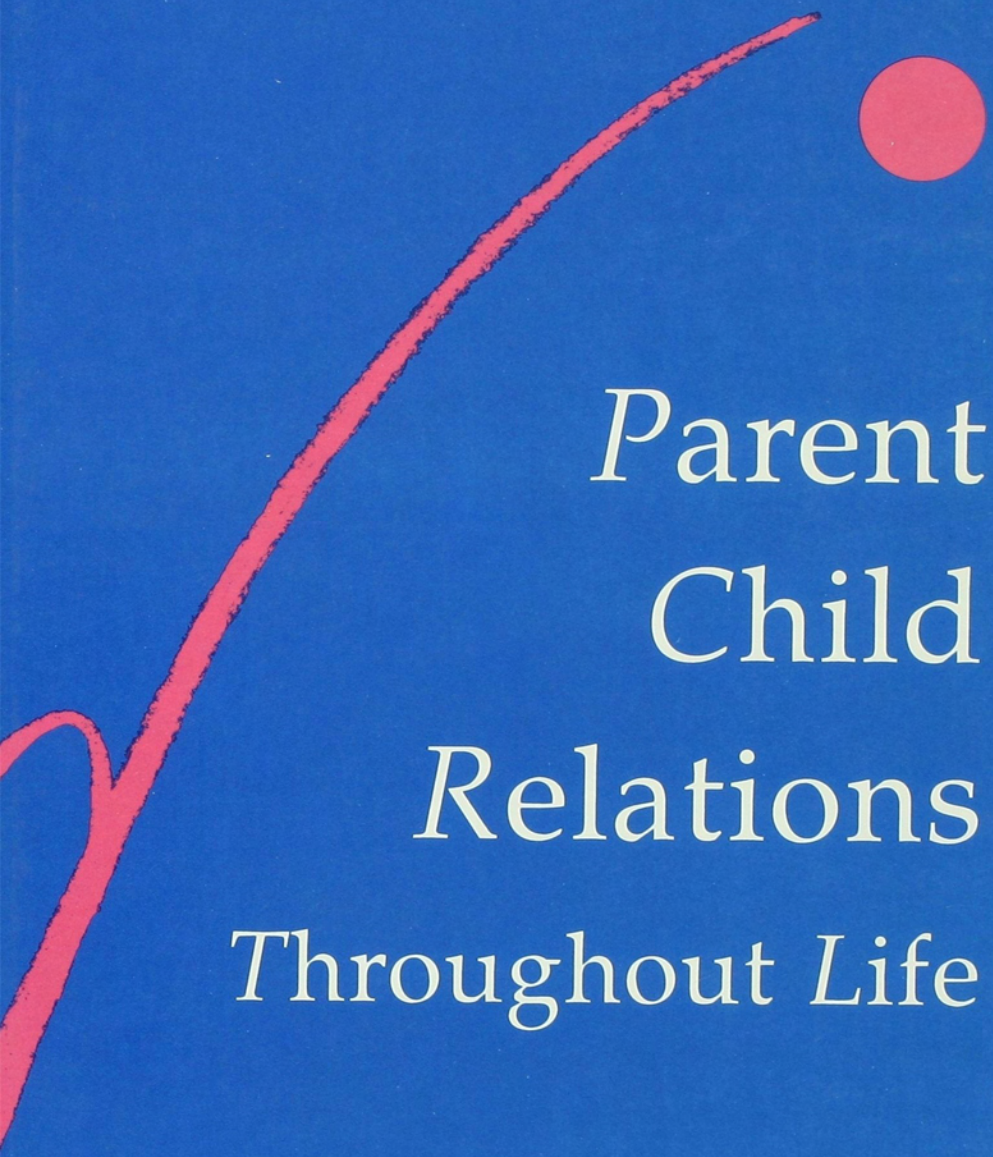

Parent-Child Relations Throughout Life

Editors
Karl Pillemer
Kathleen McCartney

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To our parents,
Jean Burrell and *Louis Pillemer*
Rose and *George McCartney*

and to our children,
Hannah and *Sarah Pillemer*
Kaitlin and *Kimberly McCartney Strovink*

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Foreword

Sandra Scarr

Chicken Littles have told us repeatedly that the sky is falling on our families. The idealized two-parent family with 2.2 children is a small minority of today's families. Divorced, unmarried, and surrogate mothers seem to have taken a toll on the vitality of the "Traditional American Family." Alternative family forms abound: single parents and children, adolescents rearing children alone, gay couples with children, older adults living together, and so forth.

Born in the idealized 1950s, the imaginary family ideal even today is of two married, heterosexual parents and their young children. However, there are millions of families made up of middle-aged parents with adult children still in the household, of grandparents caring for grandchildren, of middle-aged children caring for their aged parents. In this volume, research is presented on the varied family forms encountered today. The research shows that the contemporary American family has amazing variety and resilience.

Whether families "work" to nurture and protect participants depends on both external and internal systems. External economic conditions, social networks, extended family systems, and other societal supports (or more commonly the lack thereof) all bear on how well family members can function in each others' best interests.

