

Family Conflict: The Adolescent Experience of
Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Argument

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my father, Frank Buzzetta, Ed.D., Psychologist, who passed away on my sister's 19th birthday, January 12, 1998, at the age of 55. His lifelong commitment to families and especially the Native American communities was an inspiration for me and my own dedication to families. And I also dedicate this work to my grandmother, Frances Buzzetta, who passed away on December 2, 2010, at the age of 93. She lived life to the fullest and had a profound impact on so many families and communities around the world. *Mi te manca, la gioia mia!!*

ABSTRACT

This study explored the embodied teen experience of parent-teen conflict and argument. Using a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach, data were collected from eight teens living within 150 miles of Minneapolis, MN. Teens self-identified as (a) living in a family with everyday conflict, (b) not seeing a psychologist or counselor, (c) not having been in any drug or alcohol treatment programs, (d) not knowing the researcher ahead of time, and (e) being between the ages of 13 to 19 at the time the interview took place. The interview data were unstructured conversations with teens that were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using a phenomenological text analysis procedure. From these data, the following themes emerged: (a) feeling powerless, small, devalued, and oppressed; (b) experiencing irritation, frustration, hypocrisy, pettiness, and defiance; (c) wanting freedom and autonomy and the battle for control; and (d) needing safe space and “me” time. Each theme and the whole embodied essence of this experience were interpreted through teens' as well as the researcher's lenses. The interpretations provide insight for teens, parents, and parent educators that may help improve parent-teen relationships and provide strategies to use in the classroom setting.

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION TO THE PHENOMENON, METHODS, PROCEDURES, AND PARTICIPANTS

I am walking down a path through a park, and, as I do, I see people interacting. To my right are two guys laughing and horsing around as they walk down the street. On the bench to the right of me is an older man who is tossing a few pieces of bread from his sandwich to the squirrel at his feet. He seems calm and content with feeding the squirrel and enjoying the sunshine. A little further down, I see a woman with a teen whom I believe to be her son. They seem upset and at odds with the serenity of the park. What are they saying? The woman is gesticulating wildly and sounds angry, and the teen is scowling, seems irritated, and appears to be mumbling under his breath. Were they arguing? What has created this tension between them, and how does each of them experience this moment? It is a scenario we have seen many times over, and it is one that has fascinated me for years. What is that teen experiencing in that moment?

To begin our journey, we need to understand the phenomenon of parent-teen conflict and argument as it has been described thus far in research. Also, we need to orient ourselves toward this phenomenon as we start down the path en route to the essence of this embodied experience. It is also important for us to consider the methodology and process that we draw on to reveal this experience as well as getting to know the teen participants themselves. This section will explore all of these aspects in an effort to set the stage for our discussion of the themes that came through in the essence of this embodied parent-teen conflict and argument experience as it is lived by teens.

Chapter 1: The Revealing of the Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Argument Phenomenon

What have other researchers, psychologists, educators, or other professionals revealed that helps us to come closer to the essence of parent-teen conflict and argument? Why is it important to look deeper and expand our perception of this phenomenon? This chapter will begin to reveal some of those pieces and help us bring together what we know about the phenomenon.

As psychologists, educators, and other professionals have come to realize, family conflict and family dysfunction are related to the development of problem behaviors in children and adolescents (Paradis, Reinherz, Giaconia, Berdslee, Ward, & Fitzmaurice, 2009; Van Doorn, Branje, & Meeus, 2008; Wissink, Deković, & Meijer, 2006). These behaviors can lead to further problems such as academic difficulty (Dotterer, Hoffman, Crouter, & McHale, 2007), social and relationship problems (Shomaker & Furman, 2009), involvement in criminal activity or delinquency (Wissink, Deković, & Meijer, 2006), and other antisocial behavior. We get a sense from media and other social networks that there is a rise of violence in today's society, and it leaves me wondering how unresolved conflict and argument might play into this and how it can affect our neighborhoods, our families, and even our classrooms.

