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African American Late Adolescents' Relationships With Parents: Developmental Transitions and Longitudinal Patterns

Judith G. Smetana, Aaron Metzger, and Nicole Campione-Barr

Five-year longitudinal patterns and the influence of developmental transitions on 76 middle-class African American late adolescents' ($M = 18.43$ years) relationships with parents were examined. Late adolescents were closer to mothers than to fathers. Controlling for age, late adolescent females who had left home reported less negative relationships with mothers than did adolescents living at home or in transition to leaving home, and late adolescent females living at home reported more intense conflicts with parents 3 years earlier than did boys living at home and girls living away. Earlier attachment led to more attached and supportive relationships with both parents and less negative interactions with mothers in late adolescence. Stable father presence also influenced more positive relationships with fathers.

There has been a great deal of theoretical and empirical interest in the quality of parent–child relationships during adolescence. Because the development of autonomy has been described as a central developmental task of adolescence (Holmbeck, 1996; Steinberg, 1990; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), researchers have been interested in whether this task is accomplished in the context of conflictive, disrupted relationships with parents, or whether adolescents' attachments to parents are maintained while their relationships are transformed. Most of the available research has focused on the impact of the normative transitions of early adolescence on adolescent–parent relationships. For instance, it has been asserted that adolescent–parent conflict may increase in early and middle adolescence, as families adapt to the social, cognitive, and biological changes of early adolescence.

Consistent with this assertion, a recent meta-analysis found that conflicts between adolescents and parents increase in intensity from early to middle adolescence and then level off (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998), whereas other research indicates that emotional closeness declines. For instance, Feldman and Gehring (1988) found that 12th graders viewed their relationships with both mothers and fathers as less cohesive than did 9th graders, whereas Conger and Ge (1999) found that emotional closeness, assessed in terms of observed communication, warmth, responsiveness, and prosocial behavior, generally declined longitudinally over 2 years in families with 7th graders. Moreover, in both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses, Furman and Buhrmester (1992) reported that adolescents' perceptions of supportive relationships with parents decreased from late childhood (4th grade) to early and middle adolescence (7th and 10th grades). Finally, in his sample of American adolescents from Mexican, Filipino, European, and Chinese backgrounds, Fuligni (1998) found age-related increases in adolescent–parent conflict and declines in perceived cohesion with parents, although longitudinal analyses revealed slight variations among ethnic groups in the timing of when closeness with mothers declined.

However, relatively few studies have examined changes in adolescents' relationships with parents during late adolescence and the transition to young adulthood, where developmental factors may combine with the increasing heterogeneity in life choices to produce greater diversity in developmental pathways (Sherrod, Haggerty, & Featherman, 1993). Recently, there has been increased interest in late adolescence as an important period of change, transition, and preparation for emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2000) has asserted that although there is little demographic variation among American adolescents aged 12 to 17, with nearly all adolescents remaining unmarried and living at home with one or more parents, demographic diversity

Judith Smetana, Aaron Metzger, and Nicole Campione-Barr, Department of Clinical and Social Sciences in Psychology, University of Rochester.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Judith Smetana, Department of Clinical and Social Sciences in Psychology, Meliora Hall, RC 270266, University Rochester, Rochester, NY 14627. Electronic mail may be sent to smetana@psych.rochester.edu.

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abounds in late adolescence and young adulthood. Most adolescents leave home at ages 18 or 19, some to work and some to attend college, leading to varying educational, occupational, and psychosocial outcomes.

White, Speisman, and Costos (1983) have proposed that it is difficult to establish mature relationships with parents during late adolescence and young adulthood until a certain degree of individuation has been achieved. That is, late adolescents may be more likely to be alienated from their parents than are adolescents at any other developmental stage because the need for autonomy is greater than the need for dependence. Consistent with this assertion, research has shown that young adults who have the most frequent contact with parents, especially young adults who are living at home, are least close to their parents and have the poorest psychological adjustment (Dubas & Petersen, 1996; O'Connor, Allen, Bell, & Hauser, 1996). Indeed, Dubas and Petersen (1996) found that greater geographical distance was associated with higher quality family relations in their sample of young adults (averaging 22 years of age). Other research on transitions to adulthood has indicated that better adjustment following high school graduation was associated with improvements in parent–adolescent relationships, especially for adolescents attending residential colleges (Aseltine & Gore, 1993; Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980). Aseltine and Gore (1993) also found that students who have moved away to college have less parent–adolescent conflict and disagreements than do high school juniors and seniors, who still reside at home. Likewise, Furman and Buhrmester (1992) found that college students perceived less conflictive and more supportive relationships with parents, particularly in girls' ratings of their mothers, than did early and middle adolescents. Moving out of the parental home may have positive effects on adolescent adjustment and parent–adolescent relationships (Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996) because there is less opportunity for conflict over parental rules and expectations and greater opportunities for independent decision making.

However, research on transitions in family relationships during late adolescence has focused almost entirely on European American middle-class families and on adjustment to college (e.g., Adams, 2000; Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993). Although variations in the timing and nature of these transitions also have been examined recently in European families (Beyers & Goosens, 2003), studies of ethnic minority families in the United States have been noticeably absent. Although the African American middle class has expanded considerably in size (Billingsley, 1992), research has tended to focus on the developmental challenges for African American adolescents growing up in poverty and facing early childbearing (Brooks-Gunn, Guo, & Furstenberg, 1993). There has been little research on the effects of leaving home on family relationships in middle- and upper-class college-bound African American youth, although numerous commentators have called for more research examining normative developmental processes and developmental patterns in well-functioning African American families (Garcia Coll, Meyer, & Brillon, 1995).

Issues of autonomy and attachment have been described as critical developmental issues in the leaving home process during late adolescence (Hauser & Greene, 1991; Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993), and African American culture places high value on both. African Americans strongly emphasize family and family obligations, frequent interaction with relatives, geographical propinquity, and extended kin networks (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990; Hatchett & Jackson, 1993). Attachment and loyalty to parents and community are stressed (Cauce et al., 1996) and provide sources of strength, resilience, and protection (Winfield, 1995). Although these factors may make separation from parents difficult, African American childrearing also strongly emphasizes independence and self-reliance (Cauce et al., 1996). Indeed, a recent meta-analysis found a greater emphasis on individualism among African Americans than among European Americans (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Moreover, there is a deep cultural and historical belief in African American culture, documented since slavery, about the importance and efficacy of education (Billingsley, 1992). These values are particularly strong among middle- and upper-middle-class African American families, where educational attainment (including getting into the right colleges) has been described as almost an obsession (Graham, 1999). Thus, African American adolescents who leave home to attend college are fulfilling culturally prescribed expectations, but whether leaving home has positive effects on African American parent–adolescent relationships remains to be determined. The first aim of the present study was to examine the effects of leaving home on middle- and upper-class African American late adolescents' relationships with parents.