Thus, parents without jobs or adequate income are less able to function as parents and role models for their children than the more fortunately employed. Elderly adults without adequate retirement and medical protection can become abused dependents of resentful adult children. Internal to the family, many personal and relational strains can interfere with the family's functioning. By temperament, some children are easier for parents to like and get along with than others. Children with disabilities place additional strains on parents' rela-

tionships and on the family system as a whole. Yet, most families "work" reasonably well to support members' development. Some "work" better than others, a matter that is described in many of the chapters.

Families are both affectional and obligatory systems. Love and obligation characterize all enduring human relationships. Parents not only love their children, they are obligated to provide care and support for them to maturity. Obligations of adult children to their elderly parents require them to provide care and nurturance, reciprocating for their earlier receipt of such benefits. In some cases, physically and mentally disabled adults are perpetual burdens to their aging parents. In other cases, adult children are caring for aging parents with dementia. Obligations continue in many varieties of parent–child relationships across the life span.

Understanding the affectional and obligatory systems of families today requires the perspectives of parents, as well as children, and of variation as well as norms. In this book, the authors address both aspects of parent–child relationships, which is a rare occurrence. Even rarer is the study that investigates individual differences among relationships between parents and their children at any age. In this volume, we find chapters on individual differences in early interactions between infant and preschool siblings and their parents, on daughters' and sons' relationships with mothers and fathers, and on age changes in relational obligations and affection. This is a rich array of variations on the parent–child theme.

Relationships between parents and their children undergo profound changes as children develop and as parents enter new life stages. Developmental psychology has too often ignored the developing adult, whose parenting role changes dramatically from young adulthood and young children, to older adulthood and the children's own maturity. Grandparenthood is yet another life stage: Affectional relations and familial obligations shift from one-sided giving by parents when children are small, to reciprocity in the middle years. This book succeeds in presenting this array of changes in parent–child relations across the life span.

Preface

Karl Pillemer
Kathleen McCartney

One of us is a sociologist who studies aging; the other is a psychologist who studies early childhood. Several years ago, we began to have conversations about our own research. Despite differences in our backgrounds, we quickly realized that we shared a common interest: understanding the nature and dynamics of parent-child relations.

However, because we study parent-child relations at different points in the life course, communication was initially difficult. We found that we read different journals, used different methods, and consulted with different sets of colleagues. This situation was further complicated by the differences in discipline: We had to overcome some of our biases regarding which questions were even worthy of investigation.

Over time, we discovered that by sharing questions and ideas our own research lives were enriched. As we found our own interaction to be beneficial, we became convinced that others in our respective fields would also benefit from greater communication.

One way to achieve this goal is interdisciplinary contact. We therefore planned a conference in which researchers interested in parent-child relations at different points in the life span could come together and discuss common themes. In May 1989 the conference brought together a group of researchers in Durham, New Hampshire to discuss these general themes with respect to young children, adolescents, and adult children of elderly parents. The group was intentionally diverse, and included representatives from psychology, sociology, and anthropology. This volume is comprised of 13 of the papers presented at the conference.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As we found in our own experience, a review of the literature reveals a curious phenomenon in the study of parent-child relations: Several parallel lines of research are being conducted with surprisingly little interaction among participants in each group. Most obvious are disciplinary boundaries; to date, communication between psychologists and sociologists investigating parent-child relations is still limited. As Mortimer (1984) has noted, sociologists tend to emphasize social-structural determinants of parent-child relations, such as position in the class structure. Psychologists, on the other hand, are more likely to focus on such factors as individual differences, the child's developmental status, and ongoing parent and child behaviors. However, some progress has recently been made, as indicated by several volumes on parent-child relations that have included members of both disciplines (Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1988; Kreppner & Lerner, 1989; Perlmutter, 1984).

In our view, more striking is the gap that exists between researchers in child development and researchers in aging. This difference has been highlighted by Hagestad (1984), who characterized the two lines of research as *alpha*—research on young children and their parents—and *omega*—research on elderly parents and adult children. Numerous exhortations to bring the alpha and omega research traditions together have met with little success. As Hagestad asserted, "Past work has taken two distinct directions, representing two separate traditions and focusing on two extremes of the human life span" (p. 130).

To be sure, obvious differences exist between the early stages of the family life cycle and the later ones. In early childhood, parent-child relations are more intense, and the influence of parents on children is undoubtedly greater. Essentially, family members cannot easily escape one another's influence. In later life, relations between parents and children assume a more voluntary character (Foner, 1986; Hess & Waring, 1978; Suitor & Pillemer, 1987). This difference is best reflected in the fact that young children almost always live with their parents, whereas adult offspring most often do not.

Given such life-course variations, it is often assumed that issues affecting parents in the early child-rearing years will be very different from those affecting middle-aged and elderly parents. In fact, two vigorous areas of inquiry now exist, divided by the gulf of the life span. Researchers on child development and social gerontologists have worked in isolation from one another, using different types of methods and publishing in different journals. We believe that the contributions to this volume demonstrate one fact: Researchers on young children and their parents and those who study parent-child relations in the middle and later years have much to learn from one another.

