observed two generations in a prospective longitudinal study of early parenting and found evidence for parenting quality congruency across two

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generations. Averaging family member reports in each generation to create a family system measure of the family environment, Rothenberg et al. (2015) found continuity of family conflict over two generations.

Agency

Social cognitive theory proposes that behavior, while partially determined by situational influences, is also partially determined by human agency. People are “self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting, and self-regulating, not just reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by external events (Bandura, 1999, p. 154).” Human agency is linked to personal self-efficacy, one’s sense of competence to effect outcomes through one’s behavior (Bandura, 1997). Parenting self-efficacy is an individual’s appraisal of their competence as a parent. It is “a dynamic and emerging process that is modified by changing task and situational demands as well as by changing individual factors (Sevigny & Loutzenhiser, 2009, p.179).” Among other situational factors, parental, marital, family and child characteristic all effect parental self-efficacy, and parental self-efficacy has been shown to effect child development from infancy through adolescence (Jones & Prinz, 2005). The focus here is on parental agency and the family system. Can parents succeed when they intentionally set out to create a family environment different from that in which they grew up?

Systemic Model

The measures used here to evaluate the family system are connection, individuation, and conflict. Connection processes focus on affection and a supportive family climate, nurturing trust and self esteem. It corresponds to the attachment concept of safe haven. Individuation focuses on respect and clear interpersonal boundaries

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within the family, nurturing personal autonomy and self differentiation. It corresponds to the attachment concept of secure base (L. G. Bell & Bell, 2005).

Connection. Children, like adults, have a fundamental need to be cherished and nurtured (Bakan, 1966; McAdams, 1989). The basis for this need is an attachment circuit in the brains of all mammals; in humans, the attachment circuit motivates the desire for physical contact and emotional support (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The complementary process of caregiving is motivated by a separate brain circuit active in the parent (D. C. Bell, 2001; Panksepp, 1998). The parent's caregiving complements the child's attachment; this creates a connection relationship based on warmth and the child's active depending on the parent (Doi, 1981; Stern, 1985). Such dependency is called *amae* in Japanese, a word which is difficult to translate into English where "depending" often carries a negative connotation. The model for *amae* is the baby at the breast.

Children who receive caregiving from parents that is empathic and responsive to their needs develop internal working models that enable them to be open and secure in adolescent and adult relationships (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999; George & Solomon, 1999; Heard & Lake, 1997). With security and support comes an optimism toward life (Berman & Sperling, 1994). Higher levels of parental support (caring, closeness, affection) lead to higher self esteem, more social competence, and better psychological adjustment.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Individuation. Over much of the child's early years, the parent is focused on meeting the child's attachment needs. However, just as people have a need to be

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cherished and nurtured, they also have a need to be autonomous and effective (Erikson, 1963). As toddlers begin to be capable of independent action, most parents partially refocus their caregiving actions on the child's needs for autonomy and effectiveness (Brazelton & Cramer, 1990; Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975). Parental caregiving complementing the child's self-efficacy is referred to as an individuation relationship.

Individuation is a prominent developmental process in adolescence and young adulthood (Grotevant & Cooper, 1998; McGoldrick, Carter, & Garcia-Preto, 2010). To the extent that parents promote a family system with clear interpersonal boundaries, where members are encouraged to think for themselves, speak for themselves, and accept others' differences, children develop their capacity for autonomous action and learn how to direct their efforts effectively toward mastering the environment (Bowen, 1978; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Even the experience of conflict, in the right context, can be positive, assisting in identity formation, the development of conflict resolution skills, and assertive behaviors (Holmbeck, 1996). Individuation increases as the child's assertion of ideas and feelings is met by validation and acknowledgement by the parent(s) and as family members are comfortable with individuality and with differences between them (D. C. Bell & Bell, 1983; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). Clear interpersonal boundaries support a differentiated self and personal autonomy (Karpel, 1976; Stierlin, 1976). If an appropriate parent-child boundary is "dissolved" (Fullinwider-Bush & Jacobvitz, 1993) or if the child is "triangled" into the parental sub-system to stabilize or resolve tension in the marriage (L. G. Bell, Bell, & Nakata, 2001), her own development may be delayed or inhibited. To the extent

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that a family has clear interpersonal boundaries and self efficacy needs are recognized, family members will be encouraged to think for themselves, speak for themselves, and accept others' differences. Children will develop a differentiated self and a capacity for autonomous action, learning how to direct their efforts effectively toward mastering the environment, supporting their sense of psychological wellbeing (Bohlander, 1999; Tuason & Friedlander, 2000).

