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ABSTRACT

The focus of this newsletter is on the interaction between two major developmental stages: adolescence and middle age. Research and theories about each stage are presented separately, followed by a discussion of how the two occur within the family structure. This discussion may be useful to teachers, counselors, employers, or researchers working with individuals who are particularly affected by the impact of this cross-stage interaction. Among the unique and stressful characteristics of adolescence are ego identity, peer-group relations, emotional growth, establishment of independence, and career formation. Middle age is frequently characterized by awareness of aging and proximity of death, waning health and vitality, achievement of career plateau, waning parenthood, and resultant change in marriage situations. When adolescents undergo ego identity and role confusion at the same time that their parents experience pressures of generativity versus ego stagnation, tension and potential conflict are likely. Parents may not have the physical or psychic energy to guide their adolescent children, and alienation may result. Greater freedom for the younger generation may promote inferiority feelings in parents. Research is needed to explore family therapy, education about problems of aging, and effect of environment or individual characteristics on the varying severity of transitional stages experienced by different people. (AV)

IN THIS ISSUE

The **Center Quarterly Focus** is on the interaction between two major developmental stages: adolescence and middle age. The discussion is set in the context of the family: parents and their adolescent children. But, the discussion is relevant for persons in middle age working with adolescents in any setting: schools, correctional facilities, youth serving agencies, on the job.

Barbara Smith, a recent graduate of the University of Minnesota, and past participant in the Youth Studies Collateral of the Center for Youth Development and Research, explores the interaction between adolescence and middle age from the perspective of "what is known" about these two life stages. The contrast between what is known about adolescence and the more limited material available on middle age is readily apparent. However, the discrepancy in the relative quantity does not detract from the major purpose of her paper: to begin to raise the issues that are involved when developmental stages are recognized as existing for all members in the adolescent/middle age relationship.

Researchers, writers and teachers are explicitly drawing attention to the impact of cross-stage interaction in "normal, everyday life situations" as well as in pathology, e.g., adolescent abuse. In the counseling process with adolescents in crisis or in trouble, increasingly, family members are involved and their characteristics and needs considered.

Courses in "adult development" are appearing in colleges of education where some attention normally has been given to adolescence; a next step would be to bring these two perspectives together.

Similarly, courses on "parenting" reflect far greater awareness of the developmental needs of all family members raising new and different questions about parent/child relationships.

Youth professionals are educated in adolescent development, but only occasionally asked to consider their own developmental needs in relation to the people with whom they work. This, too, is changing, facilitated not only by scholarly research, but by popular books such as Gail Sheehy's *Passages*, a journalistic account of mid-life, commingling interviews with academic findings.

Accordingly, this initial review seeks to contribute to the developing momentum regarding middle age/adolescence interactions based on a more extensive knowledge base. In reading the text, it is important to bear in mind that all people develop at their own rate and individual differences prevail. It follows that generalizations about any group may not be valid for any given individual.

Miriam Seltzer, Editor

ADOLESCENT AND PARENT:
Interaction Between Developmental Stages

by Barbara Smith

When one looks at modern youth, whether it be in the context of the psychological, the sociological, or the cultural aspects, inevitably the relationship between the adolescent and his parents becomes one of the foci. This relationship is generally viewed as a factor that significantly influences the direction of the adolescent's growth. It is, of course, a two-way relationship, and because it is so important, it is necessary to know and understand both sides. Much research has been done and much has been written about the adolescent's role in this interaction. There are elaborate theories of adolescent development and quantities of empirical data which pinpoint areas of concern and areas of growth and change.

But what of the other side of this interaction — that is, what of the parent? Much of the information about parents is presented in terms of the effects they have on their adolescent son or daughter. To fully understand the interaction between parent and adolescent it is necessary to recognize

parents as persons who have specific concerns and problems of their own, persons who have identities apart from their parenting and from their effect on their children. Adequate information about *both* parents and adolescents as individuals, coupled with information about the interaction between them, can contribute to a more extensive and intensive view of family life. It may also help to promote an understanding of, and an ability to deal with, the discontinuities and problems that occur between parent and adolescent within the family.