PLAN OF THE VOLUME

A review of the literature indicates that despite the differences in the nature and structure of parent-child relations at different points in the life course, several overarching themes exist. These major themes, which are reflected in the outline of this book, are as follows: (a) parent-child attachment, (b) transitions and their impact on parent-child relationships, (c) relationships between and within families, and (d) the influence of social-structural factors on relations between parents and children. Here, we briefly trace these common themes, as they appear in the contributions to this book.

Parent-Child Attachment

According to Freud (1962), Erikson (1963), and others, the first psychosocial task of the infant is *attachment*. Although the term is often used to describe a relationship between parent and child, social scientists also speak of the child as "being attached" to the parent. Freud originally hypothesized that the relationship with the mother served as the prototype for future relationships; indeed, this idea can be found in more recent writings by Bowlby (1969), Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978), and others. A healthy parent-child attachment is critical for the individual's emotional adjustment.

Parent-child attachment is also a particularly promising area in which to examine variations at different life-course stages. In the present volume, two new perspectives on parent-child attachment are offered. Bretherton, Birington, and Ridgeway (chapter 1) examine the parental side of attachment, a perspective that has in general been neglected. Cicirelli (chapter 2) extends the attachment perspective to parent-child relations in later life.

Bretherton et al. explore the inner experience of mothers' attachment relationships. Through interviews, they assessed mothers' thoughts and feelings regarding their attachment relationships with one of their children. In so doing, they attempted to ascertain the "internal working model" mothers held of the attached figure and of their own selves. Bretherton et al. find strong correlations between mothers' sensitivity and insight and the quality of children's attachment to them.

Cicirelli examines adult children's attachment to aging parents in the context of caregiving. This stands in contrast to prior efforts to explain adult children's caregiving, such as those based on obligation or equity theory. Cicirelli argues that theories based on cultural conditioning or exchange alone are inadequate, because they cannot sufficiently explain children's motivation. Attachment theory, however, can account for motivation. Thus, Cicirelli's explanation for why adult children continue to invest heavily in their parents is developmental in nature and draws on the notion of internal working models.

In this regard, Cicirelli's logic is quite consistent with that of Bretherton and her colleagues. It also follows that there will be individual differences in adult children's motivation to care for aging parents as a function of the children's internal working models with respect to security.

Life-Course Transitions

Major life transitions are another clear area of overlap between researchers on younger and later life families. As Parke (1988) has observed, interest in stressful normative and non-normative life transitions and their impact on the family has been growing rapidly since the 1970s. He argues that taking a life-span perspective in understanding transitions is of critical importance, in that the impact of transitions depends on the specific developmental status of the individuals affected. There is thus much to be gained by examining transitions that occur at different points in the life span and by considering differences and similarities in their nature and outcomes.

This volume includes three chapters that address the topic of transitions and parent–child relations. Two of these chapters deal with normative transitions: Mebert (chapter 3) on the transition to parenthood and Nydegger (chapter 5) on the development of maturity in intergenerational relations. In contrast, Boxer and his colleagues (chapter 4) treat a non-normative transition: the impact on the family of the revelation that an adolescent is gay or is a lesbian.

Mebert begins by noting that the transition to parenthood was originally viewed as an abrupt "crisis," but that this interpretation has been called into question. She argues that the transition does not occur suddenly with the birth of the first child, but instead begins gradually before the child is born. First, Mebert determines whether the level of motivation for pregnancy is related to several psychological variables. Second, she addresses the question of whether parents who differ in motivation also vary in their mode of approaching parenthood ("assimilative" vs. "accommodative"). Her results demonstrate that the timing of the transition to parenthood, as indicated by original motivation and planning for pregnancy, affects such factors as mothers' depression and locus of control. Further, mothers with high motivation are better able to integrate the new baby into their lives.

Nydegger attempts to merge psychological concepts of maturity with research on intergenerational relations. Taking Blenkner's often cited, but largely unresearched, concept of "filial maturity" as a springboard, Nydegger explores the degree to which relationships with aging parents are in fact a path to maturity. Filial and parental maturity emerge from her research as matched concepts, which develop in parallel courses. Further, Nydegger is able to refine and revise Blenkner's view by rejecting the notion that filial maturity must follow a crisis and that it only occurs in middle age. Instead, Nydegger demon-

strates that maturity in children develops gradually throughout their relationships with their parents. She also notes that within-family diversity exists; different children within the same family may have widely varying filial maturity experiences.

Boxer, Cook, and Herdt examine the process of "coming out" as gay or lesbian and its impact on the quality of parent-child relationships. Based on an extensive research project that involved interviews with adolescents and parents, Boxer et al. establish that alterations in parent-child relations are a critical dimension of this identity transition. They are able to specify ways in which parents are affected by the disclosure that their child is gay or lesbian and how parents and children subsequently alter their relationships. The transition to a publicly gay or lesbian identity becomes a family event or, in the authors' words, a "family coming out process," in which parents restructure their expectations and goals for the future life course of their children.

