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PARENT-TEENAGER INTERACTIONAL CONFLICT

By

Andrea Kautz

B.A., North Dakota State University, 1972


Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

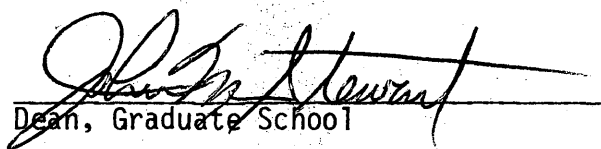
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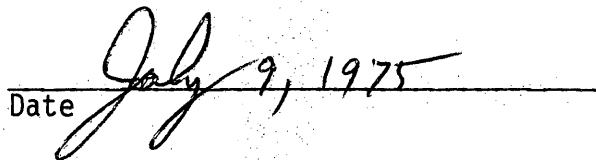
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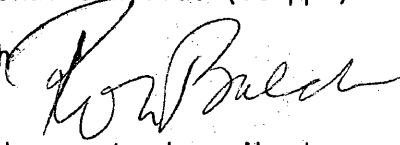
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The purpose of this study was to describe how conflicts arise in family relationships, how boundaries are perceived and accounted for by parents and teenagers, and how families encourage harmonious relationships among family members. Data were collected by use of the interview method. Fifteen accounts (nine teenage and six parent accounts) were used in the analysis.

It was found that when effective communication breaks down, conflicts may arise. Boundaries, which serve to indicate the limits of the relationship, aid the maintenance of harmonious relationships between family members. Through discipline, boundaries are enforced, changed, or relaxed. The sharing of responsibilities serves several purposes within the family. Through this accountability given each member, group identity may be facilitated, individuality may be encouraged, and boundaries may be reinforced or altered to enhance harmonious family relationships.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research was to study conflict interactions of parents and teenagers. Data collected by use of the interview method were used in the qualitative analysis of family conflict. Those represented in the sample included nine teenagers, two of whom have parents who are divorced or separated, and nine parents. Three of the parents were interviewed singularly and the remaining six adults (husband and wife team) were interviewed in couples. This study was based on a total of fifteen accounts. To my knowledge none of the teenagers interviewed are related to the parents interviewed. My research objective was to describe how conflicts arise in family relationships, boundaries are perceived and accounted for by parents and teenagers, and families encourage relationships to become predictable and continuous.

In order to obtain informants, I asked friends if they knew of any teenagers living in a family setting who were willing to be interviewed. The first informant I contacted was a teenage girl. From her I got the names of two other teenage girls whom she thought would be willing to be interviewed about their families. After interviewing these three girls, I decided there was a need to get parents' perspectives; so I obtained six accounts from parents. In this paper, those interviewees of a husband-wife team will be distinguished by letter.

For example, informant #7A refers to the wife; informant #7B refers to the husband.

During the course of interviewing, I considered my initial questions and the information these questions yielded. I retained those questions which directed the interview toward discussion of parent-teenage relationships and discarded those questions which lead away from that focus.

This process of data collection is most accurately described as "theoretical sampling." That is, the researcher collects, codes, and analyzes his data at the same time, and decides what data to collect next and where to get them in order to develop his description as it emerges.<sup>1</sup> By analyzing responses from the early informants, I was able to eliminate irrelevant questions and formulate questions on new topics brought out by the informants. The consideration of gaps in the data and new topics of inquiry suggested by the previous data collected guided the next step in the data collection process. For example, I did not decide to interview parents until the interviews with teenagers suggested that a more complete picture of family conflict would require parents' perspectives.

Theoretical sampling is used to discover categories of data and their properties and to weave the relationships between categories into a theoretical scheme.<sup>2</sup> The relationships among categories, which are suggested as hypotheses, give a description rather than a precise

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<sup>1</sup>Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, The Discovery of Grounded Theory (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967), p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 62.



prediction of magnitude of association.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in theoretical sampling, the data guide the sampling process; whereas, in statistical sampling, the emphasis is upon representativeness of the sample for the purpose of testing or verifying hypotheses.<sup>4</sup>

In the determination of a theoretical sample, the simplest comparisons are made among different groups of the same substantive type. For example, initially parents and teenagers used in this research represented families where 1) the parents had never been divorced or legally separated and 2) the family unit consisted of at least mother, father, and teenager residing in the same household. Comparisons of these parents and teenagers lead to description that is applicable to one type of group,<sup>5</sup> The scope of generalization may be increased by comparing different types of groups within different larger groups. I chose to include two accounts from parents of small children. Two teenagers from homes where parents have been divorced or separated have been included in this research. The purpose of selecting additional comparison groups after the analytical framework had been developed was to give additional confidence in the credibility of description.<sup>6</sup>

The procedure used to study interaction between parents and teenagers was the interview method. This method facilitates the discovery of what people think happens in interactional situations within the family unit.<sup>7</sup> The value of using this method is to find out how

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 63

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>7</sup>Herbert Blumer, Symbolic Interaction: Perspective and Method (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 50.

people perceive and account for their interaction with others, rather than discovering how interaction actually proceeds.<sup>8</sup>

In the process of interviewing, I shaped the direction of inquiry through a body of questions that I asked every informant (see Appendix, pages 67-68). I conducted the interview taking the role of "facilitator of conversation." Typically, I began all interviews with the questions, "How many children are there in your family and what are their ages?" The next question often was, "What activity have you done this past week which you would consider a family activity?" As informants described an activity or incident, I listened for some expression of relations between family members and then pursued that direction if the informants were willing. When we exhausted that topic, I introduced another question and another phase of the conversation began.

This style of interviewing is similar to the focused interview wherein certain information is desired of all informants, but the particular phrasing of questions and their order is redefined to fit the characteristics of each informant.<sup>9</sup> After the interview, frequently the informant volunteered the comment that the interview seemed more like a conversation than an interview. This effect was intentional so as to allow the respondent as much freedom in responding as possible. Theodore Caplow maintains that if the interview is to function as a highly facilitated conversation, the respondent must perceive it as a

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>9</sup>Norman K. Denzin, The Research Act (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970), p. 125.

conversation.<sup>10</sup> This condition favors the yield of information from the informants.<sup>11</sup>

The method I used to analyze these data is one suggested by Schatzman and Strauss.<sup>12</sup> I considered a single interview at a time. I read through the interview at least once. Then I started at the beginning of the interview and analyzed one particular phase of the conversation at a time. When he deals with large volumes of qualitative data, the researcher disciplines himself to think in terms of units of information, significant categories of things, persons, and actions.<sup>13</sup>

Initially, I set up units of information pertaining to objects perceived by informants such as boundaries, or individuality, or actions such as risk-taking, communicating, or listening. I also classified the informant according to his family status: parent of teenagers, teenager, parent of small children, or teenager not living with original parents. The discovery of significant categories of things, persons, and actions and the characteristics of those categories is probably the most fundamental operation in the analysis of qualitative data.<sup>14</sup>

In the continuing process of analysis, categories are linked with other categories until most of the data are accounted for.<sup>15</sup> These are suggested as statements of relationships between categories or

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<sup>10</sup>Theodore Caplow, "The Dynamics of Information Interviewing," American Journal of Sociology, 62 (September, 1956), 171.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>12</sup>Leonard Schatzman and Anselm L. Strauss, Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), pp. 108-127.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 103.      <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 110.      <sup>15</sup>Ibid.

hypotheses. The process includes analyzing as well as gathering data. The emerging categories and description of relationships between categories are checked by the gathering of more data.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the analytical process the researcher makes changes in the categories until all the categories are substantiated by the data.<sup>17</sup> Through this process of systematically obtaining and analyzing data, description of interaction develops from the data.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 1, 9.

## CHAPTER II

### EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The first topic in the consideration of parent-teenage conflict is effective communication. Communication may be defined as exchanging messages. Family communication refers to talking among those persons of a household who consider themselves to be under one headship.

Communication is a vital ingredient of a family. When one teenager was asked, "What do you think makes a family hold together?" she replied:

. . . understanding and talking to each other and letting each other know what's going on with the other person, what they're doing, how they're doing it. If they have any problems, I think just sitting down and talking about it [makes a family hold together and] helping each other with things if somebody needs help in doing something.<sup>1</sup>

However, whom does one talk to or with whom will he share things? One teenager described the person of his preference:

Mom . . . will say some pretty dumb things. She's not as smart as my dad is, so sometimes she says some pretty dumb things, but she's just easier to talk to--she's more open.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, I will discuss strategies families use to facilitate communication, problems that may cause ineffective communication, and insights that informants gave in reference to effective communication. Effective communication between family members is necessary for the continuance of the life of the family and for meeting

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<sup>1</sup>Informant #1, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Informant #2, p. 13.

the individual needs of its members. Family communication is used to decide how money is appropriated and spent, how time is spent together, and how family responsibilities and needs are met, such as washing clothes, taking care of the yard, fixing meals, mopping floors, and cleaning the bathroom. Through communication, values are determined and taught to family members. Communication enables one family member to gain a second perspective about a situation, share his opinion, explain and administer discipline, establish and reinforce individuality, and support, encourage, or discourage another family member.

One mother gave an illustration of ineffective communication. This example demonstrates the need for effective communication.

This goes to show you how important the verbal is . . . . We were living in a winter cabin and there was a little boy in the neighborhood who was about 5 . . . . [My daughter who was 3 and he were playing] in the sand box and I was listening to them. My daughter said, "You can be the dad and I'll be the mother. . . . I'll make your lunch and you can go to the sawmill." She was patting her sand pancakes together and putting them in the lunchbucket. [The little boy] said, "What's the sawmill?" She said, "You know, where you go to make money." And I think he was feeling really mixed up, so he said, "How do I do that?" [My daughter] said, "Well, you go and pull money off of the greenchain."