More specifically, I wonder about the role of family conflict in relation to social violence. Violent acts often seem born from arguments that soon get out of control. Who hasn't heard of a crime of passion? Emotions are powerful and can exert a stronghold on our psyche. Families, especially, can fall victim to powerful emotions, degrade into violence, and be plagued by problem behaviors.

Family Conflict and Problem Behaviors in Children and Teens

As we look at family conflict more broadly, we begin to uncover a link to problem behaviors in children and adolescents. The relationship between family conflict and problem behaviors has been corroborated in earlier studies that explored this connection, as we will see. Embedded in these studies are persistent questions about the implication such conflict and argument has on society as a whole. In other words, it is not a new phenomenon, and we continue to wonder about it even today.

In one such study, Mechanic and Hansell (1989) conducted a longitudinal examination of 7th, 9th, and 11th graders of 19 public schools in 5 New Jersey communities. Their results suggest that family conflict had more negative effects on adolescents' well being over time than did separation or divorce. In addition, they found that "adolescents living in intact families with high conflict had significantly poorer well-being than those living in families of divorce with low conflict" (p. 105). Unfortunately, family conflict is not well defined in this study and could refer to parent-parent conflict, parent-child conflict, or child-child conflict. The study does not seem to specifically address parent-teen argument but seems to look more at the overall atmosphere of a family, especially one in which conflict is more often the norm. If one lives in a highly-conflicted environment, we can assume that arguments are more likely to crop up because of the inherent tensions and dynamics of these environments.

Another study conducted by David, Steele, Forehand, and Armistead (1996) corroborates the findings reported above. They found that general family conflict had more predictive power for subsequent internalizing and externalizing problems than did marital satisfaction or dissatisfaction. But once again, this is overall family conflict and

not specifically parent-teen conflict. It does, however, help us better understand the overall implications of conflict and argument on family development and potential dysfunction, but it still leaves one wondering about the specific experience of parent-teen conflict and its impact on the parent-teen relationship and on adolescent development.

Continuing in this broader perspective of family conflict, Mollerstrom, Patchner, and Milner (1992) studied 524 parents from 44 U.S. Air Force bases scattered across the continent and overseas. They found that the strongest link in their research was between general family conflict and the greater potential for abuse. In addition, family conflict and the lack of family cohesion, another layer to our puzzle, set in motion a circle of coercive interactions that increase the likelihood of child abuse. Intergenerationally, coercion can continue in a downward spiral as it is modeled and passed from parent to child.

Where the studies discussed above reveal some information about the hostile nature of a conflicted family environment and suggest the potential of negative outcomes for individuals living in these environment, several other studies highlight more specifically the connections among family conflict, family violence, and adolescent emotional and behavioral problems (Nelson, Hughes, Handal, Katz, & Searight, 1993; Shagle & Barber, 1993; Smetana, Yau, Restrepo, & Braeges, 1991; Thornburg, Hoffman & Remeika, 1991). The nature of the conflicted family environment seems to place individuals at greater risk later in life and there seems to be a definite connection between conflict, argument, and coercive relationships or exchanges. The teen experience begins to come to the surface but through the eyes of parents and adults; we are missing that all important teen perspective.

The studies cited thus far have revealed some of the more general aspects of family conflict and family conflict in relation to adolescent emotional and behavioral problems. By beginning to question the general phenomenon of family conflict, we can see how earlier studies move us in the direction of parent-child conflict and argument more specifically. These studies begin to shed light on the importance of studying the family conflict experience, but, as mentioned, they still leave us wondering about the specific nature of parent-teen conflict and the intrinsic argument that seems to be at the heart of the experience.

Parental Conflict and Hostility: Ties to Family Conflict and Teens' Experience

In a study similar to Mollerstrom et al. (1992) above, Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, and Simons (1994) bring to light the idea that high levels of spousal irritability, coupled with coercive exchanges over money matters, were associated with greater hostility in general by parents toward their children. Additionally, these hostile and coercive exchanges seemed to increase the likelihood of adolescent emotional and behavioral problems. If parents are more hostile toward their children, we could assume that there may also be a greater chance of parent-teen argument and conflict; however, such conflict and argument is not specifically highlighted in these studies. Again, our picture becomes clearer, but we are still missing important detail in the out-of-focus areas of our picture.