Researchers and theorists support the importance of connection, individuation, and related concepts for understanding the family-individual interface (Benson & Deal, 1995). While connection and individuation are often empirically related, they are viewed here as separate and complementary processes (D. C. Bell & Bell, 1983; Bengtson & Grotevant, 1999; Grotevant & Cooper, 1998; İmamoğlu, 2004). This view is congruent with the attachment idea that the experiences of safe haven and secure base are mutually supportive (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Adolescents develop both individuation and connection with respect to their parents, with well-functioning young people reporting a close connection with parents while at the same time demonstrating high levels of autonomy and individuation (Apter, 1990; Cooper, 1999; Grotevant & Cooper, 1998; Hill & Holmbeck, 1986).

Contributions of the Current Study

This prospective longitudinal study makes a contribution by focusing on two generations of families at the midlife/adolescent life cycle stage. At issue is the extent to which the childhood family, the family of origin (FoO), influences the family in which the adult child is a parent, the family of procreation (FoP). That is, to what extent does the family one grows up in influence or shape the family one creates as a parent? Also, to

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what extent is one able to intentionally change specific family dynamics like connection, individuation, and conflict? Are parents able to improve on what they experienced as children?

In each generation whole families were interviewed in their homes at the midlife/adolescent family life cycle stage. Family interaction process was recorded. The research presented here includes family system measures taken from the coding of the family interaction process as well as the family members' descriptions of the family on a questionnaire.

Hypotheses

- 1) There will be a continuity between parents' families of origin characteristics and those of their families of procreation in the areas of connection, individuation, and conflict.
- 2) Parents' intent to change, to create something different from their family of origin system, will lead to a difference in the desired direction.

METHOD

This study explores the effects of family characteristics on the children's families when they grow up. Families in both generations participated in home interviews during the midlife/adolescent family life cycle stage. Home interviews were held in the mid 1970s with 99 U.S. families with adolescents; an equivalent interview was conducted 24-35 years later with 91 families of the adult children when they had adolescents. During home interviews family members completed a questionnaire describing their family. They then discussed differences of opinion about the family and jointly created a

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projective 'picture' of their family. Family system characteristics were coded from taped family discussions by trained coders using global scales. The questionnaire and the coding were used to evaluate the continuity between the family of origin (FoO) and the family of procreation (FoP). As part of the Wave 2 family interview, parents listed ways in which they tried to be similar to and different from their FoO in creating their FoP; each also filled out a retrospective questionnaire describing their FoO when they were an adolescent. This retrospective questionnaire allowed us some information about the early family experiences of the mate who had not been interviewed as an adolescent with their FoO.

Sample

Wave 1 Sample (1975-76). Structured home interviews were conducted with 99 families at the midlife/adolescent family life cycle stage. The relationships between family functioning and adolescent development was a primary focus of the original study. This was a white, middle-class, non-clinical sample (L. G. Bell & Bell, 2005). Subjects were recruited through one of three high schools in one suburban district. A homogeneous sample was chosen in order to focus more effectively on the effects of the family system, as revealed in the family's interaction process, in a small sample. For the most part, the parents at Wave 1 were born during the Depression and married after World War II. About a fourth of the mothers and fathers had at least one parent who was an immigrant from Europe. The mean age for fathers was 44 (SD 3.8); for mothers, 42 (SD 4.1). They had been married at least 16 years and had two or three children, at least one of which was an adolescent daughter. Because of this focus on an adolescent daughter, there are more daughters (future mothers) than sons (future fathers) at Wave

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1. Thirty-six percent of the fathers had graduated college; an additional 54% had completed high school. For the mothers, 21% were college graduates; an additional 77% had completed high school.