Dad worked on a greenchain and [my daughter] had asked me before, "Why does Daddy work?" I had said, "To make money." She had figured it all out, but she had a completely wrong picture.<sup>3</sup>

#### STRATEGIES OF COMMUNICATION

A variety of activities are utilized for the continuance of effective communication within the family. One family uses the evening

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<sup>3</sup>Informant #3, pp. 19-20.

mealtime to talk things over:

One of the main things [in which everyone takes part] is the fellowship at suppertime. This is the most [opportune] time we have to talk over our problems and things of the day.<sup>4</sup>

Another family schedules at least one evening a week for the purpose of discussion or activity:

We talk about all the things that have happened in the week that we've had troubles with or anything that is bothering us, or something that is coming up for one of us kids or for mom or dad--something that's special. Then [our parents] teach us or give us lessons or we do. We take turns. Some of it is on religion. Some of it is on everyday things: friends, painting, things like that.<sup>5</sup>

One family utilizes one evening a week in a different way, but this strategy also includes every member of the family:

Every weekend in our family we have a thing called "Winner for Dinner" in which one of the kids or one of us [parents] invites someone we know but the rest of the family doesn't know very well. . . . We invite them to come and spend an evening with our family. . . . It's really neat because the kids get excited about it and we never know who is going to be invited. . . . The kids have participated and if adults have been invited it has not been an adult relationship like, "You kids go somewhere else after supper." The kids have participated in all the conversation, entertainment or whatever is planned for the evening. I think the whole family has shared and enjoyed it.<sup>6</sup>

Although some families use a structured time for communication, there are other strategies informants have used to facilitate effective communication. One young father spoke of encouraging members to participate in the life of the family:

. . . It is so neat, as soon as you can, to involve the child in the life of the family: get them involved, make

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<sup>4</sup>Informant #4, pp. 1-2.

<sup>5</sup>Informant #5, pp. 2-4.

<sup>6</sup>Informant #6, pp. 1-3.

them feel like they are doing something, even if it is sloppy. . . . They want so much to be a part. [My wife] saw this right off the bat. When she would sweep the floor, [our daughter] would take a popcorn popper toy and go right after her. She would imitate and that is role association which is very important.

[Children] look to parents first for roles. If they can feel they are part of the family, not just on the sidelines, that has a lot to do with [involving them in the life of the family].<sup>7</sup>

Some families have strategies for involving every member of the family; other informants expressed recognition of the lack of such times of relating. In answer to the question, "Do your parents spend much time together?" one daughter replied:

Sometimes they go on Sunday drives if they are not too tired. We all eat supper together when we are all home. That is the problem--nobody is ever home when someone else is.<sup>8</sup>

Another teenager described a similar situation. This daughter is from a home in which the parents are divorced.

About 5 p.m. my mom usually comes home. About that time everybody is home and it is kind of confusing.

(interviewer) Is there ever a time including the weekend that you know your family will be together?

Sunday usually . . . . About 11 o'clock we all eat a brunch together. Then about 6 o'clock we will have something like a roast or turkey. . . . But all the rest of the week it is really confused. We eat dinner together but sometimes somebody is off doing something else, so it ends up [with] two of us eating.<sup>9</sup>

If there are many activities outside the home which engage the time of family members, there may be little or no time left for

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<sup>7</sup> Informant #7B, p. 17.      <sup>8</sup> Informant #1, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Informant #8, pp. 11-12.



activities to facilitate family communication. One mother expressed such a concern:

I don't like to encourage [activities outside the home] too much because pretty soon you don't have a family. . . . Somebody's going here and somebody is going there. There are more problems then than what it is worth, and really nobody is getting that much from it. You get to be a stop-off place and that is about it.<sup>10</sup>

Informants spoke not merely of lack of time for talking, but also of specific aspects concerning relationships between members of the family which play a part in communication.

#### PROBLEMS IN COMMUNICATION

According to informants, there are problems which can serve to block communication between family members. Aspects of relationships which can become problematic include listening, fears, and initiating sharing times.

##### Listening

For communication to be effective, one person must give a message and another person must receive that message. Listening is as vital to communication as talking. One daughter explained how listening is used by family members to meet their needs:

My mother and I talk. In the family, I have the most personal relationship with her. I can tell her certain things and discuss things with her. . . . About a month ago I was getting tired all the time. I would always tell her what was bothering me. She doesn't come up with any solutions and she doesn't make me feel any better, but people always say it is nice to get off your back whatever is bothering you. It is nice to be able to tell someone.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Informant #3, pp. 1-3.

<sup>11</sup> Informant #9, pp. 13-14.

Problems in communication arise when there is no one willing to listen to a message or when persons are selective in what they will hear. In response to the question, "If you would talk to your dad, what would you talk to him about?" one daughter gave this answer:

His truck; it's the only thing you could get him to listen to. You could say, "I ran a nail through my foot," and he would say, "And do you know that my truck . . ." <sup>12</sup>

According to many informants, this problem of failing to listen is directed at parents. One mother described her role as parent and listener:

Sometimes when you are busy or tired and your son is trying to tell you something and he is rattling off fifty words a minute, I'll be saying, "Uh-huh, uh-huh,"; he'll say, "Mom, you're not even listening to me." And I hadn't been either, you know. So we are guilty of that too. You just have to watch it . . . . Whatever they are trying to tell you is just as important as what you are thinking about. <sup>13</sup>

### Fear

A second consideration which serves as a block to effective communication is fear. Teenage informants express fear of sharing things in their life with their parents. One daughter explained how the communication gap is widened when children are afraid to talk to their parents. She would do things differently with her own children:

I would want them to not be afraid of me, to tell me anything, because a lot of the time that is the problem children have--they are afraid to tell their parents something. Then they just go ahead and do stuff. . . . A lot of kids are in trouble with the police because their parents say, "Now I don't understand; what's wrong with you?" There is a communication gap and you

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<sup>12</sup>Informant #10, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup>Informant #4, pp. 11-12.

have got to keep it open because you can have real problems if you don't.<sup>14</sup>

One teenage boy affirmed, "I guess that is one thing I shouldn't be with my parents, but I am always afraid of what they are going to say."<sup>15</sup> One daughter explained that because she is afraid of talking to her mother about certain things in her life, she may seek ways of avoiding communication:

Almost any kind of problem I can talk to my mom about. If it was something really bad and I was afraid to talk to her about it, then I would talk to my sister or brother--like if I thought it was going to hurt her. My boyfriend and I have a really close relationship and if I ever got pregnant I couldn't talk to her about that. I suppose I could, if I got enough guts, but I wouldn't want to tell her about it in the first place. If I could find some other way I could get around it without telling her, I would.<sup>16</sup>

When sharing something about your life which is important, there is risk involved such as a response from your confidant to indicate he was not listening or did not consider what you said important, or there may be fear of condemnation. These factors may contribute to the difficulty of initiating a time of communication.

#### Initiating Sharing Times

One son described the relationship he has developed with his father. In this relationship, the task of initiating communication lies primarily with the son. The result of such a condition is a strain on communication:

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<sup>14</sup>Informant #8, pp. 14-15.

<sup>15</sup>Informant #2, pp. 11-12.

<sup>16</sup>Informant #1, pp. 6-7.

It always has to be a gesture on my part [to begin communication] because dad just doesn't take the time to want to talk to me. But when he finds out I want to talk to him, he'll listen.<sup>17</sup>

The only time I do something with my dad is when I am forced into it. In a way he is married to his job. He is always busy . . . . We just never do anything. At least I try to talk to him.<sup>18</sup>

Initiating a time of communication may be uncomfortable for the person doing the initiating. One father humorously described his perspective as initiator of a sharing time between his sons and himself:

I took the two boys out to lunch a couple of weeks ago because I thought maybe they had a problem or something like that and it would be a good time to talk about it. . . . As it was, we just wasted a bunch of money--no problems that they came up with. We went to the Edgewater [Restaurant], too . . . .

(interviewer) When you went to the Edgewater and you felt your sons had something on their minds, how did you approach it?

Wow, they could probably tell you that. They laughed. I don't remember what the exact words were, but it was very blunt like, "Is there anything bothering you?" It was really neat because we wound up having a good time and not getting bogged down with heavy things. . . . There was a window shade that was halfway down and we couldn't see out to the water; so I reached up to move the window shade, but it is the kind that doesn't stop . . . and all these people were sitting around. The kids just got a real kick out of it. I think it's kind of neat [for them] to see their dad like that.<sup>19</sup>

These are some of the problems within relationships which can act as hindrances to continuous and effective communication.

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<sup>17</sup> Informant #2, p. 13.      <sup>18</sup> Informant #2, pp. 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> Informant #11, pp. 8-9.

## CONFLICTS

There are times in families when effective communication breaks down and there is a breach in a relationship between two or more members for a period of time. In the following examples, conflict situations are described. These conflict situations refer to relationships between at least one parent and one teenage son or daughter. A conflict may be described as a fight, argument, hassle, or confrontation. The circumstances which surround a time of conflict may be as varied as the people involved. Below is one description of a conflict between father and son in which there is a breakdown of communication. The son's comments were in response to the question, "If your father would get angry at you, what would that be for?"

Probably for not doing something that he asked me to like raking, cleaning, or mowing the lawns. If he asks me to do something, he usually expects me to do it. That is when he gets mad, when I don't do something that he asks.

(interviewer) Then what does he do?

Just yells and screams.

(interviewer) What do you do?

Yell and scream back at him. But it doesn't do any good . . . . Most of the time when I get into a fight with my parents, I'm usually the one that is at fault. I feel pretty bad after it is over; during it, it's kind of fun.<sup>20</sup>

The daughter who spoke of the fear she has of talking with her mother about her boyfriend, depicted the conflict that exists in her relationship with her mother:

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<sup>20</sup>Informant #12, pp. 2-3.