What else do we know of parental hostility in relation to the family unit? In a study by Benson, Buehler, and Gerard (2008), the likelihood that highly conflicted environments are more likely to breed argument and hostile exchanges comes through. The researchers tell us that:

Parents' hostility more strongly relates to harshness than any other parenting construct. One explanation is that anger and frustration engendered by interparental hostility take a toll on maternal patience. Frustration in the marital relationship then is released into aggression or harshness in the mother-adolescent relationship. A second potential explanation is that behaviors in the marital relationship extend into agonistic [*sic*] and harsh interactions in the parent-adolescent relationship through coercive cycles maintained through negative reinforcement (Patterson, 1982). A third possible explanation is that persistent interparental conflict creates a chronically stressful condition (Harold & Conger, 1997), which weakens the capacity to respond without harshness to adolescent misbehavior. (pp. 445-446)

We gain a sense of the conflicted environment with its stresses and tensions that may spill over into the parent-teen relationship and communication patterns.

If parental conflict and hostility spills over into the parent-teen relationship, how are those tensions and conflict felt by teens? A partial answer comes from De Goede, Branje, and Meeus (2009) who discovered that “adolescents who perceive many conflicts with their parents see them quite consistently as non-supportive power figures and this does not change throughout adolescence” (p. 86). But why do teens living in conflict see parents in this way?

Impact of Parent-Teen Relationships and Parenting Styles on Teen Identity Formation

One study (Berzonsky, Branje, & Meeus, 2007) that focused on two-parent families with 13-year-old teens explored identity formation and teens' perceptions of parent-teen relationships. Berzonsky et al. identify three identity-processing styles:

Late adolescents with a normative style are conscientious, committed, and goal directed, and they tend to function in a conforming, socially structured, closed fashion: Their behavior is regulated by internalized imperatives and expectations about how they should act (Berzonsky, 2003, 2004a; Dollinger, 1995; Jakubowski & Dembo, 2004; Soenens, Duriez, & Goossens, 2005). An informational style is associated with open-mindedness, high levels of commitment, autonomous self-regulation, and academic and emotional autonomy (Berzonsky, 1990, 2004a; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005; Dollinger, 1995; Jakubowski & Dembo, 2004; Soenens, Berzonsky, Vansteenkiste, Beyers, & Goossens, 2005). A diffuse-avoidant

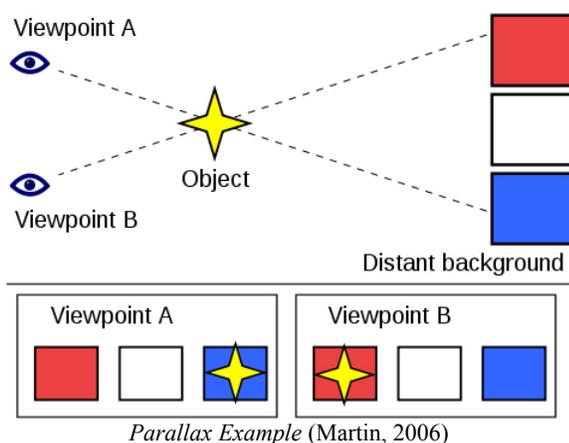
identity style has been found to be negatively correlated with commitment, autonomy, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and self-regulation (Berzonsky, 1994, 2004a; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005; Jakubowski & Dembo, 2004; Soenens, Berzonsky, et al., 2005). (p. 326)

In the end, Berzonsky et al. found that a *normative identity style* “was associated with positive parent-adolescent relations, including open, trusting communication and a willingness for adolescents to disclose information to their parents” (p. 338). This suggests that when teens trust their parents and have open communication with them that parents are less likely to feel it necessary to control behavior. In addition, Berzonsky et al. tell us that, with a *diffuse-avoidance style*, teens perceived their parents “as being low in trust, openness, and supervision” (p. 338); there seemed to be much more overly permissive parenting practices with limited parental supervision. And, an *informational style* was associated with “parental psychological control (i.e., being manipulative and intruding on an adolescent’s plans and goals)” (p. 339); these teens may perceive their parents as making “intrusive attempts to monitor and keep track of their activities and whereabouts” (p. 339).