This paper is exploratory in nature. Accordingly, it only touches upon some of the important issues on which further study is needed. Five topics relating to the parent-adolescent interaction are dealt with. First, adolescence and some of its characteristics as a unique period of growth and change are briefly described. Second, middle age (35-60 years) as a developmental period is explored and some of the specific characteristics and concerns of this time of life are identified. (Since this section deals with middle-aged parents, it is the major focus of the paper. It seems most parents who have adolescent children are approaching middle age or are already middle-aged.) Third, the relationship between these two developmental stages within the context of the family relationship is examined. Fourth, the implications of all this information for those concerned with family and/or youth are discussed. Fifth, possible questions for research that will help to increase our knowledge and understanding of these topic areas are suggested.

ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence can be defined from many perspectives; no one definition integrates all the characteristics of this developmental stage. Here, adolescence is defined as a critical transition period, generally spanning the ages of 12 to 20, during which rapid growth and change occur.

The physiological maturation which takes place during this time is accompanied by rapid changes in body size and structure, by the appearance of secondary sex characteristics, and by heightened interest in sexual matters. Cognitively, according to Piaget, the adolescent is becoming capable of formal operational thought and is able to perform logical operations on symbols and hypotheses. [Thornburg, 1971] Socially, the young person's ideas about people and relationships are becoming more complex and differentiated and often there is a turning from parental to peer influence, at least in some areas. While friends of their own age are very important to adolescents, adults are just as important. In a two-year nationwide study of adolescent girls, their family was found to be very significant to the girls as a supporting and limiting power while their friends were considered important as mirrors of themselves. [Konopka, 1975]

Eric Erikson views the major task of this period as establishing an ego identity, a matter of considerable difficulty. Erikson says that it is necessary for the adolescent to have a certainty of self and a sense of continuity and belonging if he is to avoid the problems of role confusion. [Neugarten, 1968] In this process of building and integrating a concept of self, the peer group and interpersonal relationships become important. The search for identity and for a sense of self-esteem goes on throughout life but begins in the adolescent years and can contribute to some of the turmoil and stress of this period. [McCandless, 1970]

Some of the other developmental tasks of this period include emotional growth, moral development, social adjustment, establishment of independence, and career formation. [Cole, 1970] Information about all facets of life is coming in from all sides, and the adolescent needs somehow to integrate this new information into his value system. In addition to all this, a transition in emotionality seems to occur at this time. Thus adolescence tends to be a sensitive period. [Hurlock, 1973]

Early authors have described the adolescent years as an "awakening of Spring" and more often than not, as a period of "storm and stress." In his book *Adolescence*, published in 1904, G. Stanley Hall describes it as a time of storm and stress accompanied by unreasonable conduct and a lack of emotional stability. [Demos and Demos, 1969] Freud viewed it as a dramatic period in which the id is completely out of control and defines the major tasks as finding a suitable love object and building a satisfactory ego defense mechanism. Anna Freud sees it as a period of transition, tension, and conflict. [Horrocks, 1969] Margaret Mead presents a different picture; she says "storm and stress" is a cultural variable and is not a universal phenomenon. [Ada. .s, 1973]

Contemporary American society seems to generate an adolescent interval that is both gradual and stressful. Adolescence tends to be a moratorium period between childhood and adulthood where the loosening of control is gradual and where the adolescent is allowed to take on some adult roles but not all of them. Youth's questioning of the validity of these adult roles makes the choice of them more difficult and contributes to stress and tension. People's expectations of the adolescent vary; some treat him as an adult, others as a child. The adolescent's role, then, is somewhat undefined and in flux. It can be very confusing. While some generalizations can be made about the growth and change of this period, adolescence is also a time of individual development. Change and turmoil are handled differently by each individual, depending on his personality, lifestyle, means of coping, etc.

Whether this developmental stage actually becomes a serious crisis period depends upon the individual as well as on the kind of atmosphere society generates. With our knowledge of adolescents and the problems they face, we can provide an environment that will facilitate the healthy growth and development of each individual. This environment should provide conditions where adolescents can actively participate in the decision-making that affects their lives, where they can establish a sense of belonging, where they can experiment and try on roles, where they can discover self by looking outward as well as inward, where they can formulate their own value system, and where they can cultivate a capacity to enjoy life. [Konopka, 1973] Adolescence may still remain a confusing and difficult time, but it need not be a time of serious crisis or despair.