We examined differences in African American adolescents' perceptions of their relationships with parents as a function of developmental transitions in late adolescence. The sample for the present study

was drawn from the third wave of a 5-year longitudinal study that was initiated in a sample of middle- and upper-middle-class African American early adolescents. The sample at Time 3 included adolescents who were still living at home, either attending high school, working, or going to college, as well as a transitional group of adolescents who were in the process of leaving home for the first time to attend residential colleges, and a group of adolescents who had been away from home for at least 1 year and living semiautonomously (Goldscheider & DaVanzo, 1986), primarily attending residential colleges or, in a few cases, enrolled in the Armed Services. Semiautonomy, defined as living in a college setting or in military barracks, has been described as an intermediate step between leaving parents' homes and establishing an independent residence because these adolescents have some social, emotional, and physical autonomy from parents but are not yet fully, and particularly financially, independent (Goldscheider & DaVanzo, 1986). We examined differences in parent–adolescent relationships as a function of these three autonomy statuses.

Consistent with previous research, we expected that perceptions of negativity in relationships with parents would be lower among adolescents who have left home than among adolescents remaining at home. It has been hypothesized that conflict increases during periods of rapid developmental change (Collins, 1991), but this has been investigated primarily in terms of entry into adolescence. In the present study, we examined whether similar effects are found during late adolescence as well. We hypothesized that adolescent–parent relationships would be most negative among African American adolescents who were in transition to leaving home and least negative among semiautonomous adolescents, who already have left home. Mother–daughter relationships have been found to be more conflictive than other dyads, in African American (Smetana & Gaines, 1999) as well as in European American families (Montemayor, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Therefore, we hypothesized that girls, especially girls in transition out of the home, would view their relationships as more negative during late adolescence than would boys. We also hypothesized that semiautonomous African American adolescents, and particularly girls who have left home, would report having more supportive and close relationships with parents than would other adolescents.

Moreover, some studies have found that children, and especially girls, generally report greater emotional closeness with mothers than with fathers (Collins & Russell, 1991), and other research has found that late adolescents report more closeness with the same-sex parent (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). African American girls have been found to view their mothers as a central source of support and guidance during developmental transitions (Cauce et al., 1996). Although there appears to be agreement across studies that girls, including African American girls, report more emotional closeness to their mothers than to their fathers, it is unclear whether late adolescent boys differ in their emotional closeness to mothers and fathers. African American boys and their mothers have been described as having a special and close bond (Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 2000), but there have been few comparisons of African American adolescents' relationships with mothers and fathers, and more generally, African American adolescents' relationships with fathers have been understudied (Parke & Buriel, 1998). Thus, the second aim of the present study was to compare African American late adolescent boys' and girls' perceptions of supportive relationships and negative interactions with mothers and fathers. Consistent with the previous literature, we expected that late adolescent African American girls and boys would report closer and more supportive relationships with mothers than with fathers.

Longitudinal studies of transitions in late adolescence have found significant continuities between early and middle adolescent–parent relationships and the quality or nature of late adolescent transitions. For instance, Dubas and Petersen (1996) found that young adults who were least likely to leave home had poorer family relations in eighth grade, and males who lived in another part of the country during young adulthood had better family relations in middle adolescence than did either female middle adolescents or male or female adolescents who remained at home. The third aim of the present study was to examine whether adolescents who were living at home, in transition, or semiautonomous at Time 3 differed in the quality of parent–adolescent relationships, including conflict and attachment, in early and middle adolescence. The previous research led us to expect that with the effects of age controlled, adolescents who remained at home would report more adolescent–parent conflict at earlier periods than would adolescents who had left home. Because transitional adolescents differed from semiautonomous adolescents only in terms of the timing of their transitions—both were primarily leaving home to attend residential colleges—we did not expect to find differences between these two groups in the quality of their earlier relationships, with age controlled.

Finally, in the present study we examined the relative influence of adolescent–parent conflict and adolescents' perceptions of attachment in early and middle adolescence on African American late adolescents' perceptions of positive and negative aspects of their relationships with parents. Previous theorizing and research have described adolescent–parent conflict as a temporary perturbation leading to transformations in family relationships (Holmbeck, 1996; Smetana, 1996; Steinberg, 1990). In turn, this suggests that conflict may not be stable across adolescence and that conflict in early adolescence should not negatively influence the quality of African American late adolescents' relationships with parents. In contrast, although emotional closeness has been found to decline over the adolescent years, significant stability in emotional closeness over time has been observed (Conger & Ge, 1999). Therefore, we hypothesized that there would be considerable continuity in adolescents' perceptions of attachment to mothers and fathers across adolescence and that more positive relationships in early adolescence would predict closer and more supportive relationships in late adolescence.

To summarize, the present study examined the gender-differentiated effects of leaving home on middle- and upper-middle-class African American late adolescents' relationships with parents and the influence of earlier adolescent–parent relationships on the leaving-home transition. We compared the quality of African American boys' and girls' relationships with mothers and fathers and the influence of earlier conflict and attachment on late adolescents' perceptions of close, supportive, and negative interactions.

Method

Participants

The original sample at Time 1 consisted of 95 middle-class African American early adolescents (*M* age = 13.10 years, *SD* = 1.29), nearly evenly divided between boys and girls, and their parents (93 mothers and 57 fathers). Families were followed for 5 years, with the Time 2 assessment occurring 2 years after Time 1 and the Time 3 assessment occurring 3 years later (5 years after the initial assessment). Attrition between Time 1 and Time 2 was 10%, resulting in a Time 2 sample of 85 middle adolescents (*M* age = 15.05 years, *SD* = 1.28) and their parents (83 mothers and 52 fathers). Attrition over the 5 years of the study was 17%, resulting in a Time 3 sample of 76 adolescents (*M* age = 18.43 years, *SD* = 1.39, range = 16.08 to 20.83; 38 males and 38 females, 77 mothers and 44 fathers). The analyses reported here are based on 76 adolescents and their parents, for whom data were available at Time 3. (Included in the Time 3 sample were 5 families who did not participate at Time 2 but participated again at Time 3; we imputed mean values for Time 2 so as not to reduce further the sample size.)

In all participating families, both parents were Black and overwhelmingly (98% of mothers and 95% of fathers) African American, as described by self-reports, with the remaining parents claiming Caribbean, African, or Hispanic origin. Mothers and fathers were, on average, 40.49 and 44.71 years of age (*SD*s = 6.48 and 7.34, respectively) at Time 1. Participating mothers and fathers had, on average, 14.88 (*SD* = 2.27) and 14.46 (*SD* = 2.61) years of formal education. Marital status remained stable over the course of the study for 80% of the sample, with the remaining 20% experiencing change in marital status, primarily between Times 2 and 3. Families both dissolved and reformed, with two families experiencing the death of a spouse. The frequency of boys and girls living in stable versus changing family structures did not differ significantly. Approximately half of all families (51%, $n = 39$) were stably married families with two biological parents, 10% ($n = 7$) were stable stepparent families, and 20% ($n = 15$) were stable single-parent households (either divorced or never married).