Identity formation in teens is an important factor to consider when exploring parent-teen conflict and argument, and this study touches on the impression teens have about their parents and how this relates to teen behavior and identity. Such studies suggest a reciprocal relational impact of parents and teens on one another. How do parents and teens impact and color the views of the other? Berzonsky et al. might touch on the perceptions teens have, but what about the emotions, feelings, energy, and deeper lived experiences that are connected with the actual perceptions? Where is the deeper teen perspective?

How do teens live conflict and argument, and what unique elements can only be seen through their vantage point and camera lens? Such questions suggest the need for parallax and perspective taking. In the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Online (2010), parallax is the:

Difference or change in the apparent position or direction of an object as seen from two different points; (*Astron.*) such a difference or change in the position of a celestial object as seen from different points on the earth's surface or from opposite points in the earth's orbit around the sun.



Using parallax in relation to the parent and teen perspectives, we may be able to create a more well-rounded perspective for both adults and teens.

All the studies thus far suggest that a conflicted family environment itself is connected to a greater propensity for parent-teen argument and subsequent adolescent problems. It is an issue that continues to touch families today. Other studies are beginning to reveal why it is important to understand teens' as well as parents' experience of conflict and argument. As Bogenschneider and Pallock (2008) point out, "our understanding of parent-adolescent relationships may be incomplete if we rely on a single reporter to represent a relationship property" (p. 1025).

Just as astronomers use parallax to measure distances in space and expand our understanding of those celestial bodies, our use of the parallax concept can also provide similar data and expanding perspective. Unfortunately, it seems so many studies focus on parents' perspective or are written from parents' viewpoints while fewer studies seem to look at the teens' perspective or experience. Many times the teen voice is buried, and we need to hear that voice to gain a more complete understanding of this phenomenon.

It would seem that highlighting the specific teen experience of this moment may reveal some of the missing details of our overall understanding of families and parent-teen relationships, and it would allow us to build on prior research and create greater depth in our understanding. It's not unlike adjusting a camera lens to reveal the detail in the fuzzy, out-of-focus bits in our viewfinder—bringing life into focus. Questions that continue to linger:

- Do we have a clear understanding of the embodied teen experience?
- Do teens have much voice in research?
- Where do we lack depth and understanding in our exploration of family conflict?
- What are we left wanting to know?

Summary

What has become unequivocally clear from this body of research is that family conflict has an impact on teens and their families and that parent-teen conflict is interrelated with the perception of openness and support, or lack thereof, within the family. What is not clear is the full embodied nature of the experience of parent-teen conflict and argument and, specifically, the teen experience of this conflicted

relationship. To know the essence of teens' experience, we need to be connected to their living of this conflict.

As I read the quantitative studies above, several questions surfaced in my mind. What emotions rise up during these moments, and what passions drive these adolescents? Can mere statistics truly capture the richness of such an experience? It seems that passion and emotion play a major role in the life of an argument between parents and adolescents. In trying to understand an individual's unique experience of arguing, can methods that try to quantify human experience reveal the interplay between all the elements of an argument and the rich complexity of such human interrelationships? Are we able to see the tensions between rationality and irrationality, between autonomy and dependence, and between individual and family contained in this single lived experience? Are we able to understand how teens embody this experience? What is it like for teens to live arguments with their parents?

While many of the studies reported above have demonstrated how argument and conflict can lead to problems later in life, other studies have shown that the predisposition of a family toward open communication, trust, and affection more likely lends itself to teens who experience positive adolescent development, positive adaptation, and positive identity formation (Berzonsky et al., 2007; Beveridge & Berg, 2007; Crockett, Brown, Russell, & Shen, 2007; Heller, Robinson, Henry, & Plunkett, 2006). It also seems that the nature of the conflict itself, the ability to resolve such conflict, and the manner in which resolution takes place also have varying impacts on the teen experience and perception of conflict and argument (Branje, van Doorn, van der Valk, & Meeus, 2009).