MIDDLEAGE

Only recently have researchers from various fields of study begun to

look seriously at development as a lifelong process which is accompanied by many physical, social, and emotional changes. [Atchley, 1972] Middle age, spanning the years from 35 to 60 (depending on the individual), has been one of the most ignored areas of development. Roger Gould found that people of similar ages have similar problems and specific concerns according to their age. The data from his study indicate that there is a definite developmental sequence in the middle adult years. [Gould, 1975] The consensus of many authors, in sum, is that "the middle-aged adult has as many problems to solve and pleasures to enjoy as any child or adolescent ever thought about." [Bischof, 1969, p. 1] Middle age, then, as part of life's developmental sequence is just beginning to be recognized as an important and unique stage in an individual's life.

Erik Erikson presents one of the few theories of human development that encompasses the entire life cycle. In this theory ego development is traced from infancy to old age. While the task for the adolescent is ego identity vs. role confusion, the task for the middle-aged adult is that of generativity vs. ego stagnation. Erikson says that it is necessary for the person in this stage to expand his ego interests and to have a sense of having contributed to the future. The middle-aged individual also struggles with changeability in his identity and self-image. While the problem of ego identity is predominant in adolescence, Erikson feels it is present for the middle-aged adult as well, though it occurs on a different level. The difference is due to the adult's more extensive life experiences. His success in resolving the problem varies with the degree of his success in dealing with earlier crises or stress. [Neugarten, 1968] Erikson, then, presents a view of the middle adult years as a time when important development is occurring and growth and struggle are going on.

Robert Peck posits a theory that middle age is a time of psychological learning and adjustment consisting of four major tasks. The middle-aged adult must first learn to value wisdom rather than physical powers as a means of solving problems and as a standard for self-evaluation. During the middle adult years there is a decrease in physical strength, stamina, and attractiveness; therefore the individual needs to change from physique-based values to wisdom or life-experience-based values. Failure to make this switch may result in bitterness, depression, frustration, and ineffectiveness in work and social roles. The second task for the middle-aged individual according to Peck, is that of socializing rather than sexualizing in human relationships. Along with a decrease in physical powers, there is also a crisis period in terms of the individual's sexual identity. Peck views this crisis as an opportunity for relationships to take on greater depth and a new kind of value that was not possible when sexualizing was the goal. The third task delineated by Peck is that of establishing emotional flexibility so as to avoid emotional impoverishment. It is during middle age that parents die, children leave home, and the circle of friends and relatives is broken by death. The individual needs to be able to shift his emotional involvement to other people and activities. If he is unable to reinvest his emotions, problems can result. The fourth task is to maintain mental flexibility instead of sinking into mental rigidity. It is during the middle years, Peck feels, that the person becomes set in his ways and closed to new ideas. Usually the person of this age has achieved peak status of some sort and thus is tempted to forego further change, refusing to look at new answers to old problems and situations. [Neugarten, 1968] Peck, then, defines some specific areas of change and potential problems for the middle-aged adult. He views these problems and tasks as worthy of as close attention as that given to the problems of the earlier stages of life.

In a study done through direct observations of group therapy sessions and through the analysis of questionnaires about attitudes and concerns, Gould pinpoints some specific concerns people have as they move through the adult years. In the thirties, the individual's focus is on the family, and the feelings about one's mate and offspring increase in significance. This period is also marked by active psychological change and pursuit of various achievements. In the forties, personal comfort decreases and the data suggest that this period is an unstable and uncomfortable time. Many people report a feeling that it is getting "too late" to do many of the things they had hoped to do. In the fifties, the major concern is with self and people tend to respond with increasing passion to statements about lack of time. Many concerns about health are also expressed at this time. There is a developmental sequence, then, which does appear in the middle adult years. [Gould, 1975] A sense of stagnation, disequilibrium, and depression is predictable as people enter the period of mid-life; this is just part of the total life cycle picture. [Sheehy, 1976]

Very limited systematic data are available on adults. The most frequently used technique of investigation is the survey-questionnaire, usually accompanied by some sort of interview. Through the use of such questionnaires and surveys some experiential and intuitive data about specific areas of change and growth in the middle adult years have been collected. The following are just a few of the major concerns, changes, and awarenesses that may touch a person during the middle adult years. They do not constitute an all-inclusive catalog, nor is the composite meant to be a sweeping description or stereotype of the middle-aged adult. An examination of the characteristics of individuals within a wide age span (35-60 years) will always reveal great variability. What is important to one person may be of little significance to another. The characteristics discussed here are *possible* areas of concern, and the purpose in looking at them is to help establish the middle years as a period of growth and change which is an integral part of the total life cycle.