At Time 1, income was assessed on a scale ranging from 1 (*less than $25,000/year*) to 7 (*more than $70,000/year*). Using this scale, 28% of the families earned between $25,000 and $40,000 per year, 32% earned between $40,000 and $70,000 per year, and 40% earned more than $70,000 per year. At Time 2 and Time 3, the scale was modified so that 7 = *more than $100,000/year*. Parent-reported family income was highly stable across time: from Time 1 to Time 2, $r(70) = .88$ (alpha was set at $p < .05$; thus, all results reported as significant are $p < .05$ or better), and from Time 1 to Time 3, $r(69) = .79$. At Time 3, 16% of the sample earned between $25,000 and $40,000 per year, 28% earned between $40,000 and $70,000 per year, and 55% earned more than $70,000 per year, with 30% reporting annual incomes of more than $100,000 per year. Nearly half (48% of mothers and 47% of fathers) held skilled, white-collar, technical, or professional jobs, as assessed by scores greater than 60 on the Socioeconomic Index (SEI; Entwisle & Astone, 1994), which ranges from 1 to 100. However, 28% of mothers and 40% of fathers worked in semiskilled, trade, or service jobs (as indicated by scores less than 40 on the SEI). Thus, the sample ranged from lower

middle to upper class. Parents' ages, income, and education did not differ according to adolescents' gender. The families resided in and around a midsize Eastern city.

At Time 3, 33% of the adolescents ($n = 25$) were still in high school (64% in 11th grade and 36% in 12th grade), 7% ($n = 5$) were working, 3% ($n = 2$) were serving in the Armed Forces, and 58% ($n = 45$) were going to college (1% in vocational school, 12% in community or 2-year colleges, and 45% in 4-year colleges). Only 2 adolescents who were over age 18 in the Time 3 sample did not graduate from high school. One completed 9th grade, one completed a GED, and both were employed. The proportion of adolescents in high school, working, or in 2- or 4-year colleges did not differ by gender. Nearly all (99%) reported being single, unmarried, and not cohabitating; one adolescent reported living with a partner, and one adolescent had given birth. The majority of adolescents (55%, $n = 40$) reported being financially dependent on parents, 39% ($n = 29$) reported that they were partially self-supported, and only 7% ($n = 5$) reported being totally self-supported. Adolescents' sources of support also did not differ by gender.

Analyses indicated that adolescents who did not participate at Time 3 did not differ significantly at Time 1 by gender or (parent-reported) current or past academic performance, as measured by GPA, from those who continued their participation. However, adolescents lost to attrition at Time 3 were significantly older at Time 1 ($M = 13.72$ years, $SD = 1.21$) than adolescents retained in the study ($M = 12.97$, $SD = 1.30$). Moreover, adolescents who continued their participation over the 5 years of the study did not differ from adolescents lost to attrition in terms of either mothers' or fathers' age, educational attainment, or family income at Time 1, but adolescents who were retained were more likely to come from two-parent biological families than were adolescents lost to attrition, $\chi^2(df = 1) = 10.63$.

Measures

Autonomy status. Adolescents completed a demographic questionnaire that assessed whether they had graduated from high school (and the year) and the last grade of school completed. They also indicated on checklists and more narratively whether they were working or were attending vocational school, a 2-year or community college, or a 4-year college or other, and whether they were living at home. Nearly all college students indicated which college they were attending. At Time 3, 46% of the sample ($n = 35$; 17 boys and 18 girls) were living at home, including 25 students still in high school and 10 students who were working or attending local colleges or vocational schools. Twenty-four percent of the sample ($n = 18$; 10 boys and 8 girls) were in transition to residential colleges in that they were within ± 3 months of moving away from home for the first time. Twenty-eight percent ($n = 21$; 10 boys and 11 girls) were semiautonomous, including students who had lived away from home at a residential college or in the Armed Services for at least 1 year. Only 2 adolescents were clearly living independently. To examine associations with other measures, these categories were treated as a scale ranging from 1 (*living at home*) to 4 (*autonomous*). Based on Dubas and Petersen (1996), we also coded geographical distance as 1 = living at home, 2 = living within 100 miles of home, and 3 = living at least 100 miles away from home. Adolescents also indicated whether they were dependent on parents (coded as 1), partially self-supported (coded as 2), or totally self-supporting (coded as 3).

Attachment to parents. At each assessment, adolescents completed the Trust and Communication subscales (18 items) of the Parent–Peer Attachment Inventory (PPAI; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), which assesses adolescents' closeness and attachment to parents. Responses were scored on Likert scales ranging from 1 (*almost never or never true*) to 5 (*almost always or always true*). Adolescents completed the questionnaire twice, once for mothers (or stepmothers) and once for fathers (or stepfathers). Ratings of trust and communication were highly correlated at each wave for both mothers and fathers, with *r*s ranging between .80 and .85. Given these high correlations, mean ratings of trust and communication were combined for each parent to obtain separate measures of adolescents' perceptions of attachment to mothers and fathers at each wave.

Adolescent–parent conflict. At Time 1 and Time 2, adolescent–parent conflict was assessed using the Issues Checklist (Prinz, Foster, Kent, & O'Leary, 1979; Robin & Foster, 1989). Adolescents, mothers, and fathers were each presented with 37 areas of day-to-day decision making (e.g., over curfew, clothing, homework). For each item, the respondent indicated whether the issue was discussed during the past 2 weeks, and if discussed, they rated the intensity of discussion on a scale ranging from 1 (*calm*) to 5 (*angry*).

Network of Relationship Inventory (NRI). At Time 3, adolescents separately rated the quality of their relationships with their mothers and fathers (or stepparents) on a measure derived from Furman and Buhrmester's (1985, 1992) NRI. Adolescents living in

stepparent families were instructed to rate the parents with whom they were living. The NRI assesses qualitative features of different relationships on 11 dimensions, each of which includes three items assessed on Likert scales ranging from 1 (*little or none*) to 5 (*the most*). Factor analyses of the items have revealed that the measure can be reduced to two broadband dimensions of interpersonal relationships (Adler & Furman, 1988): one assessing perceptions of positive social support and the other assessing perceptions of negative interactions. In the present study, adolescents rated perceptions of social support from each parent on 15 items assessing companionship, instrumental aid, intimacy, nurturance, and affection (αs = .90 and .94 for perceptions of mothers and fathers, respectively). Mean scores for the 15 items were obtained, with high scores indicating more supportive relationships. They also rated perceptions of negative interactions on 6 items assessing conflict and antagonism (αs = .94 and .96 for perceptions of mothers and fathers, respectively). Means for the 6 items were obtained, with higher scores indicating more negative interactions.