When we talk to each other, it is a complete fight all the time. . . . She just knows I am going to go out with [my boyfriend]: she can't do anything.<sup>21</sup>

Another daughter described her family situation:

The main fights [in our family] are probably between my parents and I. . . . I'm the one that has fights because of my age and the activities I'm doing and [because] I feel strongly about certain things that maybe they disagree with.<sup>22</sup>

. . . People sort of get tired of other people--in a family you do. . . . You can get sort of cranky and picky so you say, "Quit interrupting me," or "You're interrupting me."<sup>23</sup>

One father described a conflict which occurred in his home:

. . . A lot of times the hassle is before you have the confrontation. And then you have the confrontation and you think, "Wow, I was a fool." And the other person thinks, "Wow, I was a fool," because you come together and the thoughts that you had were not settled, and you started to listen instead of just talk. . . . People will say it is easy, but it's usually bad and ugly. . . . When we have problems we are trying to talk about them before they build up. That is idealistic, but if we work on it, it works.

.....

My biggest fault lies with the oldest son. I don't show him enough love and I correct him too often. I just find myself doing that and I think, "Why don't you just shut up?"

(interviewer) How does your son respond?

He just turns me off and I can't blame him. It is really difficult when a father does that, too, because the son just closes him off and there is not much of an open door there. It is one of those things you work on. . . . It is tremendous to think, "What is the matter? I just can't get through to him!"<sup>24</sup>

This father pointed out how the communication problem is in effect before the confrontation or conflict occurs. One daughter clarified the

<sup>21</sup>Informant, #1, pp. 3-4.

<sup>22</sup>Informant #9, pp. 16-17.

<sup>23</sup>Informant #9, pp. 12-13.

<sup>24</sup>Informant #11, pp. 5-8.

relationship of ineffective communication and conflicts:

If we can face a problem head on and come to a compromise by talking it out [conflicts can be resolved]. . . . People have a tendency to skirt or go around. Once it is brought out into the open, all tension is relieved; it all works out.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Informant #10, p. 19.

## CHAPTER III

### LEARNING TO LIVE IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

Within the structure of a family unit, learning occurs. One main thing that may be learned in a family is how to live in relationship with others. In this chapter, I will consider how the family moves toward the goal of learning to relate to others, parental learning, and learning of the children from a parental perspective, and self-directed learning from a teenager's perspective.

One teenager pointed out the practicality of learning to live in relationship with others. She stated that by being together and by starting early, a family is likely to hold together:

You have to learn this. If you are not shown affection when you are a child, you don't know how to give it. . . . So, to start a family out right, I think you should try to do things with [the] family while they are young, while they are still willing. It's good to learn early in life that you have to get along with other people.<sup>1</sup>

The parents of a small son also see the importance of learning to be in relationships. Their goal, however, is not merely a social one, but a spiritual one as well:

Basically [our son] learns what it means to be in relationship to others. Eventually, when he becomes more mature, he will see that relationships are not simply social, but there is more love and fellowship between us and that will introduce him to Jesus. When he sees us in relationship to others, he will see that it is not the normal trend of the rest of the world we live in. He will see how we love others and the fellowship [we

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<sup>1</sup>Informant #10, pp. 16-17.



have]. This will show him there is something unique about the way we live. This will introduce him to a relationship with God.<sup>2</sup>

Whether the goal towards which the family moves is a social or a spiritual one, the family may use a strategy to facilitate this learning. The once-a-week family night may be a tool for learning to live in relationship with others. One family uses their family night to give lessons. Each member participates.

Every Monday night we either have a discussion or we have activities. . . . About three weeks we have lessons and then we will have an activity. We stagger them so everybody gets a turn and then we start over again. . . . Everyone gets a chance to do their own thing, explain it, and tell why they like it. . . . We have a format like a program. We can deviate from it if something comes up. Somebody throws questions and we try to answer them.<sup>3</sup>

According to one mother, her family uses a discussion time to make decisions which affect all the members of the family. This family "negotiates" between members:

We had a family meeting Sunday night. We were all just sitting around and we were talking about some things that were important to all of us. Then we talked about money. We asked the kids by Saturday to try to determine what their needs are . . . . So we are in the process of negotiating as to what their feelings are and what our feelings are, and Saturday we will decide what we are going to do about it.<sup>4</sup>

This mother also pointed out how early negotiating can avoid conflict between family members later on. She explained when they have meetings and what is accomplished:

Usually when there is a need for it [we have a family meeting]. Last Sunday we felt there were a lot of things that needed to be talked about . . . . It was nice. Everybody

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<sup>2</sup>Informant #13B, pp. 7-8.

<sup>3</sup>Informant #5, pp. 2-4.

<sup>4</sup>Informant #6, pp. 22-24.

was home sprawled out all over and [the father] said, "Hey! This would be a good time for the meeting." Everybody agreed, so we started talking. It is time that one of them made a schedule for dishes. It is a hassle all six of us are involved in. If you want out of the dishes, you can trade with somebody, but you have to write it down . . . so that, "I've done it for you but you haven't done it for me" doesn't come up anymore. And wouldn't it be neat if certain things were decided and we all knew what to expect! When we have to come to a head on clash [it would be neat to have] decided what was going to happen and what is fair.<sup>5</sup>

A learning process is involved in living in relationship with others. Some parents have spiritual values in mind as their family learns to live in harmony with themselves and with others. Other informants described the means they use to encourage relationships in the family such as lesson-giving and a process of negotiating. Even though the entire family can be used as a means of learning to live in relationship with others, parents and teenagers spoke of individual ways they learned about relationships to others.

When one has not been a parent, it is easy to assume that parents automatically evolved into parents. However, parents who were interviewed testified how they have learned to live in relationship with others and particularly how they have learned to live in relationship with their own children. One mother described how she and her husband had to learn about parenthood:

I noticed when the children were getting to the age where they were out of hand, which was, at the most, four years of age, [disciplining] was beginning to be hard for me, yet I was wanting to interfere when [dad] was doing it because I thought he was correcting too hard. I realized that part of this was that he wasn't doing it often enough. I wasn't used to it and he wasn't either. He had to remember not to correct when he

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<sup>5</sup>Informant #6, pp. 22-24.

was really angry and to be able to do it in a more calm state of mind.<sup>6</sup>

Another mother spoke of the parents' learning to be parents as a team.

This learning took place through conflict situations that arose:

It took us a long time to learn that one parent might see something that the other parent doesn't know about which could change the situation. But if you intercede, it just undermines the respect of the parent that is involved.<sup>7</sup>

Parents expressed concern about the quality of learning which takes place within the home. Teenagers, on the other hand, generally had different concerns in the matter of learning to live in relation with others. Where parents tended to be concerned about what their children learn and the kind of upbringing, teens focused on their independence and their ability to make decisions regarding their life and their relationships with others. One parent, in agreement with other parents interviewed, stressed the importance of what is learned early in childhood: "I think the training is very important in the first few years because I was already set in my ways by age seven."<sup>8</sup> Another mother commented on early learning from a parent's perspective:

Children can learn very simply when they are real young, but if you wait a year or two, and then start trying to pound out what they have learned early, it is very difficult. But they can understand it very easily when they are real young and you just say, "No."<sup>9</sup>

One father explained how a child learns by example; how parents relate to their child will influence the child to relate to others in a similar way. He contrasted two types of relationships. One is based

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<sup>6</sup>Informant #4, pp. 17-19.

<sup>7</sup>Informant #6, pp. 19-21.

<sup>8</sup>Informant #3, pp. 16-17.

<sup>9</sup>Informant #4, p. 19.

on the principle of reciprocity; the other is based on the principle of "grace":<sup>10</sup>

A legalism means in order to receive "A" you have to do "B" . . . and that is contrary to our relationships here. It is not necessary for a person to have to do everything to receive something; that's all based on the principle of reciprocity. . . . In other words, if you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.

(interviewer) What would be an example of when someone tends to do that?

. . . for instance, trying to win somebody's love by buying them presents all the time, getting them expensive stuff. [If] we gave [our son] a lot of things, he would learn how to do that too. . . . But, you see, he doesn't have to do anything to receive our love. He's got it; he gets it for free--that's grace.<sup>11</sup>

This mother of teenagers summarized the importance of learning to live in relationship with others through this advice:

Most all of the correction and the things that you use in your children's upbringing is [established by starting] early. This is just respect for each other. Even when my husband and I go someplace, if we are not coming back at a certain time, we call each other. The children see this so that they know, naturally, it is expected of them also. . . . They learn all along the way what you are trying to teach them in everyday living.<sup>12</sup>

The teenage years are those important years which hover between childhood and adulthood, when one is somewhere between 13 and 20. Representatives of this amorphous group offered interesting insights concerning their relationship with their parents and with other people.

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<sup>10</sup>Reciprocity, as it is used here, is no contradiction to Gouldner's reciprocity; see Alvin Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity," American Sociological Review, 25 (1970), 161-178. In both cases, the principle of reciprocity is qualified; other variables may also be in effect. Gouldner's use of the term, however, is in application to structure rather than processual interaction.

<sup>11</sup>Informant #13B, pp. 12-14.

<sup>12</sup>Informant #4, pp. 12-16.

These teenagers presented a contrasting perspective to that of parents on the topic of learning. Teens emphasized their independence and experience; they consistently stressed these factors in examples they gave of learning to live in relationship with others.

One daughter explained how she conducts her relationship with her parents so that she maintains her independence in decision-making, yet keeps peace in the family:

I am pretty free to make decisions. I didn't talk to my parents first and tell them I was going to get a job. I got the job and then went home and told them I have a job. If I want to make something [in] the afternoon or if I want to put something up in the room, like remodel it, I can do that so long as it doesn't wreck the whole basement. My sister and I went into the candle-making business and we sold some candles. It was our decision to make the mess and we had to be sure we cleaned it up, [decide] where the money would go . . . and how we would spend it. I don't talk to my parents that much about what I am going to do . . . . I think I like to make up my own mind because if I asked them their opinions, I might be influenced to get what they want to make them happy. I would rather not ask them.<sup>13</sup>

Another daughter gave a description of how decisions are made in her family. She, too, emphasized her liberty:

Our parents let us take the initiative on when we should come in [at night] and what we should do . . . . They have been doing this--my mom more than my dad [because] we live with her. She lets us do pretty much what we want unless we have something we are supposed to be doing. She usually gives us the benefit of the doubt and tells us to use our good judgment: so we do. There have been a few slipups, though. Of course, there is in just about every family living situation.<sup>14</sup>

Some parents have explicit expectations which were acknowledged by the teenager. However, according to this son, learning and decision-making emanates from himself:

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<sup>13</sup>Informant #1, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup>Informant #8, pp. 5-6.