Wave 2 Sample (1999 – 2009). Telephone interviews (1998-2002) were conducted with former Wave 1 adolescents; these interviews are not a part of this study, but set the stage for the FoP interviews. Telephone interviews were completed with 187 then midlife adults, former Wave 1 adolescents. We located 221 former adolescents from 82 of the 99 original families. The former adolescents were located through high school alumni directories and through their parents (quite a few of the parents still lived in the same house). Ninety-seven per cent of the women and 92% of the men agreed to be interviewed by phone. The average age for men was 38 (SD 2.6); for women, 33 (SD 2.8). All of the subjects were high school graduates. Seventy percent of the men and 65% of the women were college graduates; 20% of the men and 27% of the women had postgraduate degrees. At the end of the telephone interview, if the interviewee had children, they were asked if they would be willing to participate in a home interview with their family like the one they had participated in as an adolescent with their FoO. Seventy-eight percent agreed and 88 families were interviewed with their families during the midlife/adolescent family life cycle stage. Home interviews were spread over 10 years in order to be sure there was at least one adolescent in the family at the time of the interview. There were 68 families where the mother was the adolescent at Wave 1 and 20 where the father was the adolescent.

Home Interview

The home interview with all family members included an informed consent, questionnaires, a family revealed difference task (Strodtbeck, 1951) and a family projective exercise, the Family Paper Sculpture (L. G. Bell, 1986; L. G. Bell et al., 2004; L. G. Bell, Ericksen, Cornwell, & Bell, 1991; Wedemeyer & Grotevant, 1982). The revealed difference task was based on family members' individual answers to selected items from the Moos Family Environment Scale (Rudolf H Moos, 1974, 1990). Items on which family members disagreed were selected for discussion, and the family was asked to discuss these items and try to reach agreement. The same coalitions were used with each family, e.g. Mom against all, Dad against all, Mom and Dad vs. kids, Mom and oldest vs. Dad and youngest, etc. The Family Paper Sculpture involved family members working together to create a 'picture' of their family using varied colored disks for persons, red and black lines to represent similarity and difference between individuals, and blue loops for boundary markers. Family interactions during both exercises were audio-taped at Wave 1 and videotaped at Wave 2. They were then coded for family system variables, using a global coding scheme, by coders trained in family systems.

Insider and Outsider Perspectives

This study includes both family member (insider) and professional (outsider) measures. There is a true-false instrument completed by family members describing various aspects of their family system, cohesiveness, expressing feelings, conflict, independence, etc. (Rudolf H Moos, 1974). This instrument was also given retrospectively; near the end of the Wave 2 interview, both parents described their FoO during their own adolescence. This allowed us to access information about the FoO of the mate whose family was not interviewed at Wave 1.

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Family interaction process was coded on global scales by coders trained in family systems (GCS: L. G. Bell, Cornwell, & Bell, 1983). While self report data by a family member can provide important information about individual experiences of the family, many concepts of interest to family researchers are concepts that family members do not know and which they cannot directly express. For such concepts outsider approaches to study of the family may provide a perspective on family structure and process which is unavailable to the family members. Outsider approaches may also allow more objective measurement because they side-step social desirability. If the respondent does not know the researcher's concept behind an exercise, the respondent's social desirability associated with the concept will not be activated. Thus potential bias is reduced.