At Time 3, adolescents' ratings of attachment on the PPAI (*M*s = 3.69 and 3.49, *SD*s = .81 and .91 for mothers and fathers, respectively) and adolescents' ratings of supportive relationships on the NRI (*M*s = 3.23 and 2.67, *SD*s = .72 and .95 for mothers and fathers, respectively) were found to be highly correlated for both perceptions of mothers, $r(76) = .81$, and fathers, $r(71) = .82$. Accordingly, for each parent, the two measures were combined to obtain measures of adolescents' perceptions of close, supportive relationships with mothers and fathers.

Attrition Analyses

Adolescents who discontinued their participation in the study did not differ from adolescents who continued to participate in their ratings of conflict intensity and attachment to mothers and fathers at Time 1. Furthermore, there were no differences between mothers who were retained and mothers who were lost to attrition in their ratings of conflict with their adolescent at Time 1. However, as might be expected from the greater attrition among nonintact than intact families, attrited fathers reported more intense conflicts at Time 1 than did fathers who were retained over the course of the study (*M*s = 2.33 and 1.61, *SD*s = 1.01 and .53), $F(1, 56) = 10.60$.

Procedures

Families were initially recruited through African American churches, professional and social organizations, and word of mouth (see Smetana & Gaines, 1999, for more detail). Two African American interviewers visited families' homes; in a smaller number of cases and depending on their preference, families visited the university (there were no significant differences between families participating at home or in the lab). As part of a larger study, parents were mailed a packet of questionnaires, including a demographic questionnaire, to complete before the home visit. Adolescents completed the PPAI (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) during the home visit, and all participants were administered the Issues Checklist at this time. Interviewers read all questionnaire instructions to the adolescents and were available to answer their questions. Parents received an honorarium for their participation (either cash or a gift certificate), and adolescents received two movie tickets.

Families were contacted 2 years after their first interviews and invited to participate again. At Time 2, families were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (for parents), the Issues Checklist (for parents and adolescents), and the PPAI (for adolescents) before the home (or lab) visit. Completed questionnaires were collected during the home (or lab) visit, where other assessments that were part of the larger study were conducted. As at Time 1, parents and adolescents received honoraria for their participation.

Parents were contacted by phone again to solicit their participation at Time 3. In addition, at Time 3, all adolescents were contacted individually to invite them to participate. Because many adolescents were living away from home and several families had moved out of the area, adolescents and parents were mailed questionnaires with instructions for completion and a return envelope to mail them back. Because the Issues Checklist, which was used to assess adolescent–parent conflict at Time 1 and Time 2, focuses on everyday issues of disagreement and a substantial number of adolescents no longer lived at home, it was not considered appropriate for use at Time 3. Therefore, perceptions of negative interactions with parents were assessed using the NRI. Adolescents and parents both received honoraria for their participation.

Results

Preliminary and Descriptive Analyses

To examine the hypothesis that African American adolescents would report closer relationships with mothers than with fathers at Time 3, repeated-measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with

adolescent gender as the between-subjects variable and parent as the repeated measure were performed on the combined closeness and support variable and on negative interactions. As hypothesized, adolescents at Time 3 rated their relationships with their mothers as closer and more supportive than their relationships with their fathers (*M*s = 3.46 and 3.10, *SD*s = .73 and .90, respectively), $F(1, 70) = 10.00$. The Adolescent Gender × Sex of Parent interaction was not significant, nor were there significant effects in the analysis of negative interactions. However, because some adolescents lived in single-parent, mother-headed households, and because for some, family status changed over the course of the study, adolescents' perceptions of relationships with their fathers may have been influenced by whether fathers were physically present in their household. Therefore, the analyses were performed again, controlling for whether the father was stably present (in a married, biological or stepparent family). The main effect for parent gender remained significant, and the covariate effect was not.

Adolescents' perceptions of close, supportive relationships with mothers were moderately and negatively correlated with perceptions of negative interactions in those relationships, $r(76) = -.42$. Likewise, there was a moderate but significant and negative association between adolescents' ratings of close, supportive relationships and negative interactions with fathers, $r(71) = -.36$. These moderate associations indicate that negative interactions and closeness and support assessed distinct aspects of late adolescents' perceptions of their relationships with parents rather than opposite ends of a single dimension of positive versus negative relationships. There also were significant and positive correlations in adolescents' perceptions of the positive aspects of relationships with their mother and fathers, $r(72) = .24$, but not in their perceptions of negative interactions with mothers and fathers, $r(71) = .06$, *ns*.

Late Adolescents' Relationships With Parents as a Function of Autonomy Status

It is not surprising that adolescents' autonomy status was strongly associated with their age at Time 3, $r(76) = .70$, their geographical distance from their parents' home, $r(70) = .84$, and degree of financial independence, $r(74) = .46$, although both geographical distance, $r(70) = .56$, and financial independence, $r(74) = .53$, were less strongly associated with adolescents' age. However, adolescents' autonomy status at Time 3 did not differ by gender and was not significantly associated with parents' marital status or the stability of parents' marital status over time, annual family income, parents' educational attainment, or parents' occupational prestige, as scored on the SEI (Entwisle & Astone, 1994).

The first set of analyses tested the hypothesis that relationships with parents would be better among adolescents, particularly among girls, who had left home. Because the at-home group included adolescents who were living at home and still attending high school and adolescents who remained at home while working or attending college, we first performed *t* tests to determine whether these two groups differed in their ratings of closeness and support and negative interactions with mothers and fathers. The two at-home groups did not differ significantly for three of the four variables, but adolescents who were still in high school reported significantly more positive relationships with mothers than did adolescents who remained at home beyond high school (*M*s = 3.62 and 3.07, *SD*s = .72 and .56, respectively), $F(1, 33) = 4.67$. These differences became nonsignificant when age was controlled in the analysis.