Between-Family and Within-Family Approaches

Until relatively recently, researchers conceived of parent-child relations in a somewhat limited way. Traditionally, investigators focused on parents' effects on children and paid scant attention to children's effects on parents. In fact, family systems theory suggests that family dynamics consist of more than just parent effects and child effects (Sameroff, 1982; Steinglass, 1987). In addition, between-family designs, in which comparisons are made among individuals from different kinds of families, are much more typical than within-family designs, in which comparisons are made within the family.

Although the between-family approach can be useful, it is limited when variations within families moderate or obscure between-family effects. For example, birth order has most often been studied using between-family analyses; however, it is likely that birth-order effects can only be understood by considering conditions within the family, such as spacing of siblings, gender of siblings, or even personality of siblings (Plomin & Daniels, 1987).

This volume includes five empirical chapters in which between-family and within-family analyses are presented. What unites these five chapters is their departure from traditional socialization research that has focused on parent effects on children using between-family comparisons. The first two chapters are by developmental psychologists. Both chapters advocate the need for within-family studies. The data presented by Dunn (chapter 6) show evidence for similar treatment of children by parents, whereas McCartney and colleagues (chapter 7) show that treatment is more similar when the children are more similar—at least with respect to language use. Rathunde and Csikszentmihalyi (chapter 8) conduct between-family analyses on the dimension of complexity, and relate it to adolescent happiness. Pillemer and Suitor (chapter 9) consider chil-

dren's effects on elderly parents' well-being, and Suitor and Pillemer (chapter 10) examine the impact of coresidence on various dyads within the family.

Dunn demonstrates convincingly the importance of differences in siblings' experiences from a developmental perspective. Her argument is easily made based on data from her Cambridge Sibling Study and from collaborative work with Robert Plomin on the Colorado Adoption Project. Dunn suggests that the origin of individual differences lies primarily with differential parental treatment. Although mothers are relatively consistent in their behavior toward their different children when the children are the same age, their behavior toward each child is not stable. Thus, at any given time, a mother behaves differently toward her different children.

McCartney, Robeson, Jordan, and Mouradian examine differential parental treatment directly within the context of language use. McCartney and her colleagues studied mothers and their first-born and second-born children when each child was 21 months old. Mothers were consistent in their language use to their two children, especially with respect to syntax. Mothers also adapted their language to their two children, especially with respect to certain language functions. The chapter concludes with a taxonomy of potential sources of differential parental treatment of siblings that will help to guide future research.

Rathunde and Csikszentmihalyi studied adolescents' perceptions of their happiness at home. Using the Experience Sampling Method, individuals assessed their subjective experience at random intervals. Based on questionnaire data, families were categorized as *complex* if they were both integrated and differentiated; that is, if they were flexible. The researchers found that children need more complex environments so that they can engage in activities that promote their development. Rathunde and Csikzentmihalyi link the ideas of integration and differentiation with attachment and autonomy, and discuss the implications of these dimensions for healthy parent-child relationships.

Pillemer and Suitor's chapter examines the issue of reciprocal influences between parents and children in later life. They begin by arguing that gerontological research has overemphasized the influence of elderly parents on their adult children. In particular, the literature focuses on declines in health of elderly parents and resulting dependency on children as the major dynamic in late-life families. However, based on recent research in child development, Pillemer and Suitor argue that adult children are equally likely to have a significant impact on their *parents*, even into later life. They focus on adult children who have serious problems with mental and physical health. Using data from a random sample survey, they provide evidence that having a troubled adult child is negatively related to parental well-being.

Suitor and Pillemer's chapter examines elderly parent-adult child relationships when the generations share a residence. The focus of this chapter is the impact of residence-sharing on parents' marital relationships and on relationships with their adult children. Contrary to previous speculation, simply shar-

ing a residence with an adult child was not found to have an impact on elderly parents' marriages. Further, surprisingly low levels of parent-child conflict were found in shared households regardless of whether children lived in their parents' homes, or the reverse. The authors argue that the voluntary nature of parent-child relationships in later life allows elderly parents to choose whether to live with their children. Thus, elderly persons do not involve themselves in shared living situations with children that are conflictual and distressing.

Social-Structural Influences on Parent-Child Relations

There is a long-standing tendency to view parent-child relations strictly in an intrafamilial context. However, a number of social scientists have attempted to move beyond this more limited perspective. Sociologists often quote C. Wright Mills (1959) in this context, who asserted that "the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, [and] he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances" (p. 5). The argument is made that social science in general should focus on larger social processes that influence the lives of individuals (for a recent review of this perspective, see House & Mortimer, 1990). Psychologists, too, have embraced such a view (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cochran, Lerner, Riley, Gunnarson, & Henderson, 1990; Kessen, 1978; Parke, 1988).

This perspective has led to analyses of parent-child relations that include structural variables. The goal is to examine how factors like economic conditions, race, or group norms and values affect such diverse family characteristics as child-rearing practices (Kohn, 1969), family conflict and violence (Straus & Gelles, 1990), or intergenerational support in later life (Mutran, 1985).

The three chapters in this section reflect a concern with understanding extrafamilial influences on parent-child relations, although the authors approach this topic in different ways. Three different aspects of social structure are represented in these articles: Rossi and Rossi (chapter 11), the power of social norms; Menaghan and Parcel (chapter 12), the economic system; and Bengtson, Marti, and Roberts (chapter 13), the political system.