There are certain things my parents don't want me to do and there are certain things they don't care about.

(interviewer) What are certain things they don't want you to do?

Like [they don't want me to] go out and smoke dope or take all kinds of pills or crap like that. I consider myself smart enough to leave all that kind of stuff alone.<sup>15</sup>

Another son stressed self-learning or self-experience as an important way of learning about yourself and others:

Most of the time my parents just let me learn by myself--self-experience--instead of trying to discipline me real strict like, "You can't do this; you can't do that." They let me learn for myself . . . . Say like going out drinking, you are going to learn your lesson sometime by getting sick. My parents look at it [this way]: they did it when they were kids; it's nothing new to them. They figure they can't stop me from doing it.<sup>16</sup>

. . . . .

I think if you learn for yourself, you learn a lot more than when a lot of people try to teach you. . . . I think if you have a wide variety of experiences you learn a lot about yourself and a lot about other people.<sup>17</sup>

One teenage daughter felt she was under far too many strict rules and she decided to change things in her family situation. She explained that her parents had been too restrictive and she could not live under their dictates. She felt dependent and unable to make decisions for herself. She decided to confront them and to no longer follow their advice, but to make decisions herself. She, too, emphasized learning through self-experience:

. . . there were so many restrictions placed on me, like when I am supposed to be in. I just . . . told them when I

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<sup>15</sup>Informant #14, pp. 10-11.

<sup>16</sup>Informant #12, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup>Informant #12, pp. 12-13.

am going to be in. Lots of times my parents say, "Well, we prefer you to be in earlier." Depending upon the circumstances, I am or I'm not [in earlier]. More and more I have made those judgments because I can't live by the way they want things. . . . Usually I think of what I have just done or what I am going to be doing [as a basis for making judgments]. For instance, on Friday night, if I am going out Saturday night, I figure I should be in early. [There is] no sense being out late two nights. . . . If my parents disagree with me without giving me a reason, I usually do [what I have planned] because I feel like I have thought things out enough. I am sure there are some things I am not thinking about, but how am I ever going to learn what they are until I try?

(interviewer) Have you gotten any feedback from your parents?

Yes. They feel like I am wrecking my life . . . . They think I have made muchos mistakes. They feel like I should give up trying to run my own life and let them run it. I have gotten the feeling they have given up on me. They think it is hopeless: I will not listen. Their line is, "You think you know so much." I guess the reason I come off like that to them is because I feel like I know nothing. If I let them see that, they take advantage of it. So, I come off like I know what I am doing. They don't like that at all.<sup>18</sup>

There exists a distinct difference between the kind of learning parents are concerned about and the kind of learning teenagers focus upon. Parents emphasize the quality of learning early in childhood, whereas teenagers speak of self-learning or self-experience which is important to them at the present time. In family relations, many factors may contribute to a conflict between teenager and parent. Parents, who at an earlier time played a greater role in the upbringing of their children, now are faced with the teen's emphasis and concern with independence and self-learning. To understand these relationships

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<sup>18</sup>Informant #15, pp. 6-9.

more clearly, boundaries pertaining to the relationship between parents and teenagers is considered.



## CHAPTER IV

### BOUNDARIES

In this chapter, the concepts of boundary, legalism, and distance are discussed. A boundary is that which serves to indicate the acceptable bounds or limits of social interaction, whether explicit or implicit.

Parents and teens do not haphazardly relate to one another. According to their accounts, their interactions are quite predictable and fairly consistent. What is responsible for this consistency, in part, is the existence of boundaries which govern people's interactions. Many informants acknowledged limitations in their relationships, while other informants gave examples of such limits. Informants indicated that these limitations or boundaries are learned. They may be rules and guidelines taught by parents or they may be discovered through experiences of relating with others. If these boundaries are taught, often they are reinforced through discipline. Informants described the concept of boundaries and how boundaries are in effect in the relationships between members of the family.

#### THE CONCEPT OF BOUNDARIES

Parents of small children who were interviewed introduced the concept of boundaries or limitations relative to discipline. They emphasized how children want to know what they can and cannot do. They

look first to their parents for answers. These limitations or boundaries, which are learned, may then be applied in relating to the world. One mother stated: "There comes a time when you know your child is testing you. He wants to know what his limits are. You know that by knowing the child."<sup>1</sup> This desire to know boundaries starts early in life, and so does the desire for self-experience which teenagers spoke about (see pages 22-26). One mother described the need she sees for teaching her son boundaries or limitations through discipline:

Right now when [our son] is two years and three months . . . , children get independent and rebel against us. If we should admonish them or spank their hands, they want to spank us back. They don't want to be told what to do and at the same time they are discovering the world around them. They are finding out and wanting to experiment. This causes all kinds of dangerous situations for them or for things around them. . . . But then they have to be put on the narrow path and made sure that they know what their boundaries are. This is where it is established.<sup>2</sup>

Whether these boundaries are conscientiously taught by parents or learned in daily experiences, they are taken into account when people relate to one another. Many informants gave examples of boundaries, although few informants identified them as such. One mother gave an illustration of a boundary she and her husband use in specific interactions with their children. This is a limitation which the parents maintain concerning the interference with their children's problems.

I would say that if either one of us noticed that one of the kids was carrying a problem or if something seemed to bother them, we would ask them, but not in front of everybody else, "Hey, is something bothering you? Would you like to talk?"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Informant #7A, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Informant #13A, pp. 1-2.

<sup>3</sup>Informant #6, p. 10.

This example refers to a guideline these parents use in initiating a sharing time with one of their children. They do not ask one child, in front of other members of the family, if they would like to talk privately or if they have a problem.

In developing boundaries for relating to others, parents serve as examples to their children. According to one father, without examples, rules and regulations mean very little:

. . . It is not just a bunch of laws and regulations that you are presenting, but it is teaching. If it is removed from the ongoing daily living, that you are supposed to act such and so, unless the children are presented with examples and those examples are presented in the context of parental love, especially love between the parents, then it won't mean much. Just like the law of the Lord isn't just a bunch of rules, but it is the teaching of relationship and discovering God's character. So when it is, "Train up a child in the way he should go,"<sup>4</sup> the discipline fits hand in glove with the everyday living of presenting guidelines yet not apart from love.<sup>5</sup>

One father described how interactions between parents and children are governed. He gave an example of how guidelines are used, but not apart from love:

Our son is a freshman and I don't think he has been out later than 11:30 or midnight. We don't really have a curfew. We find out where they are going . . . . You more or less get with what is going on . . . . A lot of times [my wife] and I go out and we will come home late. I know we have really upset the kids sometimes when we said we will be back and we show up later. They are really upset. We would be if they are late. It is so neat because they love us.<sup>6</sup>

Families often have informal rules about letting someone know if one leaves home for a period of time. These kinds of boundaries are

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<sup>4</sup>Proverbs 22:6      <sup>5</sup>Informant #7B, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup>Informant #11, p. 23.

established so it is understood what is expected of family members. In this way, boundaries are an aid to maintaining predictable relations between persons. One daughter described a system which her parents set up so they would know where their kids are at night. She referred to the boundary when she described the time she came home late:

We have this report system our parents have devised. Whenever we get home late at night or if we are not at home when they go to bed, we are to come into the bedroom and "Mom, mom, I'm home." And they say, "Yeh," and then you go to bed. [When I came home late] they just said, "Look what time it is." I said, "What are you going to do to me?" They grounded me for a week. I didn't object because I knew it: I was in the wrong. It wasn't so bad. We do this all the time so they know where we are.<sup>7</sup>

This is perhaps more explicit than many boundaries in operation within families. Most boundaries which aid relations between family members are not as apparent as is this report system. Legalisms and boundaries are the next consideration.

#### LEGALISMS

A legalism is the tendency to emphasize the importance of a law or rule, whether explicit or implicit, in social interaction. As was discussed in Chapter III, a legalism means that in order for one person to receive "A" he has to do "B". Boundaries may incorporate rules; however, there is a difference between boundaries and legalisms. One parent described what it is like if legalisms are in effect in a relationship:

In order to be privileged, you have to do this. In order to receive protection, you have to do this. In order to be

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<sup>7</sup>Informant #5, pp. 6-7.

loved, you have to do this. In order to receive grace, you have to do this. In order to get power, you have to do this. In order to have influence over people, you have to do this. Or you don't do something for anyone unless you are really sure they are going to repay. Those are all legalisms. We don't impose legalisms on one another, but we need boundaries to know what our limits are.<sup>8</sup>

One informant gave an illustration of relations between her parents and herself which approximates a legalistic relationship. In such a relationship, the principle of reciprocity is in effect: if one person doesn't perform in a specific way, the other person will eliminate privileges of the relationship. The concept of a legalistic relationship is, however, an ideal type. It is doubtful that a human relationship would withstand under the governance of reciprocity--expectations for performance are inflexible. Consequently, the relationship would be severed or the terms of relating would change. In this example, the daughter and father do not speak to each other: there is no effective communication between them. At one point in the relationship with her parents, rules were placed upon the daughter. She was expected to perform in specified ways for her parents. As a result, their relationship is a precarious one, lacking effective communication and predictability:

My parents didn't know how to handle me as a child. I guess I am rebellious or something, so they decided they should be more lenient with me than they were with my other two sisters. Now they feel like they made the wrong choice, that they should have held me to the same rules that they held the other two. For a while they tried to go backwards. . . . It is too late. I am too close to leaving their control completely to go back and have them do that to me. I have rules and regulations on me that I have never had to handle.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Informant #13B, pp. 12-13.

<sup>9</sup>Informant #15, pp. 11-12.