Separate 3 (autonomy status: at home, transitional, semiautonomous) × 2 (adolescent gender) ANOVAs were performed on adolescents' ratings of closeness and support and negative interactions with mothers and fathers (the two autonomous adolescents were dropped from these analyses). Adolescents' age at Time 3 was used as a covariate in these analyses. With age controlled, girls were found to rate their relationships with their mothers more negatively than did boys (*M*s = 2.58 and 2.20, *SD*s = 1.07 and .70, respectively), $F(1, 65) = 6.87$, but these findings were qualified by a significant Autonomy Status × Gender interaction, $F(2, 65) = 5.34$, which is presented in Figure 1. Post hoc ANOVA

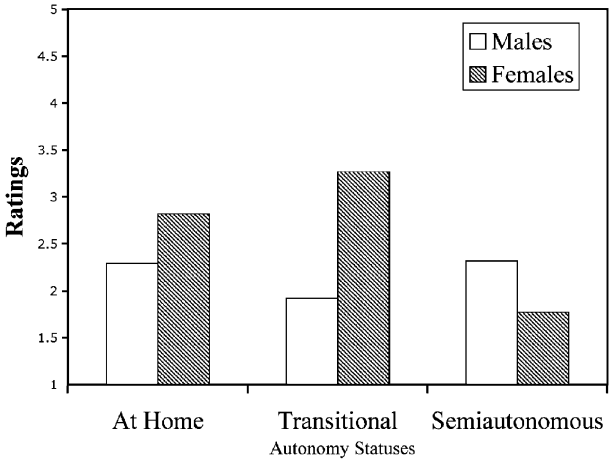

Figure 1. Negative interactions with mothers as a function of late adolescent autonomy status.

tests by gender, followed by Scheffé's tests, indicated that, as expected, girls living at home and transitional girls reported more negative relationships with mothers than did semiautonomous girls, $F(2, 34) = 7.26$. T tests by gender indicated that girls who were living at home and girls who were in transition out of the house both reported more negative relationships with mothers than did same-status boys. There were no significant main effects or interactions in the analysis of positive relationships with mothers or adolescents' perceptions of relationships with fathers.

Adolescent–Parent Relationships in Early Adolescence and Transitions to Autonomy

The next set of analyses examined whether adolescents' autonomy status at Time 3 predicted differences in adolescent–parent relationships at Time 1. Preliminary analyses revealed that adolescents who were still in high school or beyond high school and still living at home did not differ significantly on any of the dependent variables. As in the previous analyses, the two autonomous adolescents were dropped from these analyses, and separate 3 (autonomy status) × 2 (adolescent gender) ANOVAs with adolescent age as a covariate were performed on adolescents' Time 1 ratings of conflict intensity, attachment to mothers and fathers, and mothers' ratings of conflict intensity. Because of the smaller number of fathers participating at Time 1, the transitional and semiautonomous groups were collapsed to have sufficient *n*s for analyses, and a 2 (autonomy status) × 2 (adolescent gender) ANOVA was performed on fathers' ratings of conflict intensity. There were no significant effects in any of the analyses.

Adolescent–Parent Relationships in Middle Adolescence and Transitions to Autonomy

Time 3 Autonomy Status × Gender ANOVAs with adolescent age as a covariate also were performed on adolescents', mothers', and fathers' Time 2 ratings of conflict intensity (again, with the transitional and semiautonomous groups collapsed for fathers) and adolescents' ratings of attachment to mothers and fathers. There was a significant Gender × Autonomy Status interaction in adolescents' Time 2 ratings of conflict intensity, $F(2, 65) = 3.11$, which is depicted in Figure 2. With age controlled, boys who were transitional and semiautonomous at Time 3 reported more intense conflicts with parents at Time 2 than did boys who were living at home, $F(2, 32) = 9.22$. Moreover, girls who lived at home at Time 3 rated conflicts as more intense at Time 2 than did boys still living at home. There were no other significant main effects or interactions.

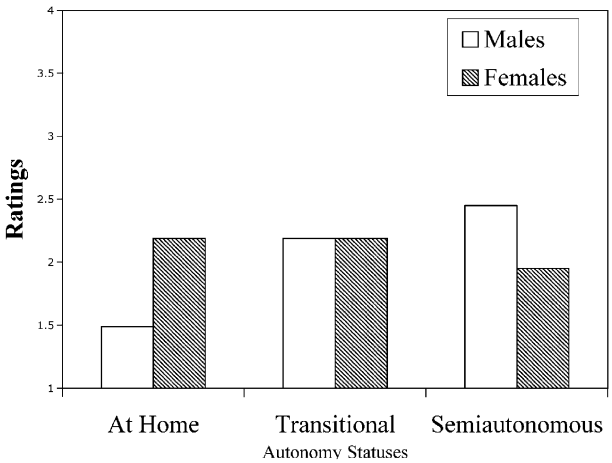

Figure 2. Conflict intensity at Time 2 as a function of late adolescent autonomy status.

Predicting Late Adolescents' Perceptions of Close and Supportive and Negative Interactions with Mothers and Fathers

Table 1 shows the correlations among adolescents' ratings of attachment to mothers; adolescents' and mothers' ratings of conflict intensity at Time 1 and Time 2; and adolescents' perceptions of support, attachment, and negative interactions with mothers at Time 3. Correlations for relationships with fathers are shown in Table 2. As can be seen, ratings of conflict intensity were moderately stable over time. It is interesting that parents' and adolescents' ratings of conflict intensity did not show consistent associations. In contrast, adolescents' ratings of attachment to both mothers and fathers were highly stable across the 5 years of the study.

The next set of analyses employed hierarchical regressions to predict adolescents' perceptions of positive and negative interactions with mothers and fathers at Time 3 from the earlier measures of relationships. Because attachment (but not supportive relationships) was assessed at all three waves, the influences of earlier relationships on attachment and supportive relationships at Time 3 were examined separately to determine whether similar patterns of relationships were obtained for the two outcome variables. In all analyses, adolescents' sex (coded as females = 1, males = −1) and autonomy status (as a continuous variable) were entered as a block in the first step of the analyses to control for their effects.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Dependent and Independent Measures for Relationships With Mothers

	M	*SD*	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Autonomy status	1.84	.86	.00	.10	– .29*	.18	– .04	– .05	.19	– .15	– .24*	– .05	.08
2. Adolescent gender	0.00	.50	1.00	.01	– .07	.00	– .02	.01	.09	.13	.21	.03	– .07
3. Father presence	0.57	.51		1.00	.01	– .03	– .02	.02	.01	– .15	.06	– .06	– .11
4. T1 attachment	3.96	.74			1.00	– .31**	– .01	.69***	– .15	– .07	– .16	.39**	.42***
5. T1 A conflict	1.88	.72				1.00	.09	– .14	.19	.08	.15	– .07	– .14
6. T1 M conflict	1.95	.72					1.00	.02	.04	.32**	.20	– .05	.03
7. T2 attachment	3.90	.68						1.00	– .13	– .03	– .33**	.52***	.56***
8. T2 A conflict	2.03	.76							1.00	.12	.10	– .09	– .04
9. T2 M conflict	1.75	.50								1.00	.12	– .10	– .04
10. T3 negative	2.39	.92									1.00	– .28*	– .51***
11. T3 support	3.22	.72										1.00	.81***
12. T3 attachment	3.69	.81											1.00

Note. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3; A = adolescent; M = mother.
*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$. ***$p<.001$.