Rossi and Rossi undertake a systematic analysis of the structure of social norms regarding relationships with kin. In particular, they examine the ways in which these general rules regarding obligations toward kin are translated into specific guides for behavior. Their findings indicate that normative obligations toward kin are highly patterned by the structure of the relationship and are not greatly affected by situational factors. Parents and children evoke the greatest obligation, followed by more distant relatives. Norms regarding helping parents and children are so strong that factors such as gender and mar-

ital status do not affect levels of obligation. Norms regarding helping appear to translate into actual behavior, as well: Individuals who report higher levels of kin obligation also report greater exchange of help with parents and children.

Menaghan and Parcel employ social-structural variables to understand parent–child relations. They focus on mothers who are employed, asking what effects the occupational and economic experiences of those mothers have on their children's lives. By examining the influence of structural factors on the relationship between maternal employment and child outcomes, they attempt to understand the ways in which social structure shapes family structure and thereby human development. Menaghan and Parcel assert that mothers' employment experience affects both parental values and maternal well-being, which in turn influence children's cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes. Further, they hold that a similar relationship exists between mothers' employment experiences and *non*-family child care. Both mothers' economic situation and their values help determine the type and quality of day care their children receive and thereby also the outcomes for the children.

Bengtson, Marti, and Roberts tackle the complex and controversial debate over "generational equity," which centers around the distribution of resources among cohorts in society. Increases in resources to the elderly are seen by some critics as resulting in decreases in resources to needy children. Concern over generational equity has led to the founding of national organizations that lobby for a reallocation of resources from programs for the elderly to those for children. The authors argue that the generational equity debate can be illuminated by examining three family issues that characterize intergenerational interaction: autonomy, solidarity, and affirmation. Within families, the generations struggle with the contradictions between autonomy and dependency, solidarity and individuality, and affirmation and conflict. Much of what occurs at the societal level, they assert, reflects these basic conflicts. Throughout the chapter, Bengtson et al. move back and forth between the macro- and microlevels, using family-level data to illuminate the larger social policy issue.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

It is apparent that the contributions to this volume address a wide range of substantive issues and use a variety of theoretical perspectives and methods. Thus, it is appropriate to consider the question: What is the value of bringing together a diverse group of researchers who seem to study parent–child relations differently?

The most obvious answer to this question are the common themes around which the chapters are organized. They make clear the considerable community of interests among these scholars that transcends disciplinary and life-span boundaries. Beyond these themes that have been explicitly identified, a care-

ful reading of the chapters shows numerous other areas of agreement. For example, a number of the authors reject the notion that parent-child relations are characterized by crises. Other authors demonstrate the need to examine different gender combinations in parent-child relations. Many also discuss the need to examine the family more closely, by looking within it, by studying both fathers and mothers, or by considering bidirectional influence.

We believe that the most important benefit to be gained from this volume is the generation of new ideas for research. Beyond the specific suggestions for future research given in each chapter, we hope that the volume inspires scholars to reach across disciplines and across different points in the life span in designing their research. To give only one example, with a few notable exceptions, gerontologists have not examined questions that are burning issues in child development: Children's influence on parents and differences among siblings within the same family are only two possible avenues for exploration.

Our conviction that it is of critical importance to look for common themes in parent-child relations throughout life stems in part from our experience in preparing this volume and in organizing the conference that led to it. We hope that readers will share our enthusiasm for weakening the barriers that divide researchers and for devising a broader view of relationships between parents and children throughout life.

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I

ATTACHMENT

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The Parental Side of Attachment

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Until quite recently, attachment theorists and researchers paid rather little heed to the parental experience of attachment relationships. Following Bowlby's (1958, 1969) theoretical formulations, empirical studies emphasized the infant's need for a special figure who is emotionally and physically available and thereby facilitates exploration of the environment (secure base), whose sensitive responsiveness in stressful or alarming situations provides reassurance, comfort, and protection (secure haven), whose departure arouses anxiety and whose return is generally welcomed with relief and pleasure (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Even when investigators began to explore attachment experiences beyond infancy (Bretherton, Ridgeway, & Cassidy, in press; Cassidy, 1988; Kaplan, 1984; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Marvin, 1977), the focus remained on attachment from the filial point of view, whether the assessments were of children or adults.

This neglect of the parental side of attachment is surprising for two reasons. First, findings by Ainsworth and her colleagues (summarized in Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton 1974) had strongly suggested that parental sensitivity and responsiveness are a strong causal factor in the quality of developing attachment relationships. It would therefore seem a natural next step to also probe individual differences in parents' inner experience of the attachment relationship. Second, spontaneous expressions of parental attachment behavior (watching, warning, retrieving, protecting) are easy to observe in everyday life. Indeed, there have been studies of maternal separation anxiety (Hock, 1984), but these were not guided by attachment theory.