Awareness of age.

One of the first awarenesses that strikes a person during this stage of life is the awareness of growing old. Life is no longer limitless. The individual tends to have an acute sense of time and often begins to have regrets about the "might-have-beens" of life. There is also growing frustration with the realization that there is probably not enough time to do all that one would like to do. [LeShan, 1973] This awareness of time is accompanied by the sometimes frightening and painful realization that one is moving into a

is highly regarded age group. In our society, to be aged is not an esteemed or prestigious quality. The elderly generally do not possess prestige, status, or influence. It is a position that is downgraded by everyone. [Atchley, 1972] Our society fosters a dismal outlook toward growing old and being elderly is not something one looks forward to. This time in life, when one becomes aware of the reality of old age, can be very stressful for the individual.

Health and vitality.

Health can be another matter of concern during the middle years. Often there is a decrease in physical strength, stamina and attractiveness. Since these are the characteristics that an apparently youth-oriented culture values most, this can be a difficult period. Chronic illness also becomes more prevalent at this time in life. Hearing and vision begin to fail in the fifties. [Atchley, 1972] Women tend to be increasingly concerned with the health of their husbands; men report feelings of increased physical vulnerability during the middle years. [Neugarten, 1968]

Menopause and impotence.

The onset of menopause and periods of impotence which may occur during the middle adult years can also bring about a crisis period for the individual. Menopause is a biological change that may have important psychological implications for the woman. It marks a turning point in life because it involves biological and psychological factors in addition to the perception of the beginning of "old age." These changes imply a general shift in the life stages and because so many factors are involved at once, it could become a difficult adjustment period for the woman. [Neugarten, 1968] Masters and Johnson [1970] have found that the sexual inadequacy of men increases during middle age. This is usually not due to physical factors but is the secondary result of stress stemming from preoccupation with career, family, retirement, etc. [Kimmel, 1970] During the middle adult years both men and women express the importance of remaining sexually attractive. [LeShan, 1973] These concerns, coupled with biological and psychological changes, could make this stage a difficult time for the middle-aged adult.

Waning parenthood.

Middle age generally marks the close of the childbearing years and parenthood is on the wane. [LeShan, 1973] This usually creates a certain degree of upset and conflict for both parents. For the mother who may have been totally absorbed in the family, the "empty nest" can involve a considerable role shift. This shift, combined with the biological change of menopause, could become a potential crisis period for the woman. [Kimmel, 1974] The father, who may have spent many years building his career, often turns back to the nest in his middle years only to find that his tenderness comes at a time when his children are demanding distance. This experience can result in a feeling of unsalvageable loss for the male. [Sheehy, 1976] Parents who still have children at home may also find middle age a difficult time to perform the parental role. Parents tend to feel more helpless and to worry more about their children during adolescence than at any other time. [LeShan, 1973] Parents need to adjust constantly as their children progress from infancy to adolescence to adulthood. This adjustment can be disturbing and difficult for the middle-aged individual to make. [Bischof, 1969]

Career plateau.

The middle years can also be the time when work careers peak or reach a plateau. [Atchley, 1972] Retirement begins to be recognized as a reality. There is growing awareness that some goals may be unattainable. Men in particular tend to perceive a close relationship between the life-line and the career-line, and when there is a disparity between career expectations and career achievements it adds to a heightened awareness of age. [Neugarten, 1967] Fewer options are usually available to middle-aged individuals; they may find themselves losing out to younger people. It may also become necessary to readjust some important career goals. For persons (generally males, up to now) for whom work has been a major part of their identity, the reality of retirement implies a major role shift and may involve a painful adjustment.

Marriage situation.