Because having fathers stably present in the home might influence relationships with both mothers and fathers, we also included stable father presence (stable, two-parent biological and stepparent families vs. all else) in the first step. In the analyses examining adolescents' perceptions of relationships with mothers at Time 3, adolescents' and mothers' separate ratings of conflict intensity and adolescents' perceptions of attachment to mothers at Time 1 were entered in the second step. In the third step, the same variables as assessed at Time 2 were entered into the regression equation, providing indices of residual change. In the final step, the interaction terms for Attachment × Adolescent Sex for Time 1 were entered into the regression equations (because of significant multicolinearity we only included the interaction for Time 1). Similar analyses were performed to examine adolescents' perceptions of relationships with fathers, except that fathers' ratings were omitted from the analyses because of the small number of participating fathers at both times. Interaction effects were not significant in the analyses for fathers and, thus, are not discussed further. The results for relationships with mothers are shown in Table 3, and the results for fathers are shown in Table 4.

Positive relationships with mothers at Time 3. As predicted, neither ratings of conflict intensity (nor changes in conflict intensity) significantly influenced adolescents' perceptions of attachment or supportive relationships with mothers at Time 3. In the analysis of attachment, autonomy status entered the equation

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Dependent and Independent Measures for Relationships With Fathers

	M	*SD*	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Autonomy status	1.84	.86	.00	.10	– .25*	.18	.01	– .06	.19	– .09	.03	– .03	.06
2. Adolescent gender	0.00	.50	1.00	.01	.02	.00	.00	– .01	.09	.22	– .04	– .08	– .11
3. Father presence	0.57	.51		1.00	.13	– .03	– .27*	.07	.01	– .13	.00	.39**	.24*
4. T1 attachment	3.96	.74			1.00	– .35**	– .03	.62***	.04	.01	– .23	.51***	.37**
5. T1 A conflict	1.88	.72				1.00	– .01	.19	.19	.27	.22	– .14	– .15
6. T1 F conflict	1.95	.72					1.00	– .20	– .11	.32*	.06	– .21	– .23
7. T2 attachment	3.90	.68						1.00	– .07	– .03	– .22	.52***	.46***
8. T2 A conflict	2.03	.76							1.00	.43**	.02	– .01	– .18
9. T2 F conflict	1.75	.50								1.00	.20	– .09	– .19
10. T3 negative	2.39	.92									1.00	– .31**	– .39
11. T3 support	3.22	.72										1.00	.82***
12. T3 attachment	3.69	.81											1.00

Note. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3; A = adolescent; F = father.
*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$. ***$p<.001$.

Table 3
Regression Models of Adolescents' Perceptions of Relationships With Mothers At Time 3

	Attachment			Supportive			Negative interactions		
Predictors and steps	β	ΔF	ΔR^2	β	ΔF	ΔR^2	β	ΔF	ΔR^2
Demographics		0.64	.03		0.16	.01		2.96*	.11
Adolescents' sex	.02			.12			.18		
Autonomy status	.17			– .01			– .27*		
Father presence	– .10			– .02			.10		
Time 1 variables		6.14***	.21		4.43*	.16		2.91*	.10
A conflict intensity	– .08			– .00			.16		
M conflict intensity	.04			– .03			.20		
Attachment to mother	.13			.09			.10		
Time 2 variables		3.76*	.11		3.65*	.12		2.35	.08
A conflict intensity	– .04			– .01			.06		
M conflict intensity	– .02			– .06			– .00		
Attachment to mother	.46***			.48**			– .37*		
Interaction		2.68	.03		4.88*	.08		1.31	.01
Sex × T1 Attachment to Mother	– .17			– .23*			.12		
Model total R^2			.37*			.34			.30

Note. A = adolescent; M = mother; T1 = Time 1. βs are final betas.
*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$. ***$p<.001$.

significantly at Step 1 (β = .23), but its effect was reduced to nonsignificance when Time 1 variables were entered. Analyses of both attachment and support suggested that adolescents' perceptions of attachment to mothers at Time 2 mediated the effects of Time 1 attachment on Time 3 relationships. Thus, we employed Baron and Kenny's (1986) criteria to test for mediation. The regressions indicated that Time 1 attachment had a direct relationship with both Time 3 attachment and supportive interactions (βs = .47 and .43), Fs(3, 69) = 16.13 and 12.79, and when controlling for Time 1, Time 2 attachment was related to Time 3 attachment and support (βs = .47 and .49), Fs(3, 69) = 10.61 and 10.57. Furthermore, there was a direct relationship between Time 1 and Time 2 attachment, $r(76) = .69$, and adolescents' Time 1 ratings of attachment were reduced to nonsignificance when adolescents' Time 2 perceptions of attachment to mothers were entered in the regression equations (βs = .11 and .06 for attachment and sup-

Table 4
Regression Models of Adolescents' Perceptions of Relationships With Fathers At Time 3

	Attachment			Support			Negative interactions		
Predictor and steps	β	ΔF	ΔR^2	β	ΔF	ΔR^2	β	ΔF	ΔR^2
Demographics		1.46	.07		3.07*	.13		.21	.01
Adolescents' sex	– .09			– .05			– .11		
Autonomy status	.05			– .04			– .02		
Father presence	.15			.28**			.01		
Time 1 variables		4.54*	.12		8.69***	.19		2.75	.08
A conflict intensity	– .08			– .05			.19		
Attachment to father	.10			.19			– .06		
Time 2 variables		4.14*	.10		4.12*	.08		.45	.02
A conflict intensity	– .10			.06			– .05		
Attachment to father	.37*			.38**			– .16		
Model total R^2			.29			.40			.11

Note. A = adolescent. βs are for the final step.
*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$. ***$p<.001$.

port). Thus, the results meet Baron and Kenny's criteria for mediation. They demonstrate that adolescents' perceptions of attachment to mothers at Time 1 were fully mediated by the effects of adolescents' perceptions of Time 2 attachment to mothers on Time 3 attachment and supportive interactions.

In addition, the analysis of supportive interactions revealed a significant moderating effect of adolescents' sex on Time 1 perceptions of attachment (see Table 3). Significant interactions were interpreted by plotting the regression lines for the predicted high (+1 *SD*) versus low (− 1 *SD*) values of the moderator (Aiken & West, 1991), as depicted in Figure 3. The statistical significance of the regression slopes was then examined to determine whether each slope differed significantly from zero. Perceptions of supportive interactions with mothers increased significantly as Time 1 attachment increased, but only for boys.

Negative interactions with mothers at Time 3. As shown in Table 3, the regression indicated that adolescents' autonomy status had a unique influence on negative interactions with mothers; less autonomous adolescents reported more negative relationships with mothers at Time 3. Furthermore, adolescents who perceived their attachment to mothers as less positive at Time 2 (but not earlier) reported more negative interactions with mothers 3 years later. Neither adolescents' nor mothers' ratings of conflict intensity at earlier ages significantly influenced perceptions of negative interactions at Time 3. The interaction term was not significant.