Inflexibility can cause strain upon relationships which may lead to conflict and severance of relations. This is the closest example from the accounts of the use of legalisms in a relationship.

#### RECOGNIZING AND UNDERSTANDING BOUNDARIES

Many informants, teenagers particularly, recognize limitations which govern their relationships with others. Some informants spoke of their awareness of boundaries and the consequences of transgressing those boundaries. One daughter explained the boundaries her father has set concerning money matters. If she asks for money, she is expected to spend it for what she says she will when she borrows it. The consequence of not doing so is that her father gets angry. She explained:

I ask to borrow money. I tell my parents what it is for, but I end up spending it for something else. I don't consciously . . . plan to deceive my parents. [It is just that] later I decide I don't want to buy what I said. My dad gets mad about that. If we have arguments, that is what it is over--money.<sup>10</sup>

Boundaries which are guides to interactions between people may be relative to such things as money, drugs, work responsibility, laws, and activities outside the home. One daughter stated, "My father is very bullheaded. I think if I admitted I smoked a cigarette, he would bop me to the floor."<sup>11</sup> One teenage son recognizes his father has high expectations concerning his school performance. He explained that consequently he talks over school grades with his mom because his father, a school teacher, gets upset.<sup>12</sup> His father, it seems, tends to be

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<sup>10</sup>Informant #9, p. 5.      <sup>11</sup>Informant #10, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup>Informant #2, p. 13.

legalistic about his school performance; whereas his mother is more flexible. Another informant stated that conflicts with her parents sometimes develop over participation in activities. She explained:

Once in a while when we argue, it is my sister and me against my mom and dad about certain rules they have set up that we disagree with or about things they want us to do and we don't want to do. Usually we do it because otherwise they will ground us, but sometimes we just don't do it and they ground us. . . . About the only thing they really get mad about is when we don't participate in things they feel we ought to.<sup>13</sup>

What is learned and practiced in families becomes a part of the way the children relate to others. One daughter told how her mother expects all her children to share in responsibilities around the house. The children acknowledge this expectation and when they transgress it, they feel pretty bad. She related this situation:

Mom is the one that has us keep the house straight. . . . She makes sure everything gets done.

(interviewer) What would happen if you would not do what she wanted?

She would probably get really upset about it and gripe a lot. She would tell us we have to do it if we are going to live at home. We all have responsibilities and everybody has to share. Sometimes I know we don't. We just leave it a total mess so she goes to bed. We feel bad about it so we clean it up.<sup>14</sup>

Here, if the terms of relating are not met (namely sharing responsibilities), relationships between parent and children are altered. Either there is a temporary severance of the relationship to effect a change, or there will be a more permanent change in the relations.

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<sup>13</sup>Informant #5, pp. 8-9.

<sup>14</sup>Informant #1, p. 8.

## DISTANCE

Distance is defined as remoteness in interaction arising from disparity or exclusiveness of feeling; also it is avoidance of familiarity which is proper to one's position; to know one's distance; to recognize what distance ought to be kept. Distance refers to the resulting interaction (or lack of it) when one person agrees to relate to another person in such a way as to avoid conflict in the relationship. It is, in effect, a limitation upon the relationship. One son gave an example of distance in his relationship to his father concerning the drinking of beer. He knows his father would get angry if he asked him to buy beer so he would never ask.<sup>15</sup> This is an understanding which governs their way of relating to each other. The son acknowledges his father's position and, to avoid conflict, he maintains a distance. One mother stated that as parents, she and her husband have a rule that the kids are not to roughhouse in their home. The teens act in accordance, and conflict does not occur.<sup>16</sup> In these examples, a distance is maintained in observance of a boundary set by another person. An actual physical distance may be set by one person in a relationship.

One teenager described how she maintained a distance from her father when she got to be a teenager:

When I was younger, in the fourth or fifth grade, I wanted to please my father . . . . When you are 13 or 14, you don't want anyone to touch you--your father or boys. . . . I think that is the main difference between being 9 and 10 years old and when you are a teenager. You get touchy about situations and things. . . . Your world is a lot more insecure . . . . You don't want your parents

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<sup>15</sup>Informant #14, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup>Informant #4, p. 2.



touching you and doing those little kind things for you.<sup>17</sup>

One teen humorously described the same kind of physical distance she maintains with her grandfather:

I avoid them . . . . What my grandfather does is grab me and hug me to death. And I get burned with his whiskers. That is the only thing that drives me off. You always get the life rung out of you when you meet and you get it rung out of you when you go. I am always very careful about that. I always try to maintain my distance.<sup>18</sup>

This kind of physical distance serves to indicate the limit for interaction between two people.

It may be that family relationships cannot remain intact when there is a great physical distance maintained by parents toward their children and toward each other. As one father explained (see page 29), if the parents are teaching rules and regulations for interactions, unless it is backed by examples presented in the context of parental love, especially love between the parents, the teaching does not mean much. One daughter, whose parents are divorced, gave some understanding as to what it would be like to have a physical distance maintained by parents. She spoke of her dad's relationship to the family in this way:

He doesn't have dinner with us or anything like that. Usually he has plans of his own. He doesn't come and eat dinner with the whole family. My mom and he are not married anymore, so he just kind of centers his affections around us kids, like taking us places and doing stuff with us. . . . He isn't a part of our whole family, including my mom--just now and then he is.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Informant #9, pp. 8-9.

<sup>18</sup> Informant #10, pp. 21-22.

<sup>19</sup> Informant #8, p. 12.

Boundaries which govern people's interactions are learned. When children are small, parents reinforce limits through disciplinary measures, according to informants. To see how boundaries are introduced into the relationship, let us consider disciplining.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCIPLINE AND CONSISTENCY

The basis of parent-teenage relations is developed when the child is young according to most informants. One parent phrased it this way: "Whatever goes before will influence what is to come."<sup>1</sup>

In parent and child relationships, discipline plays an important part. Discipline is defined as correction or training. Through discipline a parent determines and enforces the jurisdiction he will hold, and the child discovers the boundaries of he who governs. But discipline is only a part of the total picture of establishing relationships. It may be separated from upbringing for analytical purposes; however, it is intrinsically part of raising children. One parent described her viewpoint on discipline:

It seems to me I can't even talk about discipline without realizing there is a foundation of sincere love [and] forgiveness where, if ever we would make a mistake, we would be able to ask forgiveness. Along with love and expressing love and having the child know that he is loved, discipline plays an enormous part.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, we will consider discipline as a foundation for establishing relations between parent and teenager, discipline as a foundation for judgments, and the issue of consistency in discipline.

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<sup>1</sup>Informant #7A, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Informant #13A, p. 1.

## DISCIPLINE AS A FOUNDATION

Discipline, as it is used here, does not refer to punitive action only; discipline is a part of a child's whole upbringing.<sup>3</sup> Parents had much to say about the subject of discipline in the family. The one point made by many parents concerns the authority given parents over their own children. According to parents interviewed, this parental authority is often not acknowledged or exerted.

Authority and Respect

One young father expressed how he sees his position in relation to his child. By identifying themselves in reference to each other, child and parent can establish a relationship. He stated:

Hopefully we are laying a foundation of respect of the child as a person . . . . Our daughter is not just a child-- a sort of lesser person or an unperson. She is a person, but she also must respect me and know who I am, that I am her father and \_\_\_\_\_ is her mother, and that she is our child, and that we have authority over her.<sup>4</sup>

Authority and respect may be founded in acknowledging one person as your child or as your father or mother. This same father explained how the way in which one relates to his child influences the child's perception of his parents. If one is firm, the child will recognize his parent's authority and respond to it; but if one makes threats, relations between the child and parent may be problematic. He explained it this way:

Something I have needed to see is the difference between a threat and a command. If you threaten a child with an either-or situation: "If you do that one more time, I'll smack you," that presents the child with a choice which gets into a real hassle. . . . But if you simply stand on a

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<sup>3</sup>Informant #13B, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>Informant #7B, p. 13.

command: "I say, 'No', that is it, you don't do it," then there is no choice. You don't present him with the "either" or the "if". With threats, forgiveness seems awkward; but within the sphere of authority and command, you can love.<sup>5</sup>

If there is recognition of authority and respect, discipline becomes a critical part of the upbringing of a child. It also plays an influential part in the relations between parent and teenager.

### Loving Discipline

Many parents expressed concern over the lack of discipline in families today. One father said, "I think a lot of people today have problems in that they see discipline as an unloving thing."<sup>6</sup> As a result, parents may tend to back away from disciplining their children. These young parents described how discipline and teaching go hand in hand to establish a foundation for the child which he can use for making decisions:

You cannot teach children without disciplining them. There are some things, like teaching them how to talk, . . . where you don't really need discipline. But, as far as teaching them what is right and wrong, what is expected of them and what is not, and what the world is going to be like, in everything you have got to show them how far they can go. . . . The parents have got to be the ones. If they are not, the poor kids are really going to be confused when they grow up. They won't have any foundation from which to make judgments. Their judgments will just be in limbo with no reference points.<sup>7</sup>

Informants stated that parents may be concerned about hurting the child by being too strict with them.<sup>8</sup> This is where parents take risks when they discipline their children. This father who offered much

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<sup>5</sup>Informant #7B, pp. 6-7.

<sup>6</sup>Informant #7B, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup>Informant #7A, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup>Informant #7B, p. 14.

insightful knowledge about discipline, gave an example of disciplining his small daughter when she gets angry. He takes a risk of being rejected for his discipline:

Even if our daughter gets angry, that just reinforces the temper. I want to see that broken, so I really have to love her; I have to take the risk of her rejecting me, even if it is a rejection later on.<sup>9</sup>

One young mother explained how authority and the use of discipline helps the child to be certain in his relationships with others because he knows what is expected of him. This is how she depicted it:

It has got to be ingrained in his very being, right now when he is two, that what mommy says goes. It is no sweat having a little baby. It is really fun. But when they get older, it gets harder. Hopefully, that is what we are building for now. . . .