From all of this, it appears that hostile and coercive exchanges increase the likelihood of adolescent emotional and behavioral problems (Conger et al., 1994; Paradis, Reinherz, Giaconia, Berdslee, Ward, & Fitzmaurice, 2009; Van Doorn, Branje, & Meeus, 2008; Wissink, Dekovic, & Meijer, 2006). In addition, family conflict is more disruptive to child functioning than is marital conflict (David et al., 1996). Likewise, many adolescent disorders (mood, conduct, health) appear to be highly correlated to family conflict (Lewandowski & Palermo, 2009; Mechanic & Hansell, 1989; Nelson et al., 1993; Shagle & Barber, 1993; Yu et al., 2006), and family conflict is a foundation to coercive interactions and abusive behavior (Benson, Buehler, & Gerard, 2008; Mollerstrom et al., 1992). Finally, there appears to be heterogeneity in families experiencing family conflict (Willett, Ayoub, & Robinson, 1991), and we need to explore family conflict in greater detail to understand this heterogeneity and the different experiences. What is missing from the equation that might have been overlooked in these studies? It is the embodied teen experience that is not captured by statistics or by talking to parents. We need to turn toward the source and understand this teen experience.

Chapter 2: Turning Toward the Phenomenon

What draws us to this topic of parent-adolescent conflict and argument? Is it memories from our own past? Is it the struggles we see families facing in the everyday world? How often do we see frustration in the eyes of parents and teens and hear their cries that say, “Why can’t they get it?!” For many of us, these questions strike a chord that resonates and feels familiar. But why? Why do we continue to wonder? What hasn’t been answered that makes us wonder and want to know more? What connects each of us personally to such perplexity? And, finally, how can we uncover the answers and excavate below the surface to reveal what is elusive and hidden from view?

Personal Connection to the Phenomenon

From a personal standpoint, I have a female family member who has had many setbacks in life that seem to originate in her adolescence. She lived in a highly conflicted family environment characterized by a great deal of turmoil. She was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Conduct Disorder (CD), and Major Depressive Disorder. She was prescribed methylphenidate for the ADD and Prozac for the depression. With the combination of family conflict and the emotional and behavior disorders, she dropped out of school and has been unable to maintain regular employment or support herself. She has used illicit drugs, gave birth to two sons without having the resources to provide for them, and has been under investigation by Child Protective Services for neglect. The father of her first child went to prison for making terroristic threats to police, and the father of the second child has been unstable and unreliable. It seems that the conflict and emotional and behavioral turmoil that was bubbling underneath since early childhood finally reached the breaking point during my relative’s

teen years, and this seemed to have started her on a downward spiral from which it has been nearly impossible for her to break free.

Why did this happen? What set this chain of life events into motion? Was there something about the way my relative experienced conflict that persists into adulthood? Could we have done anything to prevent this? And how much did parent-teen conflict play a part in this? Although many of these issues individually may play a part, I have seen this happen all too often in others, and it makes me wonder about the phenomenon of parent-teen conflict. I need to better understand the uniqueness of the adolescent's experience, and I need to turn myself toward this phenomenon more fully.

What Is Conflict?

What are some ways in which we understand the concept of conflict? One of the more obvious ways to exhume this understanding is begin with a dictionary definition. In looking at the OED Online (2010), I found these definitions of the word conflict:

Conflict, *n.*—A mental or spiritual struggle within a man [or woman]; the clashing of opposed principles, statements, arguments, etc.; *Psychol.* the opposition, in an individual, of incompatible wishes or needs of approximately equal strength; also, the distressing emotional state resulting from such opposition

Conflict, *v.*—To fight, contend, do battle; to contend, strive, struggle with; (of interests, opinions, statements, feelings, etc.) to come into collision, to clash; to be at variance, be incompatible. (Now the chief sense.)