The middle-age years also have some important implications for the marriage situation. The advent of the "empty nest" may mark the first time in years that husband and wife are alone together. They may have to face some unfinished business left over from earlier years. Middle age does not necessarily generate new problems but may bring to awareness problems that have been ignored in the hustle bustle of child rearing and the pursuit of a career. One striking contrast between husband and wife in the middle years is his sense of staleness compared to her feeling of unboundedness. There seems to be mounting strong-mindedness and a movement toward independence in the wife past 35. This occurs at the same time that there are stirrings of emotional vulnerability in the husband. [Sheehy, 1976] Along with the implications that this has for the middle-aged couple, it may also be necessary for them to adjust to their mate's new social role — perhaps that of retiree rather than business executive or that of a career woman instead of a housewife. [LeShan, 1974]

Reality of death.

Probably one of the most painful and difficult awarenesses of middle age is that death is no longer a ridiculous abstraction. The middle adult years are usually the time of a person's first experience with the death of a parent. [LeShan, 1974] The circle of friends and relatives begins to be broken by death and there is increasing anxiety over the loss of one's mate. Middle-aged women rated fear of widowhood as one of their greatest concerns at this time. [Neugarten, 1968] Death touches middle-aged persons closely, which may result in feelings of anxiety and vulnerability.

In summary:

Middle age is a period of heightened introspection and a time for the restructuring of experience. The reassessment of self is a prevailing theme throughout this period. Partially this involves the integration of new information into what is already known. [Neugarten, 1967] Middle age, then, is one of the important developmental stages that occurs during the life span. It is a unique time in life — like adolescence and other stages in the life cycle — and it has its own special needs and challenges. Like most periods of growth and change it can be stressful, but as in adolescence the middle-aged adult makes an individual response to the developmental changes, and crisis need not occur.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE AGES

Few researchers have explored these two developmental stages side by side, yet this is how they occur within the family structure. Comparison and contrast of middle age and adolescence bring areas of tension and potential conflict to light. Both the adolescent and the middle-aged adult fear that life may be meaningless, feel a sense of despair about limitations and a sense of helplessness about the future. Because middle age tends to be accompanied by many of the same feelings that accompany adolescence, this period of development is sometimes called "middlescence." Middlescence can be seen as an opportunity to continue on with the identity crisis of the adolescent period. Both parent and adolescent may be going through the same developmental tasks but on somewhat different levels. While the adolescent seeks to discover a "self" and establish independence from the family, the parent too needs to separate himself from preoccupation with the family so that he can find a new "self." In a setting where both middlescence and adolescence are occurring simultaneously, it is a time of new beginning for the whole family. [Kimmel, 1974] This new beginning can be a time of anxiety, impatience, frustration, and misunderstanding. As such it carries with it the potential for conflict. Perhaps Arthur Johnson describes this situation best when he says

> . . . Adolescence hits parents at a time when they are probably feeling less confident and more compromised by life. The middle-aged parent, whose idealism about life and contribution to it has been dissipated, cannot strongly reinforce the self concept of a somewhat insecure young person whom he may subtly envy. Someone has very aptly described this as the clash of inferiority complexes. [Dialogue on Youth, 1970, p. 17]

Thus the parent who is reshaping his own self concept and undergoing major changes in lifestyle may not have the physical or the psychic energy to guide and reassure his adolescent child. The adolescent may feel misunderstood, shut out, not cared for. The behavior which stems from these feelings may trigger reactions from the parents. The result is a vicious circle of misunderstandings and resentment.

For most individuals middle age does tend to arrive at the same time as the adolescence of their children. While parents are faced with the child's defiance and rebellion and with the awareness that the child is now a sexual being bursting with life, they may concurrently be facing the anxiety that comes with getting gray and more easily tired, accompanied perhaps by concern about the status and the future of their own sex life. While the adolescent has many choices before him and can make what he wants of his life, the parents are becoming increasingly and explicitly aware of unfulfilled dreams, mistaken decisions and choices, things left undone. When life seems to be just opening up for the adolescent, it seems to be starting to close off for the parents. [LeShan, 1973] The adolescent possesses the kinds of things society values while the middle-aged parent is losing them. Whether the parents' realization of differences is conscious or not, it usually is accompanied by "inevitable feelings of jealousy and rivalry" directed at the adolescent. LeShan suggests that if adults are able to rethink the meaning of the middle years this may help lessen the conflict with their adolescent children. If adults can understand themselves better and come to value the growth and change that is taking place in their lives, they may see that lots of feelings associated with the behavior of their children really have to do with their feelings about self. [LeShan, 1973] With this understanding, they can deal openly with what is happening within them and not direct so many of their tensions and frustrations at others, particularly their adolescent children.