Insider report: Family Environment Scale (FES, Rudolf H Moos, 1974). Seven of the 10 scales of the FES were used to measure aspects of the family's internal environment. Because of time constraints seven scales were selected for the home interview; scales considered less value laden were included. The FES has been found to have a good stability over time (Rudolph H. Moos, 1991; Rudolph H. Moos, Finney, & Cronkite, 1990; Rudolf H. Moos & Moos, 2002). Each FES scale had nine items rated "True" or "False." The score for each scale was the proportion of items answered in the direction of the name of the scale (ranging from 0 to 1). Thus a score of .81 for cohesion indicates that the participant answered 81% of the items to indicate cohesion. The scales were *cohesion*, the degree of commitment, help, and support family members provide for one another; *organization*, the degree of importance of clear organization and structure in planning family activities and responsibilities;

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independence, the extent to which family members are assertive, are self-sufficient, and make their own decisions; *expressiveness*, the extent to which family members are encouraged to express their feelings directly; *achievement orientation*, how much activities (such as school and work) are cast into an achievement-focused or competitive framework; *control*, how much set rules and procedures are used to run family life; and *conflict*, the amount of openly expressed anger and conflict among family members. The average score on each item (average of all family members 9 years or older) was taken as the family's score.

Table 1 about here

Outsider report: Global coding. Family system variables were coded from the taped family interactions using the Global Coding Scheme (GCS: L. G. Bell et al., 1983). The GCS items were derived from the Beavers-Timberlawn Family Evaluation Scale (Lewis, Beavers, Gossett, & Phillips, 1976) and the Family Behavioral Snapshot (Meyerstein, 1979). The items of the GCS included measures such as family mood, warmth, boundaries, comfort with disagreement, problem-solving ability, and communication. All interaction process variables in the GCS were measured at the interval level. Thirty-one items from the GCS measuring family climate and interaction were reduced by theory, factor analysis, and reliability to nine scales. These scales were then tested for both internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) and inter-coder reliability (Pearson correlations). Alpha reliabilities ranged from .68 (clear interpersonal boundaries) to .92 (warmth and support), while inter-coder reliabilities ranged from .44 (depression) to .75 (overt conflict).

The 9 emergent scales were then entered into a second-order principal component analysis for the second step of data reduction. Two components emerged: connection (warmth and support, depression [-], overt conflict [-], and humor) and individuation (clear interpersonal boundaries, comfort with differences and disagreements, problem solving efficiency, and covert conflict [-]). Alpha reliabilities were .81 for both connection and individuation. Inter-coder reliabilities were .72 for connection and .69 for individuation. An overall measure of marital functioning weighted equally on both connection and individuation. (L. G. Bell & Bell, 2005). GCS items and scales are given in Table 1. For this study, the conflict variables were omitted from the connection and individuation measures and treated as a separate variable. This is because when parents were asked to say how they wanted their families to be different from their families of origin, conflict was an often mentioned independent theme. Thus a conflict measure was created by combining the overt and covert conflict scales.

Intent to be different. Parents were asked to list up to four ways in which they tried to be similar to their parents. They then answered the question “How important is it for you to be similar to your parents?” which they answered on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from ‘not important’ to ‘very important.’ They then did the same for ways they wanted to be different from their parents. Three major categories emerged: connection (affection, caring), individuation (respect for individuality, interpersonal boundaries), and conflict. Scores of 1 or 0 for each of the three categories were multiplied by the individual’s coding on the Likert scales (importance of being different minus importance of being similar). Examples of statements coded for connection:

- More loving and honest

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- Be more caring to my children
- More involved in the things that they do
- Always tell each child I love them
- Show affection on a daily basis
- Be more physically affectionate

Examples of statements coded for individuation:

- Children can voice their opinions to adults
- Open communication between all of us
- Let kids make own decision more
- Encourage my kids to be more independent
- I try to allow each one to be who they are
- Honor individuality

Examples of statements coded for conflict:

- Don't fight and not talk
- I want them to see less conflict and anger
- No hitting
- Manage anger; not have an insane temper like my father
- No spanking
- Not so quick to anger

Connection items were mentioned by 58% of the mothers and 64% of the fathers, individuation by 36% of the mothers and 31% of the fathers, and conflict by 13% of the mothers and 33% of the fathers.

RESULTS

All scales were centered and standardized. Analyses were by regression, regressing Wave 2 onto Wave 1 variables, comparing for gender where possible. Since some parents at Wave 2 were siblings of a parent from another Wave 2 family, all regressions were done with Wave 2 families nested within Wave 1 families.