Positive relationships with fathers at Time 3. As with mothers, the results indicated that adolescents' ratings of conflict intensity did not significantly influence late adolescents' perceptions of attachment or supportive relationships with their fathers (see Table 4). Adolescents who lived in stable, two-parent (father-present) households reported more supportive relationships with fathers at Time 3 than did adolescents experiencing a family status change or living in stable, single-parent homes, but father presence was not significant in the analysis of attachment. Moreover, as in the previous analyses, the results suggested that Time 2 attachment to fathers mediated the earlier effects of attachment. Again, we used Baron and Kenny's (1986) criteria to test for mediation in the analyses of both Time 3 attachment and supportive interactions with fathers. The regressions indicated that Time 1 attachment directly influenced Time 3 attachment and support (βs = .32 and .45), *F*s(2, 61) = 6.23 and 14.61. Furthermore, when controlling for Time 1 attachment, Time 2 attachment was related to Time 3 attachment and support (βs = .37 and .38), *F*s(2, 59) = 6.38 and 8.24. Time 1 and Time 2 attachment had a direct relationship, *r*(74) = .62, and adolescents' Time 1 ratings of attachment were reduced to nonsignificance when adolescents' Time 2 perceptions of attachment to fathers were entered in the regression equations (βs = .10 and .19 for attachment and support). Thus, the results indicated that the influence of early adolescents' perceptions of attachment to fathers on their Time 3 perceptions of attachment and supportive interactions with fathers were fully mediated by attachment to fathers at Time 2.

Negative interactions with fathers at Time 3. None of the variables was significant in predicting adolescents' perceptions of negative interactions with fathers at Time 3.

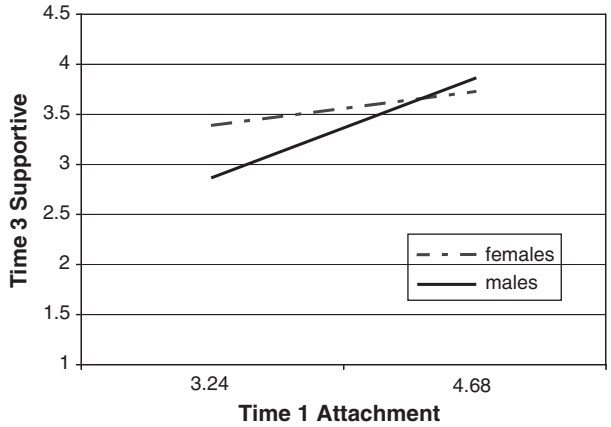

Figure 3. Gender × Time 1 Attachment interaction for supportive interactions.

Discussion

We examined longitudinal patterns as well as the influence of developmental transitions on middle-class African American late adolescents' perceptions of close, supportive relationships and negative interactions with parents. The results of the present study indicated that there was significant stability in African American adolescents' perceptions of emotional closeness to both mothers and fathers across the 5 years of the study but that late adolescents' perceptions of close, supportive relationships and negative interactions with parents also differed significantly as a function of the developmental transitions of late adolescence.

The present results are consistent with previous research on primarily European American samples (Aseltine & Gore, 1993; Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996) in indicating that with the effects of age controlled,

African American late adolescent girls who had left home reported less negative interactions with mothers than did girls residing at home and girls who were in transition to leaving home for college. Moreover, African American girls who were living at home or in transition out of the house reported more negative relationships with mothers than did same-status boys. The previous theorizing and research, which has ascribed increases in conflict in early adolescence to the violations of expectancies that occur during periods of rapid developmental change (Collins, 1991), led us to hypothesize that transitional girls might report more negative and conflictive relationships than other girls, but this hypothesis was not confirmed in the present study. Although some research has been conducted on how the process of leaving home is experienced by adolescents (Moore, 1987), more on the meaning of this transition in different cultural contexts is needed.

A great deal of research has indicated that mother–daughter dyads are the most conflictive of all parent–child dyads during early and middle adolescence (Montemayor, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), and both parents and adolescents report that early and middle adolescent African American girls have more conflict with parents than do boys (Smetana, Daddis, & Chuang, 2003; Smetana & Gaines, 1999). Our findings suggest that these sex differences persist into late adolescence and are consistent with Cauce et al.'s (1996) characterization of African American girls' relationships with mothers as being both emotionally close and conflictive.

Moreover, other research suggests that emotional closeness, which declines over the course of adolescence (Fuligni, 1998; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), increases when adolescents leave home to attend residential colleges (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Thus, negativity may decline and emotional closeness may increase as girls move out of their parents' home because, as Graber and Brooks-Gunn (1996) have asserted, there is less opportunity for conflict over parental rules and expectations and more opportunity for independent decision making. This may have been especially salient for the African American girls in our sample because research has indicated that African American adolescent boys have more freedom, including being allowed to be home alone more, having fewer rules, and having a later curfew, than do African American adolescent girls (Bulcroft, Carmody, & Bulcroft, 1996). Indeed, comparisons with adolescents of other ethnicities indicate that African American boys are given more independence and African American girls are permitted less freedom than their Hispanic and Anglo counterparts (Bulcroft et al., 1996). Thus, the loosening of restrictions that accompanies leaving home for African American girls may lead to a rapprochement in their relationships with mothers. Although our data are longitudinal, our analyses of late adolescence were based on a cross-sectional examination of group differences; thus, longitudinal research that follows African American late adolescents as they make these transitions would be needed to confirm this developmental hypothesis. Moreover, although age was controlled in the analyses and we determined that the autonomy groups did not differ on a range of sociodemographic background variables, it is possible that differences between the groups were due to other, unmeasured variables.

Based on previous research, which has indicated that geographical distance from home in late adolescence predicts the quality of earlier relationships with parents (Dubas & Petersen, 1996), we also examined whether differences in late adolescents' autonomy status predicted differences in earlier adolescent–parent relationships. We found that with the effects of age controlled, semiautonomous and transitional boys reported more intense conflicts in middle adolescence than did boys remaining at home. These results were directly contrary to Dubas and Petersen (1996), who found that males who moved farthest away from parents in young adulthood had better family relations during middle adolescence than did other young adults. Geographical distance was highly correlated with autonomy status in our sample, and analyses also indicated that boys living away from home (both less than and greater than 100 miles) reported more intense conflicts in middle adolescence than did boys who remained at home. Thus, our results suggest that the quality of African American boys' earlier relationships with parents may influence their decisions to leave home in late adolescence.