Some investigators (e.g., Stevenson-Hinde, personal communication, July 1987) prefer to use the term parent–child bond or caregiving relationship rather

than parent–child attachment. These researchers contend that *attachment* as defined by Bowlby (1969) refers to a relationship in which the attachment figure is stronger and wiser than the attached person. Under this definition, a child can be attached to a parent, but the converse cannot obtain. However, we believe that a strong case can be made for using the term *attachment* in both senses. True, the provision of protection and security is complementary (not equal) to the seeking of protection and security, but there are striking emotional parallels. It is not only the infant who keeps tabs on the parent, and who becomes distressed upon separation; parents also keep a watchful eye on their infant, become alarmed when the infant's whereabouts are not known or the infant's well-being is endangered, and feel relieved when the infant is found or the danger past. These feelings are so compelling that the label *caregiving relationship* (suggested by Bowlby) seems somehow too pale. As one father remarked to us as he rescued his 2-year-old from the vicinity of a swimming pool: "Before we had a child, I didn't know what fear was." A statement by a mother belonging to the !Kung hunter-gatherer society of the Kalahari desert (Shostak, 1981) attests to the universality of such feelings:

> When I sit in the village and my children are playing around me, I don't worry. I just watch what they do. When I leave them behind and go gathering, I worry that they won't be well taken care of, especially if the only person in the village is there because she isn't well. (p. 106)

Although the parental side of attachment was not the primary focus of his interest, Bowlby did not neglect this topic altogether. In a brief section in his 1969 volume, he considers it in the context of discussing maternal retrieving behavior in mammals:

> Whilst maternal retrieving behavior is to be seen in its most elementary forms in non-human species, it is evident also in human mothers. In primitive societies a mother is likely to remain very near her infant, and almost always within eyeshot or earshot of him. The mother's alarm or the infant's distress will at once elicit action. In more developed communities the scene becomes more complex, partly because not infrequently a mother appoints someone to deputize for her for a shorter or longer part of the day. Even so, most mothers experience a strong pull to be close to their babies and young children. Whether they submit to the pull, or stand out against it depends on a hundred variables, personal, cultural and economic. (p. 241)

Bowlby further argued that, beyond infancy, the attachment relationship could best be characterized as a goal-corrected partnership between parent and child. In such a partnership, each member is able to see the world from the perspective of the other and to take that perspective into account in the negotiation of joint goals. This idea is supported by recent evidence that even tod-

dlers have some rudimentary role-taking ability (Bretherton & Beeghly, 1982). By 4 years of age the ability to negotiate plans regarding maternal departures is sufficiently well developed to have a significant influence on child behavior (Marvin & Greenberg, 1982). However, the parents' equally important contribution to the goal-corrected partnership has not yet been examined, although it is clear that individual differences in parental perspective taking must play a crucial role in the developing relationship.

In the study reported in this chapter we begin to explore the parental side of attachment through interviews in which we asked mothers to discuss their thoughts and feelings about their attachment relationship with a specific child. The theoretical basis for our investigation was Bowlby's account of the internationalization of attachment relations in infancy (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980).

PARENTAL ATTACHMENT AND THE CONCEPT OF "INTERNAL WORKING MODELS"

In discussing the *infant's* experience and representation of attachment relations, Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) proposed the concept of "internal working model." Internal working models of the environment and of the significant people in it are dynamic representations constructed through transactions with the world (for reviews and further development of these ideas see Bretherton, 1985, 1987, 1990).

An especially important *component* of an individual's working model of the world are working models of the attachment figure and the self. To quote Bowlby (1969):

> Starting, we may suppose, toward the end of the first year, and probably especially actively during his second and third year when he acquires the powerful and extraordinary gift of language, a child is busy constructing working models of how his mother and other significant persons may be expected to behave, how he himself may be expected to behave, and of how each interacts with all the others. Within the framework of these working models he evaluates his situation and makes his plans. And within the framework of the working models of his mother and himself he evaluates special aspects of his situation and makes his attachment plans. (p. 354)

According to Bowlby (1973, 1980), internal working models provide the basic framework for experiencing, interpreting and anticipating events in the world, including attachment-related events. For this reason, the healthy functioning of attachment relationships is crucially dependent on how valid and accessible to conscious awareness (vs. distorted and inaccessible) a child's internal models of self and attachment figure are (Bowlby, 1969). It is equally important that the child's developing working models of self and attachment figure(s) mesh

well with the parents' internal working models of self and child (Bretherton, 1987, in press). Yet so far, parents' internal working models of self as attachment figure in relation to a specific child have been assessed only indirectly, that is in relation to the parents' family of origin.