Conflict with the adolescent may also crop up within the family because parents find it difficult to face the implications of their children's adolescence. For middle-aged parents, parenthood is on the wane; it is a frightening time for those who have invested everything in the family. Many adults feel threatened, too, by the young person's questioning of and struggle against authority and by youth's disdain of so many things that parents value. The current generation of adults who are in their middle years has been characterized as having lived to please others and as having been made to feel responsible for the problems of their children. [LeShan, 1973] Therefore they often expect their adolescent children to please them as they pleased their own parents. This makes for all kinds of possible misun-

derstandings and conflicts. It has also been suggested that it is difficult for middle-aged parents to let go of their adolescent children because of guilt feelings that they have failed as parents. These feelings can result in them hanging on to their children or being overprotective. This in turn may generate resentment on the part of the adolescent and may contribute to feelings such as not being trusted or not being considered capable of handling various situations.

Another development that might affect the current generation of middle-aged adults is the Women's Liberation Movement. It is disturbing for the middle-aged woman to be told that she has wasted her life. The Women's Movement can be seen by these middle-aged adults as an attack on the roles and attributes they have always thought of as satisfying. [LeShan, 1973] A mother may begin to feel some resentment toward her adolescent daughter who is free to make decisions and who has many choices available to her. Also, a mother may feel somewhat cheated. These feelings may manifest themselves in conflict between mother and adolescent daughter.

It is not easy for parents to deal with all the problems and challenges of middle age at the same time that their children seem to like them the least and are making devastating judgments of their shortcomings. [LeShan, 1973] Likewise it is not easy for adolescents who are undergoing rapid growth and change to deal with their problems and establish an identity at a time when their parents are unable or unwilling to give them the support and guidance they may need.

Only a small dimension of the complex interaction between the two developmental levels of adolescence and middlescence has been presented here. This discussion is intended only to awaken some sensitivity to the factors that may lead to a crisis within the family. However, it may very well be that tension between parent and child is necessary for the continued growth and development of both individuals. And, while this interaction may generate a potential crisis through misunderstanding and conflict, it may also result in a sharing and a greater understanding of one another. Therefore it need not result in a serious crisis or a breakdown in family relations.

IMPLICATIONS AND QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

This treatment of adolescence, middle age, and their interaction within a family structure generates a number of implications for those involved in youth work and/or family dynamics as well as for those involved in research. *Only a few of the major implications are discussed here.*

First — if nothing else, this compilation of information provides a more complete picture of the adolescent's world than was available before looking closely and explicitly at the parents. It also provides a more extensive view of the family and the interaction between parents and adolescents. When both sides are taken into account it is easier to understand the relationship and its potential for conflict. Youth workers sometimes find it easy to blame parents or to identify a parent as the "bad guy" in an unstable family situation. The data presented point out areas of stress for parents and suggest that instead of blaming parents, compassion and understanding should be shown for their positions. With further research and more information it may become possible to anticipate problems in a family before they occur.

Second — instead of dealing only with the adolescent in a crisis situation, it may also be necessary to deal with the parents. Since the interaction between parents and the adolescent can have both negative and positive effects, one upon the other, it would seem most effective to deal with all persons involved in or touched by the crisis. Some form of family therapy is implied here. However, while family therapy may be a good route to go, it presently is not a viable alternative for many families in crisis — because of the cost, the stigma attached to counseling, etc.

Third — it is necessary to be as concerned about adults as about children and adolescents. It seems important to recognize that adults have problems, to help them identify these problems, and to provide the means for working them through. This requires promotion of an atmosphere of growth and change where adults are allowed to experience and acknowledge their discomfort with "self" or

vith their lifestyle and where help and understanding are available.

Fourth — some type of education about the developmental aspects of life might be helpful. Middle-aged adults often are unaware of, or deny any struggle with, growth and change in their lives. Parents are generally expected to understand that their adolescent child is going through difficult times but very few adolescents realize that their parents may be struggling with problems, too. A mutual awareness of the total situation may promote an understanding and a tolerance that will help foster growth in both the parents and the adolescent.