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Continuity between the family of origin(FoO) and the family of procreation (FoP).

Please see results in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 prospective GCS results are data from the Wave 2 parents who participated in the Wave 1 family interviews as adolescents. In general, a healthier FoO was associated with a healthier FoP. For both mothers and fathers, individuation in the FoO predicted less conflict in the FoP as measured by the GCS. For mothers, conflict in the FoO was associated with less conflict in the FoP. For fathers connection in the FoO was associated with connection and individuation in the FoP; also more conflict in the FoO was associated with more individuation, i.e. more acceptance of individuality, in the FoP.

Table 3 prospective results are data from the Wave 2 parents who participated in the Wave 1 family interviews as adolescents; their Wave 1 FES family averages are compared with their Wave 2 FES family averages. Retrospective results in Table 3 are from all of the Wave 2 parents, using the retrospective questionnaire they completed at the end of their home interview describing their memory of their FoO when they were adolescents. The retrospective results allow us to include all of the Wave 2 parents in the analysis, not just the mate in each family who was an adolescent in a Wave 1 family. Retrospective views of the FoO were compared with the current Wave 2 (FoP) family FES averages. The results from both prospective and retrospective measures support continuity between the FoO and the FoP. Prospective and retrospective results are similar except for the FES measure of conflict for fathers. Prospective results suggest that conflict carries forward from the FoO to the FoP; retrospective measures suggest that conflict carries forward for mothers, but not for fathers. In both prospective

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and retrospective measures there's evidence that the family trait of expression of feelings carried forward for mothers.

Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here

Effects of intent to change (to create a FoP different from the FoO). Difference scores (Wave 2 – Wave 1) were regressed onto each importance-X-intent-to-be-different score. Primarily prospective data are reported as the retrospective data and the intent-to-be-different data were collected at the same time. In the GCS prospective data the expressed desire for more connection led to more individuation for the families of both mothers and fathers ($p < .01$), and to decreased conflict in the mothers' families ($p < .05$). Likewise, the intent toward less conflict led to more connection for the families of both mothers and fathers ($p < .001$). The intent to create more individuated families suggested more individuation ($p < .05$) and less conflict ($p < .10$) for fathers' families. The prospective FES results suggested that changes were stronger for the fathers' families. One interesting result from the retrospective data was that for both parents the desire to have less conflict was associated with less conflict in the FoP than was remembered in the FoO.

DISCUSSION

This study adds to our knowledge of long-term family influence by exploring the continuity between the family characteristics experienced by children and the families the children create when they grow up. The primary focus was on connection, individuation, and conflict in the family system. Families in both generations participated in home interviews during the midlife/adolescent family life cycle stage. Home interviews were held in the mid 1970s with 99 white middle-class families with adolescents; an

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equivalent interview was conducted 24-35 years later with 91 families of the adult children when they had adolescents. During home interviews family members completed a questionnaire describing their family, the Moos Family Environment Scale (FES). They then discussed differences of opinion about the family during a revealed difference task. At both waves, the average of family member scores was taken as the family score for each FES scale. Family interaction was coded on global scales (GCS). At Wave 2 parents also completed retrospective descriptions of their families of origin when they were adolescents, using the FES.

Both family member reports (FES) and global coding of the family interaction process (GCS) supported a continuity between the families of origin (FoO) and the next generation's families, the families of procreation (FoP). Parents who had experienced healthier families growing up were able to create healthier families when they became parents themselves. Evidence was also found for the ability of individuals to purposely improve family characteristics. More specifically, in response to the two hypotheses:

(1) There will be a continuity between parents' families of origin characteristics and those of their families of procreation in the areas of connection, individuation, and conflict. "Fathers' families" refer to families in which the father was an adolescent at Wave 1; "mothers' families" refer to families in which the mother was an adolescent at Wave 1.