The results indicated moderate stability in different informants' ratings of conflict intensity between early and middle adolescence and few associations between adolescents' and parents' ratings. This is consistent with other research suggesting that disagreements have different meanings for adolescents and their parents (Noller & Callan, 1996; Smetana, 1989). We also found that ratings of conflict intensity at earlier developmental periods did not significantly predict negative interactions (conflict and antagonism) in late adolescence. Because we assessed the intensity of everyday disagreements in early and middle adolescence and used a more global measure of negativity in interactions at Time

3, the lack of significant effects may have been due to differences in measurement over time; this possibility needs to be examined in future research. More research is needed to examine the developmental trajectory of conflict from early to late adolescence and changes in the types of issues that cause conflict.

In contrast to conflict, African American adolescents' ratings of attachment to mothers and fathers were highly stable over time. The regression analyses indicated that attachment to mothers and fathers in middle adolescence fully mediated the effects of early adolescent attachment on late adolescents' perceptions of attachment and supportive relationships with both mothers and fathers. That mediation was obtained for both measures of close relationships provides strong support for these findings. In addition, adolescents who reported weaker attachment to mothers at Time 2 also reported more negative interactions with mothers 3 years later. Differences in earlier attachment to fathers was not found to influence African American adolescents' later perceptions of negative interactions with fathers. Although attachment and support were highly correlated in the present study, fathers' stable presence in the home significantly influenced adolescents' perceptions of supportive interactions with fathers, but not their attachment. Further research is needed to examine this differential effect.

However, we also found that adolescent gender moderated the effects of Time 1 attachment on later supportive interactions with mothers. Boys who were more strongly attached to their mothers at Time 1 reported more supportive (but not less attached) relationships with mothers 5 years later. These results suggest that African American early adolescent girls' conflicts with mothers may have temporarily disrupted their relationships with mothers, but significant associations found between both boys' and girls' attachment to mothers in middle adolescence and their perceptions of close, supportive relationships in late adolescence suggest that these disruptions are temporary. These results, as well as the relatively low stability in the different ratings of conflict over time, are consistent with recent theorizing that conflict is a temporary perturbation in adolescent–parent relationships (Holmbeck, 1996; Laursen & Collins, 1994; Smetana, 1996; Steinberg, 1990). It is important to note that longitudinal research has demonstrated that ongoing and highly conflictive family relationships in early adolescence do lead to significant deterioration in adolescent–parent relationships (Patterson & Bank, 1989). However, overall, the African American late adolescents in our sample did not view their relationships with mothers or fathers as highly conflictive, and we found that moderate conflict in this sample of well-functioning African American families did not have long-term negative effects on African American parent–adolescent relationships.

In contrast to Furman and Buhrmester (1992) but consistent with other research (Collins & Russell, 1991; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), we found that African American late adolescents reported closer and more supportive relationships with mothers than with fathers, and this did not differ by adolescents' gender or whether fathers were stably present in the family. However, the regression analyses indicated that being in a stable, two-parent, married family (either biological or stepparent) positively influenced adolescents' perceptions of supportive interactions with fathers (but not mothers).

Parents' perceptions of the positive quality of their relationships were not obtained in the present study; thus, we cannot determine whether adolescents' perceptions of positive interactions were mirrored in parents' views or whether convergence is more likely at different times during adolescence. Therefore, future research should examine associations between adolescents' and parents' perceptions of positive aspects of their relationships. However, along with others (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992), we believe that our focus on adolescents' perceptions of attachment and supportive relationships provides unique and important information, both because adolescents' perceptions are interesting in their own right and because adolescents' perceptions of greater emotional closeness and attachment to parents have been associated with better adjustment, including higher self-esteem, greater life satisfaction, and greater well-being (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983).

A strength of this study is that we examined African American adolescents' perceptions of relationships with both mothers and fathers. Adolescents separately rated their relationships with each parent for trust and communication, and at Time 3, for support and conflictive interactions. However, adolescents' ratings of conflict intensity were not parent specific, which may have reduced the predictive power of these variables. In future research, ratings of conflicts should be assessed separately for each parent. In addition, our analyses focused only on ratings of conflict intensity. Laursen and Koplas (1995) have found that negative affect is one of the most salient characteristics in adolescents' reports of "important" conflicts from the previous day and that negative affect is associated with disengagement and lack of conflict resolution. Although this suggests

that intensity is a highly salient characteristic of conflict, future research might profitably examine whether other aspects of conflict, including rate, topic, and type of resolution, influence perceptions of relationship quality in late adolescence.

In addition, nearly all adolescents in the present study provided attachment ratings of fathers (or stepfathers in stepparent families), even if their father did not live in the home. We did not obtain information on adolescents' relationships with absent fathers or father figures. That adolescents maintained contact with fathers regardless of marital status contradicts stereotypes of African American families as matriarchal, with fathers absent from children's lives (Billingsley, 1992; McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000). However, it would have been useful to have more information about how much contact adolescents had with absent fathers and how involved the fathers were with their children. This might have helped predict changes over time in adolescents' perceived relationships with fathers and, more generally, in understanding the social ecology of middle-class African American adolescents and families. However, despite this limitation, a strength of our study was that we included fathers, particularly as African American fathers have been understudied in developmental research (Parke & Buriel, 1998).

Moreover, although sample attrition was relatively low over the 5 years of the study, we did find selective attrition in terms of family marital status, with adolescents from two-parent biological families more likely to continue their participation in the study than adolescents from other types of families. Families lost to attrition did not differ from participating families in their initial ratings of adolescent–parent relationships at Time 1, but we do not know how this pattern of attrition influenced the quality of adolescents' relationships with fathers in late adolescence, particularly as other research has indicated that attrition biases samples toward more well-functioning families (Weinberger, Tublin, Ford, & Feldman, 1990).

Finally, much of the research on the developmental transitions of late adolescence has focused on samples of convenience, such as college samples. Sherrod et al. (1993) have called attention to the need for more research on ''the forgotten half,'' or that half of the population that does not attend college (William T. Grant Foundation Commission, 1988). A strength of our study was that we followed an African American sample recruited in early adolescence, primarily on the basis of their middle-class status, through some of the developmental transitions of late adolescence. Research on late adolescent transitions in African American youth has focused on families in poverty or youth facing challenges such as school dropout or early childbearing, although the number of African American youth graduating from high school and going on to college has been steadily increasing (Billingsley, 1992). In our view, African American middle-class, college-bound youth deserve further study in future research, as they are the forgotten half of research on developmental transitions in late adolescence. Moreover, as racism remains pervasive in American society (Garcia Coll et al., 1996), the influence of racism on the life choices of African American college-bound youth deserves further attention.

The present study suggests that there is significant continuity in African American adolescents' attachment and emotional closeness to parents across adolescence but that relationships are also influenced in gender-differentiated ways by adolescents' progress towards independence. Future research should examine how these factors influence subsequent psychosocial adjustment in the transitions to young adulthood and their commitments to relationships and institutions beyond the sphere of the family.

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