Fifth — and perhaps most important, much still is not known and much research needs to be done before all the bits and pieces of present knowledge can be effectively integrated. In some areas (mostly in adult development) research is hampered by problems with the availability and willingness of subjects and by the inadequacy of measurement techniques and interpretation. [Bischof, 1969] Though some cross-sectional studies are available, much of what we need to know can be learned only from good longitudinal studies. [Neugarten, 1968] There are, of course, all kinds of problems associated with longitudinal research — whether it be prospective or retrospective — but the area of family interaction seems important enough to warrant taking the necessary time and trouble.

In terms of specific research, one of the first areas to look at pertains to the individual aspects of both adolescence and middle age. Some information is already available but there is still much to be learned, particularly in the area of middle age. Among the major questions are: Why are these stages of adolescence and middle age a crisis period for some and not for others? What determines how critical the transition period will be for an individual? Is it determined by individual characteristics such as the person's means of coping with stress, his prior experience with tension and stress, etc., or is it determined more by the individual's family environment and its specific characteristics? It seems likely that an interaction will be found between these two variables which determines how difficult a period middle age and adolescence will be. However, if specific characteristics of the individual and specific characteristics of the family that contribute to the making of a crisis situation can be identified, researchers will be in a position to begin to consider possible preventive measures for some serious family problems.

Intuitively, it has been assumed that interaction between individuals in the two different developmental stages of middle age and adolescence can have both negative and positive effects on each. However, very little research or information is available which indicates to what degree one affects the other or which shows empirically that one actually does have significant effects on the other. Research is needed to investigate the specific characteristics involved in parent-adolescent relationships. Are there different specific characteristics in families who are having serious difficulty vs. those who do not have problems? Does the degree and/or quality of the relationship between parents and adolescents differ for those adolescents who are having serious difficulty vs. those who do not? How does it differ? Is it degree, is it quality, or is it some other variable?

Will some type of education or information-giving about the developmental aspects of the entire life cycle help promote self-understanding and perhaps understanding and tolerance within the family? Cognitively, the adolescent is at a point where he can understand parental positions and points of view. How would the adolescent make use of the information about his parents' sources of tension and stress? Would it make any difference in the family interaction? Would an understanding of adult development as a normal and unavoidable process help the middle-aged individual be more comfortable with his changing "self" and make it less of a period of turmoil?

We have viewed "middlescence" as having some significant implications in terms of family interaction. We may also want to explore the implications for the middle-aged educator or youth worker and their interactions with adolescents.

And finally, how do we approach prevention and intervention? We need to identify specific characteristics of the family interaction before we can anticipate serious problems. Once we can identify these characteristics, how do we go about prevention? What kinds of intervention do we use in order to prevent the occurrence or recurrence of problems? What kinds of intervention will succeed in helping those involved in a crisis situation?

These are just a few of the questions for which better understanding is needed. Any research takes time and involves some difficulties and problems. Research in the area of family interaction is accompanied by many such difficulties. At times it may seem impractical if not impossible. Perhaps getting the "answers" is not as important as simply letting the questions underscore awareness of the areas in which knowledge is lacking. In any case — holding family interaction and the individual aspects involved to be very important — it obviously is essential to continue to question and to try to find answers that will advance knowledge and understanding.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, both adolescence and middle age are seen as critical developmental periods, each of which has its own problems and concerns. Both stages are characterized by growth and change which can precipitate a crisis period depending upon the individual's response. These two developmental stages interact within the context of the family and this interaction may result in negative and/or positive experiences for the individual. Because the family is viewed as an important part of the life of both the adolescent and the middle-aged parent, the possible consequences of this interaction carry with them many important implications for those concerned. Present knowledge serves only as a beginning in helping to understand the entire life cycle as a process of development and change. It also serves only as a beginning in helping to understand the discontinuities between the generations and the areas of potential problems and stress in the family. Much research is needed for many questions are as yet unanswered. It is hoped that increasing knowledge in these areas will enable individuals to accept change in themselves and to understand and respect themselves while in transition. This is the first step in beginning to understand and respect others who are also undergoing growth and change, whether they be one's adolescent children, one's parents, or one's peers.

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