This hypothesis was supported in both the families' self reports and in the global coding of interaction process. For both fathers' and mothers' families, individuation in the FoO led to less conflict in the FoP. Family reports also suggest that traits from the FoO were replicated in the FoP, traits such as independence, achievement orientation,

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conflict, organization and control. Both prospective and retrospective reports support continuity in the area of expressing feelings from the FoO to the FoP for mothers' families. For fathers' families, connection in the FoO was associated with connection and individuation in the FoP, and both FoO individuation and conflict were associated with more individuation in the FoP. These results support the hypothesis that an individual's family experience growing up (their FoO) influences the family they help create as adults (their FoP). Some changes may have been influenced by parental intent to create a FoP which would be healthier than their FoO.

(2) Intent to change, to create something different from one's own family of origin system, will lead to positive change in the desired area of focus.

Results support the ability of parents to affect change. Basically, when parents had the desire and intention to improve on their experience as children when creating their own families, they were successful. They created families with higher levels of connection and individuation, and less conflict.

The results as a whole argue for the importance of both mothers' and fathers' experiences as adolescents in their families of origin for the families they later create as parents. They also support the ability of parents to successfully achieve intentions for differences between their FoO and their FoP. There were many indirect effects, an expressed desire for more connection in the FoP led to more individuation. These kinds of results are consistent with the close relationship between connection and individuation, or, in attachment terms, between the safe haven and the secure base (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Often individuation nurtures connection and vice versa.

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In these data both mothers' and fathers' FoO influenced their FoP. Also, both mothers' and fathers' intentions to create a FoP that differed from their FoO were associated with a healthier FoP. The extent of fathers' influence in creating the family system was somewhat unexpected. In another study, based on parental self-report, the data suggested that both warm, sensitive parenting and parental discipline persists from the FoO to the FoP for women, but not for men (Thornberry, Freeman-Gallant, Lizotte, Krohn, & Smith, 2003). Also, Rothenberg et al. found that conflict in the FoP was correlated with that in the FoO for women, but not for men (2015).

Limitations. There are several limitations of this study. The original sample of families was recruited through high schools. It was a non-clinical sample in which the families of the least well-functioning adolescents were less likely to agree to a home interview. It might be argued that results would be different if they included more less well functioning families. The sample was quite homogeneous: white, intact, middle-class, suburban families whose children became relatively well educated. The homogeneous sample was an intentional design decision, in order to examine effects of family process without the confounds of family structure or race- and ethnicity-based cultural differences. This initial choice, while making the effects of the family system easier to discern in a small sample, at the same time limits generalizability to other populations. It may well be that the processes identified here are relevant to other families, but at this point the importance of ethnicity, class, or family structure cannot be analyzed. Also, there are many effects on the family system which were not considered in this study, such as the influence of children's characteristics on the creation of the family system.

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Strengths. There are several strengths in this research. One of the strengths is the prospective longitudinal design; two generations of families were interviewed during the same midlife/adolescence family life cycle stage. Another is that the whole family was included, and they were interviewed in their home. If the goal is to evaluate the family system, it is best to see the whole family. And, interviewing the family in their own home may make it more likely that they will feel “at home” and fall into typical relational patterns.

Another strength is that some family measures were based on behavioral data, and both family members’ reports (‘insider’ data) and coding of family interaction process (‘outsider’ data) were included. Taped family interaction process was coded by coders trained in family systems concepts. Observational data may allow more objective measures because the outside observer will have no motive for presenting the study families in a favorable light. An outside observer can also describe or code actual behavior based on a theory-based “map” not available to those whose behavior is being described (D. C. Bell & Bell, 1989; Hampton, Beavers, & Hulgus, 1989).

Therapeutic application. These results support efforts to help people understand the influence of their FoO on their FoP; to understand how childhood family patterns can inform current life and family processes. But also, that clear intentions to create something different or better in the current family can be successful. They can have more affection, more respect for individuality, less conflict and/or other changes if they set out to create something different. This is very hopeful. This study suggests that helping parents focus on particular characteristics they wish to change from their families of origin may enhance their success in making those changes. One could

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simply ask about intentions, or even give the FES or other questionnaire for the FoO, then later for the FoP. Then ask how they want(ed) the FoP to be different. One could even graph a comparison of questionnaire results from the FoO and the FoP to highlight existing and desired differences.