In a seminal study, Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy (1985) discovered that the quality of children's attachment to parents, as observed at 1 and 6 years of age, is impressively correlated with specific patterns of parental responses to a semistructured interview, the Berkeley Adult Attachment Interview (Main & Goldwyn, in press). This interview consists of a series of open-ended questions regarding parental recollections of childhood attachment figures, and the influence of these early attachment on the parents' own development and relationships. To analyze the interview, Main and Goldwyn (in press; see also Main et al., 1985) eschewed the more usual procedure of analyzing separate responses to each question. Instead, they carefully read and reread each interview transcript, and then evaluated the text as a whole. Their analysis revealed three major patterns of responding. First, parents of 6-year-olds classified as secure with them in infancy valued both attachment and autonomy, and seemed at ease when discussing the influence of attachment-related issues on their own development (whether or not they recalled a secure childhood). Second, parents of children who were classified as insecure-avoidant with them in infancy, dismissed and devalued attachment. They appeared to believe that early attachment experiences had little effect on their own development, and frequently claimed not to remember any incidents from childhood. Specific memories that emerged despite this denial were likely not to support the generalized (often highly idealized) descriptions of their parents. Third, parents of children previously classified as insecure-resistant seemed preoccupied with their early attachments. They recalled many specific, often conflict-ridden incidents about childhood attachments without being able to weave them into a consistent overall picture. In summary, both the dismissing and preoccupied parents found it difficult to discuss attachment relationships in an integrated way. Recently, a fourth major classification of infant–attachment (insecure-disorganized) has been identified by Main and Solomon (1990). Data from the Adult Attachment Interview showed that parents of such infants seemed to be struggling with unresolved issues concerning the loss of an attachment figure in childhood (see Main & Solomon, 1990). These results have been replicated in two other samples (Eichberg, 1987; Grossmann, Fremmer-Bombik, Rudolph, & Grossmann, in press).

On the basis of Main's (1985) findings with the Adult Attachment Interview, we reasoned that an interview focused on parents' attachment experiences with their own child should furnish us with material suitable for an analogous qualitative analysis. We also expected that findings from such an analysis would, like those of Main et al. (1985), be systematically related to observational measures of attachment. Consequently, we designed an in-depth, structured but

open-ended *Parent Attachment Interview*, in which we inquired about the relationship from an attachment-theoretical perspective. Although the primary intent was to examine the interview text in relation to individual differences in attachment quality, we decided to begin with a content analysis in order to gain some insight into the attachment-related issues that concern mothers of 2-year-olds. The subsequent qualitative analysis of individual differences among mothers relied on a scale of maternal sensitivity/insight developed by Biringen and Bretherton (elaborating on Biringen, 1988) which was applied to the transcribed interview texts as a whole. The theoretical basis of this scale derived from two sources: Findings showing (a) that a mother's ability to respond promptly and appropriately to her infant's signals is associated with the development of a secure infant–mother relationship (Ainsworth et al., 1978), and (b) that mothers of secure infants are able to discuss attachment issues with emotional openness and reflectiveness (Main et al., 1985). For validation purposes sensitivity/insight scores were compared with prior, concurrent, and later measures of attachment and with a variety of other attachment-relevant socioemotional variables.

METHOD

Sample

Participating in this research were 37 lower to upper middle-class families. Maternal education ranged from 12 to 22 years (M = 14.6 years). Most mothers were in their late 20s or early 30s (M = 29.3 years, range 20 to 36 years). The families were recruited into the study when the children were 18 months old. Names were obtained through birth announcements in the local newspaper. A letter of invitation describing the study was sent to the family, and was followed by a telephone call. Of those contacted, 80% agreed to participate.

Mothers and children (20 girls, 17 boys) were asked to take part in a two-phase longitudinal study of mastery motivation and its relation to attachment security at 18 and 25 months (Maslin, Bretherton, & Morgan, 1987). The project was later extended to include affect communication and the child's representation of attachment at 37 months (Bretherton et al., 1990). Twenty-nine families participated in this third phase of the study.

Procedure

A large body of data was collected when the children were 18, 25, and 37 months old. The centerpiece of this chapter is the parent attachment interview given to the mothers when the children were 25 months old, but other attachment-

related measures were also obtained. At 18 months, the Ainsworth Strange Situation was administered during one of two laboratory sessions. At 25 months, the mothers performed the Waters and Deane Attachment Q-sort after the interview session; at 37 months they performed the same Q-sort at home. In preparation for the final sorts, the mothers were asked to do a preliminary sort in the lab and were given a list of the Q-sort items to take home. This list was to serve as a basis for observing child behavior during the ensuing week. In addition, an attachment story completion task (Bretherton et al., 1990) was administered to the children in the laboratory at 37 months. This task consisted of five story beginnings enacted with small props and family figures. Security was assessed on the basis of the child's open, coherent responding to and benign resolution of the story issues (misbehavior, pain, fear, separation and reunion in the attachment relationship). Following this task, a separation–reunion procedure was conducted. This procedure consisted of a 3-minute episode, during which the child played in the presence of the tester, followed by a second 3-minute period, during which the child was alone while the tester left (''to get your Mommy''). Security classifications based on the reunion behaviors were performed by Cassidy, using a coding system for 3- to 5-year-olds developed by Cassidy, Marvin, and the MacArthur Attachment Work Group (1987).