It is hard to spank his little hand when you don't really want to, but they ask for it: they force you to do it. He knows a lot what he is not supposed to do, but he goes ahead and does it. If he doesn't get admonished and corrected, then he is confused because he expects to be . . . . It is just as important as the love he gets . . . . But right along with that and just as important is that he be disciplined and corrected and guided as to what is expected of him. If he isn't, he is at loose ends. He has got the whole world to get lost in.<sup>10</sup>

This mother brought out the notion that a child expects to be disciplined because he wants to double check the guidance he receives through admonition. As a parent, she trusts that early discipline will lay a foundation for the child for later on in his life.

One mother of five children explained how this kind of early discipline has paid off in their family relationships. Authority was acknowledged, discipline was administered, the children respected the

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<sup>9</sup>Informant #7B, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup>Informant #13A, pp. 2-3.

the parents, and the parents respected the children. She affirmed:

It has been installed in our children from little ones up that what we told them was wrong stands. I have never had one of my children rebel when I have told them, "This is it; you are not going." I have never had one of my kids go anyway. They have just never done it because they know when we tell them this, there is a reason, even though I might not at that moment explain the reason. . . . I think the main reason is that we have respected one another and the enforcement of discipline, and we have done it ever since they were little. We took a strap and paddled them good.<sup>11</sup>

The teenagers interviewed did not address themselves to discipline in the way that parents interviewed did. Teens readily gave examples of disciplinary action they received or they spoke of how to avoid disciplinary measures in their families. None of the teenagers interviewed expressed the idea of discipline as being a foundation for judgments and relationships. One contemplative teen did address the question: Should you or should you not discipline your children? She offered these thoughts on the subject:

For me it is hard to decide, how would it be to discipline your children a lot, a little, or not at all. In my family I think my sister and I had hardly any discipline at all. We can persuade our parents to do a lot of things; we can get what we want. Some people say that is being spoiled, but that is not necessarily being spoiled. If you never knew that this was wrong or that was wrong, . . . then you don't really know.

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In a way, I am glad I didn't get disciplined. Personally, I wanted to go everywhere. If, once in a while, my parents would have said, "No," then I would have had more of a sense of restrictions.<sup>12</sup>

Discipline is a vital part of the upbringing of a child and the

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<sup>11</sup>Informant #4, pp. 15-16.      <sup>12</sup>Informant #9, pp. 22-24.

establishment of relations between parents and children. But it is a very confusing and debated issue, too. According to informants, some of the confusion may be a result of the tendency to discipline inconsistently. This is the next area considered.

#### THE CONSISTENCY OF DISCIPLINE

The consistency of discipline is a major concern of most parents interviewed. Some teenagers also spoke of the consistency of parental discipline and the importance of it. One mother explained that consistency is important for the sake of the child. She also gave an illustration of the enforcement of discipline.

One time when my kids were little and all five of them were in church, I was singing in the choir and I could see what they were doing. I was about fit to be tied: I thought they were misbehaving badly . . . . They had been in church ever since they were babies, so they knew how to behave. I didn't mind if they moved a little, but I didn't want them rattling papers and disturbing. Well, I took all five of them home and I lined them up and I paddled the whole five. But I never had to do it again. They understood when you tell them something, you mean it. As I see it, that is one of the biggest problems in the world today about kids and their confusion. People have not raised them by telling them something and sticking to it, using the authority that is given to them by God, as parents to really train the kids in the way they should go. When people get so wishy-washy, the kids don't know what to think.<sup>13</sup>

Parents interviewed stated that husbands and wives must agree between themselves and back each other in the disciplining. One parent commented on the benefit of having other adults in the community who back them in the discipline of their children. These parents, in turn,

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<sup>13</sup>Informant #4, pp. 15-16.



reinforce other parents' discipline.<sup>14</sup> This helps the disciplining to be consistent.

Several teenagers expressed their agreement with the need of consistent discipline. One daughter described how her parents handle discipline matters:

They ask each other what they think they ought to do to us. . . . They stress that they ought to be consistent and I agree.<sup>15</sup>

This daughter gave an example of how discipline was enforced when she came in late one night:

I came home at 2:30 and my parents didn't think that was too neat. I was supposed to be in my 12. . . . I overstepped the boundaries and they just grounded me for a week. I have never done it again since.<sup>16</sup>

Not only does discipline need to be consistent, it must also be significant so as to be remembered. One parent explained how discipline needs to be an event rather than something so insignificant it becomes blurred in the memory. This is how this set of parents dealt with their small daughter:

The real discipline is an honest to goodness spanking which began when [our daughter was about one year old]. You begin to form a pattern when [the child] gets mobile, that unless you move into a spanking, the day becomes full of little slaps. [Because] she is falling down and bumping herself, they just sort of get blurred. So the disciplinary action . . . that begins around one year, needs to leave a stronger impression. It must be a specific event that children associate with a certain action. I take [our daughter] right over my knee and I spank her. . . . It seems to break a pattern where you are just giving her little slaps or having just minor confrontations. . . .

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<sup>14</sup>Informant #7B, p. 19.      <sup>15</sup>Informant #5, pp. 7-8.

<sup>16</sup>Informant #5, p. 6.

She would get disciplined, then she would go back and do it again to see if that was what it was all about. So you spank her again: "That's right. That is a no-no."<sup>17</sup>

The form which discipline takes as the child grows older may vary, but the principles which work in the relationship between parent and child remain in effect. This parent pointed out the need of consistent discipline--following through with what is said--into the teen years of the child:

When the children were younger, it was a swat or a spanking, but as they got older, . . . I said, "Come on, do this and do this." I would say it too many times when I really should have enforced it.<sup>18</sup>

One teenager affirmed how she responds to a steadfast command from her father and how she responds to a doubtful command from him:

If my father says, "No, you are not going to do this," I accept it if I know he is final. But if he has got the least little bit of doubt in his voice, I will badger him until I get my way.<sup>19</sup>

Discipline, which often is seen as an unloving thing, is a vital part of that which gives the child a foundation for making judgments and a foundation for relating to his parents and others.

Many informants agreed on the necessity of consistent discipline and discipline which is followed through with the agreement of both parents. One informant stated that discipline, to be effective, must be an event associated with a specific action. It must be significant so as to be remembered. When discipline is effective, parent and child may

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<sup>17</sup> Informant #7B, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> Informant #4, p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> Informant #10, p. 11.

not need come to a point of confrontation on an issue again because the terms of relating are understood.

Informants are experienced critics in the area of conflict between parents and teenagers. The focus switches from a one-to-one view of the conflict relationship to a group effort in the resolution of interactional conflict.

## CHAPTER VI

### INFORMANTS' VIEWS ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION: TEACHING AND ENCOURAGING FAMILY MEMBERS

The first four chapters dealt with effective communication, problems in communication, learning to be in relationships with others, maintaining independence, the use of discipline, development of boundaries to increase consistency in relationships, legalistic relations, and distance. The next two chapters focus on the individual relative to the life of the family.<sup>1</sup> Topics include parents as teachers, the encouragement of individuality, involving outsiders with family, and responsibility. The first consideration is teaching.

#### PARENTS AS TEACHERS

Parents serve as teachers and as examples to their family. Informants explained that parents have got to be the ones who teach their children what they can and cannot do--they set the limits and provide examples. Because of the early contact with parents, children look first to them for role instruction. One mother associated teaching with the responsibility of being a parent. She stated:

I will look at one of the kids and see them doing something, and I will feel guilty I have not spent more time with them as a parent, teaching them how this should

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<sup>1</sup>The life of the family refers to those things which encourage individuals to identify with the family and share in the activities of the family (see pages, 9-10).

be done. [I have not spent time] sewing with my daughters or teaching them how to cook or having the boys help me with things.<sup>2</sup>

This parent felt the teaching of her children has been neglected, but the children still learn from what the parents do.

Sometimes children learn from the parents things which parents did not intend to teach. One mother gave an example of how she tried to teach her daughter arithmetic:

When [our daughter] was young, she had trouble with her numbers, so I thought if I would help her to play cards, she . . . could learn her numbers. After the first three to four weeks I didn't know if I was teaching her to be a card shark. She got . . . really great at playing cards. She would get done with her work and say, "Let's play cards." In the morning she would say, "Would you play gin rummy with me before I go to school?"<sup>3</sup>

One mother explained how many of the habits which children have while they are young actually begin with adults. She referred to parents who allow young children to depend upon security blankets and pacifiers:

Some of the goofy things we get started with children, . . . like thumbsucking and pacifiers or a security blanket, is all stuff started by us adults. That isn't needed by a child. We let them start that stuff and keep it going. My kids never had any of that. My daughter said, "I didn't hurt by not having it." When she started to suck her thumb, I just took it away from her. She didn't have any pacifier or blanket because I didn't put up with them. So it just proves if you start early, a lot of this stuff can be avoided.<sup>4</sup>

When the child is very young, the mother is the primary point of contact of discipline, teaching and relationship; the father's authority backs up the mother's authority.<sup>5</sup> However, the role of the father is

<sup>2</sup>Informant #6, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Informant #3, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Informant #4, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>Informant #7B, p. 12.

vital to teaching in the family throughout the life of the child. One father explained the importance of the relationship between parents which provides teaching for the children:

Something I need a lot of growth in is really knowing how to love my wife and be attentive to her needs. . . . The most important gift that you have to give to your children is [love] for your wife. And it is the most important thing for your children to see. That is the real teaching, if you love your wife, to set an example so when [your children] grow up they will see the way the world presents a sexual relationship. [Then] they can look back and see the real intimacy and regard and respect between mother and dad. The children see that [this] way is not just a bunch of rules, of do's and don'ts, but that it is right, that sex isn't a "no-no." It is a special sacred, holy thing.<sup>6</sup>

Parents may teach their children a lot of rules to abide by and ways of living without giving them reasons for such teaching. One daughter described how she felt when her parents spoke to her about things, especially those that pertain to morals and values, without giving any explanations:

If I asked to do something and my parents didn't want me to, they would just say, "No," without explaining. It finally reached the point . . . where I told them I just couldn't take it anymore and [that] I was going to make my own decisions . . . Since then they have begun to explain why they say, "No," and why they [do not] want me to do something. When they first started to say things that were going to affect my morals and values, they should have explained things, but they never did.<sup>7</sup>

Teenagers may simply disregard that teaching which is not backed by sound reasoning or teaching which is not explained.<sup>8</sup> Although some teaching is not intended, teaching morals and values or teaching by

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<sup>6</sup>Informant #7B, p. 16.      <sup>7</sup>Informant #15, pp. 4-5.