The results of this study reinforce the importance of the family environment throughout the life course of family members, suggesting that the family system as experienced during the midlife/adolescence family life cycle stage can have life-long implications including effecting the family systems created in the next generation. The results also support the ability of parents to make intentional changes from their families of origin to their families of procreation.

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Table 1 Global Coding Scheme Scales

WARMTH AND SUPPORT:

The family has an atmosphere of openness, comfortableness, optimism & warmth.

Family's mood is Very Cold ...to...Very Warm.

Family's mood is Very Rejecting...to...Very Supportive.

Quality of laughter was warm and responsive. (not at all...to...very much).

DEPRESSION:

The family has an atmosphere of depression, sadness, hopelessness.

Family's mood is Very Sad...to...Very Cheerful.

HUMOR:

Family's use of joking and humor (none/almost none...to...very often).

Amount of laughter (none or almost none...to...very often).

CLEAR INTERPERSONAL BOUNDARIES:

In general members take responsibility for their own actions, feeling, and thoughts, and do not take responsibility for the actions, feelings or thoughts of others.

The family has an atmosphere of overly close, stuck, over-concerned with each other (-).

Is the family's image of itself is congruent with reality? Do they see themselves as they really are? Very Congruent...to...Very Incongruent.

COMFORT WITH DIFFERENCES AND DISAGREEMENT:

Family seems comfortable with differences or disagreements.

Family seems to avoid differences and disagreements (-).

OVERT CONFLICT:

Overt conflict in the family is: Severe; impairs group functioning...to...Little or none.

COVERT CONFLICT:

Covert conflict in the family is: Severe, impairs group functioning...to...Little or none.

How openly were feelings expressed? Very directly or openly...to...very indirectly or covertly.

Rate family as to clarity (not intensity) of disclosure of feelings and thoughts. Very Vague & Unclear ... to ... Very Clear.

generation to generation

PROBLEM-SOLVING EFFICIENCY:

Family's efficiency at problem solving (being able to discuss items and arrive at a mutual decision on the right answers). Very Efficient...to...Very Inefficient.

FAMILY FUNCTIONING:

Very Non-Functional...to...Very Functional

Table 2 Regression of Family of Procreation on Family of Origin: Global Coding Scheme (prospective, outsider)¹

		Wave 2		
		Connection	Individuation	Conflict
MOTHERS				
Wave 1	Connection	.06	.09	-.14
	Individuation	.06	.11	-.64***
	Conflict	.10	-.07	-.46*
		Wave 2		
		Connection	Individuation	Conflict
FATHERS				
Wave 1	Connection	.77**	.51***	-.25
	Individuation	.07	.66**	-.51*
	Conflict	.49†	.52**	-.12

¹Entries are standardized regression coefficients. Ns = 68 mothers and 20 fathers.

p values: † p <.10, *<.05, **p<.01, *** p<.001

Table 3 Regression of Family of Procreation on Family of Origin: Family Environment Scale (insider)¹

	Prospective Measures	Retrospective Measures
Cohesion	.24 [†]	.16
Interaction w. Female	-.01	.10
ExpressFeel	.02	.13
Interaction w. Female	.25*	.16*
Independence	.19	.27**
Interaction w. Female	-.01	-.06
Conflict	.36*	.00
Interaction w. Female	-.12	.26*
AchievOrient	.19 [†]	.45***
Interaction w. Female	.09	-.06
Organization	.16 [†]	.31**
Interaction w. Female	-.08	-.14
Control	.15	.24**
Interaction w. Female	-.02	-.08

¹Entries are standardized regression coefficients. Ns = 68 mothers and 20 fathers, prospective; 88 mothers and 88 fathers, retrospective.

p values: [†] p < .10, * < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Figure 1. Family Connection and Individuation Processes