The mother also filled out a variety of questionnaires during the home and laboratory visits at 18, 25, and 37 months. These included two child temperament scales, a marital questionnaire, a family questionnaire, a personality inventory, a maternal attitude survey, and a family of origin parenting assessment. The Colorado child temperament inventory (Rowe & Plomin, 1977) with scales for activity level, attention span, emotionality, sociability, and shyness, and the difficultness scale from the infant characteristics questionnaire (Bates, Freeland, & Lounsbury, 1979) were given at 18 months. The Spanier dyadic adjustment scale (Spanier, 1976) was administered at 18 and 25 months to assess marital satisfaction. At 25 months, the family adaptability and cohesion evaluation scale (FACESII; Olson, Bell, & Portner, 1983) was used to obtain information on family functioning. In addition, the mother filled out the Myers-Briggs type indicator (MBTI; a Jungian personality scale) at 18 months. The MBTI (Meyers, 1962) includes scales for extraversion versus introversion, thinking versus feeling, sensing versus intuition, and perceptiveness versus judging. The SUNY temperament, attitude and activity survey (Waters & Ridgeway, 1986) was also administered at 37 months. Interspersed amongst positive items, this survey contains a depression scale (adapted from the Beck depression inventory; Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961), and the interfering affects scale developed by Waters and Ridgeway as part of the larger scale. The latter assesses the degree to which anxiety and defensiveness intrude into an individual's capacity for enjoyment. The depression and interfering affects scales provided information about the mother's current emotional well-

being. Finally, we included the mother–father–peer scale (Epstein, 1983), with scales assessing parental acceptance–rejection and parental encouragement of independence in the mother's family of origin.

THE PARENT ATTACHMENT INTERVIEW

During the 25-months phase of the study, we invited the mothers to come to our laboratory for an interview to help us "find out what it is like to be a parent to your 2-year-old." Questions concentrated on a number of attachment-related issues, although other aspects of the relationship were also examined. An attempt was made to create a relaxed atmosphere by offering light refreshments in a comfortable living-room setting. The session lasted from 45 to 90 minutes (normally about 1 hour) and was audiotaped.

A standard sequence of questions with optional probes was used. Mothers were encouraged to describe one or more specific situations in answer to each question, not just to reply in general terms. No specific response categories were suggested. This was accomplished by phrasing the questions in terms of "Tell me about what happens when . . . ," "What do you do when X happens," "How is X different from or similar to Y."

First, by way of introduction, we asked about the mother's expectations of the baby during pregnancy, and from whom she had sought advice. Because the mother's bond to the infant predates the infant's attachment to the mother (Glogger-Tippelt, 1989), we asked about her thoughts and feelings at the baby's birth, and what the baby was like as a person during the first 2 months or so. We then inquired about her experiences with the 2-year-old toddler. This part of the interview began with a request to describe the toddler with five adjectives and then to elaborate on the reasons for choosing them. In further questions, we focused on emotional experiences that the dyad had shared, asking about enjoyable times, as well as situations that aroused anger, sadness, fear, pain, and empathy. These questions on emotion and emotion communication were included because of observational and interview findings linking open affect communication with secure attachment relationships (Escher-Graeub & Grossmann, 1983; Grossmann & Grossmann, 1984; Grossmann, Grossmann, & Schwan, 1986).

Direct questions about attachment issues focused on separations (bedtime, nighttime, and maternal absences) and on autonomy-related negotiations. Regarding the latter, we asked how the mother responded when the child was trying to do something she judged him or her unable to do and, conversely, how the mother responded when the child asked her to do something that he or she had already mastered.

In addition, we requested that the mother compare and contrast the child's relationships to mother and father. This was followed by a second comparison

question regarding similarities and differences between the mother's relationship with her own mother in childhood and her current relationship to her child. Finally, we asked the mother to share her thoughts about the child as an adolescent or adult.

Data Analysis

Audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Pauses were marked by dashes. The content analysis focused on maternal thoughts regarding particular attachment issues. It was primarily based on responses to specific questions, but whenever additional material pertinent to a topic was mentioned elsewhere in the interview, it was also taken into account. For example, bedtime issues were not only discussed during the bedtime question, but also tended to come up during earlier questions about emotional experiences. The first step of this analysis was carried out by two research assistants. It consisted of breaking the information down into grosser categories (e.g., what the mother said regarding positive and negative similarities in the cross-generational mother–child relationship, and what she said about positive and negative differences). The second step consisted in tabulating the response categories used by the mother herself. This tabulation was performed by the first author.

The global analysis was aimed at detecting individual differences in the quality of the relationship as seen from the mother's perspective. As previously noted, parents' ability to give coherent descriptions of their own attachment relations in childhood, as well as parental sensitivity in parent–infant interactions have been excellent discriminators between secure and insecure relationships (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Main et al., 1985). Building on these findings, we created a nine-point rating scale was created to assess the mother's sensitivity/insight concerning her relationship with the child.

High scores (6 or above) on the sensitivity/insight scale are awarded if the interview vividly conveys a mother's sensitive and appropriate responses to her child's communications (where sensitive and appropriate are defined within the framework of attachment theory), and documents her ability to reflect on her relationship with the child, as well as on her own and her child's behavior and personality. In applying the scale, it is important to assess whether the mother's general statements about child rearing and about the child's relationship with her and other family members are consistent with her specific descriptions of what actually happens.

Low scores (less than 5) are given if a mother talks about the "right" things to do, but then describes her own behavior in terms that are at variance with her general statements about child rearing (i.e., the interview documents low sensitivity as well as low insight). A mother may also fail to make obvious connections between her own and her child's behavior, or repeatedly express