<sup>8</sup>Informant #15, p. 6.

demonstration probably requires intent on the part of parents. Teaching is also one way of encouraging and supporting family members. One parent stated, "A lot of these kids would be so useful if they could just be taught that they are."<sup>9</sup> Encouraging the individuality of family members is the next topic.

### ENCOURAGING INDIVIDUALITY

A family can be an instrument which encourages and supports the individual member. Informants spoke of ways they relate with others which provide insights as to how individual growth is fostered through family living. It is through this kind of supportive interaction that conflicts between parents and teenagers may be minimized. According to informants, the recognition of individual differences aids in building the relationship between parents and teenagers and in keeping communication lines between them open. Encouraging individuality involves at least three aspects: knowing the other person, understanding and accepting differences, and involving outsiders in family life.

#### Knowing the Other Person

Many informants pointed out that it is important to recognize that each individual is different; each has his own needs, likes, and dislikes. One mother explained that as a parent you need to know when your child is struggling through a problem and when he needs to be alone. She said:

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<sup>9</sup>Informant #3, p. 22.

[I need to let my children] be themselves . . . , let them have time to themselves when they want to go clean up their rooms or just sit. Maybe I would like to have them do something for me, but maybe there is something they are struggling through, too. I tell them, "If there is something, come to me." Sometimes it is things they have to figure out themselves.<sup>10</sup>

This kind of recognition of the other person can encourage individual growth and respect between parent and child. One mother stated that you know a lot of these things, such as the needs of the child, by knowing the child.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, it is sometimes more difficult for the child to see the parent as an individual. One daughter described her relationship with her mother:

[My mom] probably feels she can't tell me things; I probably wouldn't understand what she is going through. Lots of time people don't look at their parents as people and it would be nice if she would let me see her as a person. It is hard. They seem like mothers and fathers.<sup>12</sup>

It can be an asset to have someone know you as a person, to know your shortcomings. This enables you to discuss things more openly with them.<sup>13</sup> As the parent knows the child, the recognition of individuality can be acknowledged and taken into account, just as the mother does who recognizes when her children need to be alone and accordingly allows them the freedom to be alone.

### Understanding and Accepting Differences

One aspect of encouraging family members to develop independently is understanding and accepting differences between people. One mother

<sup>10</sup>Informant #3, pp. 13-14.

<sup>11</sup>Informant #7A, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup>Informant #9, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup>Informant #10, p. 14.



demonstrated how she puts this into practice relative to her expectations and acceptance of her children's school performance:

I used to really get on [my one daughter] concerning her school grades because she had the ability. She could do it but she just would not apply herself. . . . But as for [my other daughter], she did things slow and it was hard for her. They were both average students; none of my kids were real brainy.<sup>14</sup>

A parent may place expectations upon a teenager that encourages him to develop his special talents, as this mother did concerning her daughter's academic ability. There is a danger, however, if expectations become inflexible.<sup>15</sup> One mother gave an example of how, by giving responsibility to her son concerning his academic performance, she seeks to encourage his individual growth and development. She related this incident:

I was at parent-teacher conferences today. [Our son] got a D and a U in math. The U is the bad part because it means there is no effort whatsoever. . . . He will be asked to take responsibility for his schoolwork. If he has time to play basketball and a lot of other things, then he can sure have time to take that D off his report card. He usually has B's in math so that is a pretty good indication he has been fooling around.<sup>16</sup>

Recognizing and acting upon individual differences can be an encouragement for the teenager to develop on his own and to take responsibility for himself. Sometimes, however, problems arise in relationships anyway. One mother gave insight as to how communication is the

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<sup>14</sup>Informant #4, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup>This is where reciprocity begins to govern relationships (see pages 30-32).

<sup>16</sup>Informant #6, p. 25.

key to unlocking many of the problems found in parent-teenager relationships:

This one thing I will always maintain, especially when the kids are teenagers, is that the biggest asset all along the way is the communication. . . . We are all human and we all make mistakes, but I am not ashamed to go and tell my kids, "I did wrong." This is the same with my husband . . . . Our whole family has the ability to ask one another for forgiveness. . . . I think because of the communication and the fact of being able to admit you are wrong, we can get along with different personalities in our home.<sup>17</sup>

There are times, according to informants, when communication lines between family members are not open. This is when others outside the family may be used to help family members reestablish relationships.

#### Involving Outsiders

When there are problems between family members or when one person is carrying a problem, friends outside the family may help with communication and relations. One mother described her relationship with her daughter when others were used to help smooth relations:

Three of my children are the kind that will talk to us about their problems; then there are two that won't . . . . [When there was a problem with our one daughter] I used to go and ask her what the problem is. She wouldn't tell me. This is one of the places where the church has been a real advantage because she, like a lot of other kids, would much rather talk to another person than her own parents. Often [another] girl or our pastor would stop and talk to her and she would talk [about it]. She thought if she said something [to us] it was like talking back to the parents which she had been brought up not to do. Yet she was feeling something was wrong. Later when we got to talking things out, I could explain why I did these things. . . . We came to a lot better understanding.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Informant #4, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> Informant #4, p. 9.

Informants who spoke of the role outsiders play in aiding family relations considered them to be an asset. One father explained why outsiders are sometimes necessary: "This child can communicate with them much easier than with his own father. . . . A father maybe just didn't understand. You can't expect a father to be perfect all the time."<sup>19</sup> Some families may have outside friends who help with problems, and some families experience others living with them for a period of time. One mother explained that this, too, may be an encouragement for families to be mindful of each other. She described how family life is having two young men living with them:

It is a comfortable situation. I know there are things we do that bother them. Sometimes they say; sometimes they don't. It is the same with us. In fact, it is kind of nice. Sometimes in your own family you take people for granted and just say, "Hey! Don't do that!" or "Turn that down!" If I talk with [the guys staying here] I might say, "Would you mind not doing that?" and explain why. So when I talk to our kids, they get the same respect. I am more consciously aware of treating everyone better.<sup>20</sup>

Much is involved in encouraging and teaching family members. The kind of relationship between parents can be influential in the child's way of relating to others. Recognition and respect of the individual can facilitate smooth relations between parents and teens. Outside friends may aid in encouraging a teen and help establish communication between family members. One father gave an example of how others in the community may be involved early in the responsibility of raising children and supporting the family in its task. He described the community as an extended family--that which goes beyond the nuclear

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<sup>19</sup>Informant #11, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup>Informant #6, p. 14.

family:

When a baby is dedicated in [our] community, the community isn't just an audience watching someone dedicate their child to God and who knows what. . . . Everyone has a responsibility. [The community] is an extended family that goes beyond the limits of the nuclear family. It is people that do have a responsibility for the child, not just "Joe" or a neighbor.<sup>21</sup>

The responsibility of raising a child, of encouraging him to be an individual and make decisions for himself is an important area which interested and concerned most informants. It is the topic which is considered next.

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<sup>21</sup>Informant #7B, p. 9.

## CHAPTER VII

### INFORMANTS' VIEWS ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION: RESPONSIBILITY

In Chapter III, emphasis was on the process of learning to live in a relationship with other members of the family. Relationships within the family may be encouraged through lesson-giving, activities, and negotiating. This chapter addresses how sharing responsibilities can be used as a means of facilitating harmonious relationships.

Responsibility is defined as being accountable for something. It may involve duties or actions. Responsibility is a topic in which most informants agreed: each person has some responsibility. One teenager expressed it this way: "We all have responsibilities. Everybody has to share."<sup>1</sup> Not everyone in the family has the same responsibility, nor does any one have equivalent responsibilities. As family members establish and reinforce boundaries which govern their relationships, the sharing of responsibilities enables members to work together as a group. Just as responsibilities differ among members, so do the boundaries of acceptable behavior differ between members. As responsibilities are delegated, boundaries may be reinforced or changed, individual accountability may be encouraged, and group identity may be facilitated. I will consider how some families distribute responsibilities among members,

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<sup>1</sup>Informant #1, p. 8.

informants' views on parental responsibility, and how teenagers develop responsibility or accountability.

It is understood among many families there are duties which need to be done for the family to continue its daily living. One mother explained how Saturday is a day in which the heavy chores such as washing clothes and mopping floors are done. She said, "We all share in those kinds of responsibilities of taking care of the house. If we let it get really bad, none of us are happy."<sup>2</sup> One daughter described how her family shares responsibilities:

Long time ago, when we were very small, my parents decided, and we didn't object too much, that everyone would have a job. . . . We split it up and try to do it according to age. My little sister doesn't do as much as we do. She just feeds the cat, but to her that is a big job. . . . If [our parents] ask us to do anything special, we usually do it because we get an allowance and that is how we earn it.<sup>3</sup>

Informants described how family members are delegated family responsibilities; they also spoke specifically of parental responsibility.

#### PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITY: CHILDREN

Teenagers and parents expressed their views on the responsibility parents have to the family. One son stated how things look in his family:

If we have a problem, [my parents] are going to talk to us kids first before they do something else. . . . They look at us kids as their first responsibility. I think children really are, though, with most parents.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Informant #6, p. 6.      <sup>3</sup>Informant #5, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Informant #12, p. 7.

One mother agreed that raising children is the biggest responsibility a person could ever have.<sup>5</sup> One family, who has other people living with them, impress upon those persons the responsibility they will have to share in raising the children. The mother explained:

Becoming a part of our family group means they have to accept responsibility for the way we are raising our children, that they will contribute to it or not do anything that would offend us or give the children something to cope with that we don't want. And I don't think that is closing the doors or making it a super-protective atmosphere. . . . We feel a tremendous responsibility for the atmosphere in which our children are raised.<sup>6</sup>

When parents feel a great responsibility for raising their children, how do they avoid creating a super-protective or restrictive atmosphere? According to one teenage informant, "Your parents should teach you a sense of responsibility; they should let you do things on your own at an early age."<sup>7</sup>

#### TEENAGERS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Informants gave examples of a variety of ways teenagers are encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility. Teens develop responsibility for themselves through jobs, particularly those assigned within the family, school, and difficult times. One daughter explained that her father encouraged her to get a job. She said, "They haven't bought me many things. [My father] believes if you have to earn money, you learn responsibility. You learn how to spend it and how not to spend

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<sup>5</sup>Informant #4, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>Informant #6, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup>Informant #9, p. 24.

it."<sup>8</sup> One mother explained why they wanted to give allowances to their kids for the work they do around the home:

The responsibility should be their's, to decide how they want to spend their money. Both of us decided their allowance should be on a set day of the week and that they should get it without asking for it. . . . If they blow it before whatever they wanted to do comes up, they have to figure out something. [We want to] give them that responsibility.<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes, out of necessity, children have special duties required of them. One mother has to work outside the home. Consequently, the oldest daughter had to be the momma of the crew for a while; she had the responsibilities of preparing meals and looking after things.<sup>10</sup> These kinds of experiences can facilitate the development of a sense of responsibility. One teenager told how his responsibility around the house and to his parents increased after a tragedy:

This summer [my mom] used to get mad at me because I was always late. But now, since my brothers were killed, it seems like I have a bigger responsibility around the house. I accept that now, but this last summer I didn't. I was myself and thought I was going to be going out on my own at 16. I have a lot more respect for my parents than I did. My mom can't even talk about it without crying. I can't give her a bad time . . . . I don't want to because deep down inside I know what she is going through. I am going through the same thing.<sup>11</sup>

There are a variety of ways in which children become independent, decision-making individuals. As teenagers mature and identify with the struggles of their parents, they develop a sense of responsibility for themselves and to those around them. Through the distribution of

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<sup>8</sup>Informant #10, p. 6.      <sup>9</sup>Informant #6, pp. 22-23.

<sup>10</sup>Informant #4, pp. 16-17.      <sup>11</sup>Informant #12, pp. 9-10.



responsibilities, each member of the family may have opportunity to identify with the group. Individuality may be encouraged as each one takes the accountability for his share. The boundaries of a relationship may be relaxed, redefined, or enforced as a result of the need to carry out the responsibility given each family member. A new depth of communication and identification between members may develop as the problem of one becomes a group concern, the task of one becomes a group task, and the tragedy of one becomes a tragedy for all. Thus, accountability for duties or actions may greatly influence the relationships between family members.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The family is an important primary group in society. It is a group in which much learning may be accomplished. Members of the family often look to parents first for roles. Part of the encouragement of children in families begins with involving them in the life of the family, making them feel a part of the family. Some families have a structured time in which time is spent with each other. However, effective communication may be hindered and conflicts may arise. How does a family deal with such times and encourage smooth and continuous relationships among its members?

Families may use a time of communication to consider problematic areas in family living, share opinions, and determine how decisions will be made. The family plays a critical role in encouraging its members to live in harmony with each other. All members learn how to live in relationship to others. The type of relationship between family members, especially parents, is the type of relationship the child learns to expect in relating to others. If legalistic relations predominate, the child sees this. If relationships are governed by boundaries, yet not apart from love, the child sees this and learns this way of relating to others.

When there are problems in the relationship between parent and teenager, the analysis begins where the foundation of interacting is

established, which is early in the relationship. A child and parent recognize who they are in reference to each other. This recognition is based on the parents as mother and father having authority over the child and the respect of one another as a person. Discipline is used to guide the child and let him know what is expected of him. This can lay a foundation upon which he can make judgments. There are some factors which make discipline effective. It is consistent. Husbands and wives are in agreement and back each other in discipline. Discipline is also significant if it leaves a strong impression. Examples of discipline indicate that when discipline is effective, parent and child may not need to come to a point of confrontation on an issue again because the terms of relating are understood. These terms are called boundaries of interacting.

Boundaries, which are learned, are limits which may govern interaction between people. Boundaries aid in establishing and maintaining predictable relationships. They are limits established, yet not apart from love. Legalism, based on reciprocity, represents a tendency toward inflexibility in relationships between people. When legalisms predominate in a relationship, conflict develops or the terms of relating become more flexible. When boundaries are acknowledged, ways of interacting are influenced. Distance is the resulting interaction when one person agrees to relate toward another person in a certain way to avoid conflict. When distance occurs between parents, it may affect all the family's relationships. As parents relate to each other and to their children in particular ways, the child, in his relations with others, learns from this example and interacts in similar ways.

Parents are teachers of their children. Along with teaching, the family can be an instrument of encouragement to individual growth and development. Much of this is facilitated through sharing responsibilities of the family group. Responsibility is defined as being accountable for something such as one's job or one's actions. Through family living, with circumstances bearing upon the family group and tasks and actions for which each member is accountable, a sense of responsibility may be developed. Eventually this responsibility can facilitate each member to look to each other and to persons outside the family to identify with them and learn to communicate effectively with them. The family may serve as a testing and training ground for the development of predictable, effective interactions with other people in society.

This study, which is a microlevel sociological investigation of parent-teenage relations, is based upon fifteen accounts. Because of the number of informants involved in the research, generalizations beyond the sample group cannot be made without caution. Generalizations drawn from the research, then, should be considered in light of the sample size.

Informants in this study offer insights relative to interrelations between people, conflicts between parents and teenagers, and the resolution of conflicts within the family. Concepts that have emerged from the data which have import in the understanding of parent-teenage relationships include effective communication, conflict, boundaries, responsibility, individuality, and discipline. Through these

concepts, informants suggest a number of hypotheses which could be tested in future research: If discipline is consistent and significant, then boundaries, which govern the interactions between parents and teenagers, are reinforced. If boundaries are understood between interacting members of the family, then conflicts are minimized. If boundaries are not understood, conflicts between parents and teenagers are frequent. If teenagers are given responsibility for the governing of their own lives and making decisions, then the reinforcement of boundaries is minimized in its importance. If the boundaries which govern the interactions between parents and teenagers are de-emphasized, then there is less opportunity for conflict. If responsibility is increased, then boundaries become more flexible. If teenagers identify more with their parents as individuals by encountering similar experiences, then conflicts diminish and communication is enhanced as the messages are backed by common experiences.

This research study also suggests general sociological avenues for research in the area of family. A similar study could be done cross-culturally in order to draw comparisons between different groups. I would be particularly interested in studying the Christian experience relative to family relations and social activities. Specific questions raised by this study which may be addressed in further research studies are: Under what conditions do boundaries in a relationship change? How does fear affect relationships? What conditions encourage the negotiating process between persons? What conditions discourage the negotiating process between persons? What is the nature of the learning

process of parents as they raise their children? What conditions encourage a legalistic tendency in relationships? In what areas of interaction is there a tendency towards reciprocity? When legalisms predominate in a relationship, what degree of negotiation is there? When a relationship tends to be primarily legalistic, what conditions will cause the relationship to become more flexible, or severed? What are the effects upon the family as distances are maintained between two members? What is the correlation between distance and the tendency toward legalism in relationships? What is the correlation between frequency of negotiating, frequency of boundary change, and the disposition toward legalism in a relationship? What is the nature of the discipline if there is no authority-respect basis? What boundaries govern the relationship between parents and children in the absence of discipline? What is the correlation between the consistency of discipline and the amount of negotiating? What is the correlation between flexibility of boundaries and consistency of discipline? What is the correlation of teaching values and morals without explanation on the part of the parents and a tendency toward legalisms in relationships with teenagers? What is the correlation between involving outsiders in family problems and the flexibility of boundaries between family members? What is the correlation between distribution of responsibilities and the flexibility of boundaries? These research questions are derived from the linkages of categories suggested by the data. These questions are suggested as statements for further research.

This study is an exploration of the relationship between specific family members. More studies, based on this research technique, in the area of primary group relations, is a lucrative research area. It cannot be anything but fruitful, judging from the wealth of ideas suggested by this small research study.

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## APPENDIX

Questions Asked Teenagers

How many children are there in your family?

What are their ages?

How do your parents handle discipline problems?

Could you give me an example?

What responsibilities do you have around the house?

What happens if you don't do these work responsibilities?

If your father would get angry at you, what would that be for?

What does he do?

What do you do?

How do arguments get resolved?

Have your parents ever apologized to you?

If you have a problem to talk out, which parent would you go to?

Give me an example of a problem you would talk to your mom about.

Give me an example of a problem you would talk to your dad about.

What is a weekday like?

During the week, is there a time that you know you could talk with your parents?

What is a Saturday like?

What is a Sunday like?

Do your folks give you advice about dating?

If you feel you've been unjustly treated in the family, what do you do?

Do you feel pretty free to ask your mom and dad for money if you need it?

What has your family done together the past week that you might call a family activity?

How do you spend time with your mom?

How do you spend time with your dad?

Does your mother work outside the home?

What would you do differently if you had your own family?

### Questions Asked Parents

What are the names and ages of your children?

Are there other people besides your immediate family living in your house?

What part do they take in the activities of the family?

How is it that you came to have additional people living with your family?

What responsibilities do these non-family members have?

In what ways do you spend time together as a family?

In what ways do you spend time with your son or daughter?

Would you say that you are an affectionate family?

What is your responsibility as a parent?

How is discipline administered?

Can you give me an example?

What is an example of someone needing discipline?

What happens when one of the kids gets a bad grade at school?

Who enforces what might take place?

If you thought someone in your family was having a problem, how would you deal with it?

Can you give me an example?

What things would you change in your family, if you could?