As an adult, I find myself thinking about conflict as a necessity of everyday human existence. The word conflict can evoke fear in many people because of the armed conflicts and wars our societies have had to endure. However, conflict can also be something much more benign and sometimes a catalyst for improved relations. As social creatures living in communities, we use crisis and conflict to negotiate an intersubjective

understanding of the world around us and to solve mutual problems. Conflict allows us to share opposing viewpoints and to share what knowledge we have to support our viewpoint. Together we can examine this knowledge and potentially create new understandings; together we can grow.

In my mind, there are two forms that conflict may take. Constructive conflict requires each side (individual or group) to assume a reflective stance toward the other and to allow an open dialogue to develop. Destructive conflict, in contrast, seems to result from neither side being willing to consider or reflect upon the other and to result in a refusal to engage in dialogue, engaging in one-sided monologues instead. There is a reciprocal back-and-forth nature to the constructive conflict while destructive conflict lacks that reciprocation. Constructive conflict implies growth and forward movement; destructive conflict suggests more stagnation and decay.

In order to grow and learn, we must be willing to take certain risks in life and uncover new meanings, and we must overcome our fears. As with other things in life, we need to risk being in conflict with others to grow as a society. In any conflict, there are risks of violence and a breakdown in communication; there is a potential for either constructive or destructive conflict. From my own personal experiences, it seems that those individuals who are able to maintain openness and engage in reflective dialogue will experience more successful conflict resolution and, thus, the conflict will likely be constructive. On the one hand, I assume that adults, by nature, have had more opportunities to explore, practice, and master the problem-solving and reflective skills needed for successful conflict resolution. On the other hand, I assume that teens have had less opportunity to master these skills, and they may not have reached a

developmental level that would allow them to engage as reflectively. This places greater responsibility on the adults to mediate that open exchange by tapping into their greater stores of overall experience.

What Is Adolescence?

Before entering into an exploration of the adolescent world, it would be helpful to consider the problematic term adolescence itself and uncover its history. What does this expression *adolescence* mean, and what are the forces at play within the context of adolescence? Our modern concept of adolescence seems to be a distinct life stage that may have been shaped by major social changes inherent in industrialization and technological advances. It has been influenced by the structure of society, government, cultural ideologies, and economic pressures. Each force exerted a varying amount of pressure at any given time period following the development of society as a whole. Many researchers discussed below have taken on the role of determining what the strongest of these influences was in each of the major eras. It is useful for us to look at some of these results when examining the current definition of adolescence to understand how this definition came to be.

Many researchers and professionals claim that adolescence was non-existent until the industrial revolution; other research has suggested that this may not be the case. In her research, Hanawalt (1992) addresses the question of adolescence as a life stage in the Middle Ages and into the modern period, and she criticizes the claims made by Philippe Ariès and others who denied that the medieval period had an adolescent life phase. Hanawalt states, “Those wishing to reserve the word (adolescence) for the modern period should consider that medieval society also did not have a word for family and yet had

nuclear, extended, and stem families” (p. 342). In addition, she states that “the European medieval world certainly recognized and defined adolescence. It also had a number of formal and informal mechanisms, such as apprenticeship or squirehood, for noting its existence as a life phase” (p. 342). Finally, Hanawalt points out that “the definition of the life stage varies with the historical period under investigation, with the urban and rural setting, and with the social and economic status of the individuals labeled adolescent” (p. 343).

On a similar note, Chojnacki (1992) discusses adolescence and gender in renaissance Venice. In particular, he concentrates on the patrician society between 1300 and 1540, a social and economic level similar to our upper-middle class, and he defines adolescence in this era. His research distinguishes adolescence as a social and biological phenomenon and ties the two aspects together. Chojnacki also emphasizes the strong demarcation between males and females with regard to (a) the length of adolescence, (b) the age at which adulthood begins, and (c) the career choices available to each. He states that:

Male adolescents appear to have been gradually weaned away from rambunctious youth into conformist adulthood through a careful, gradual process with publicly ordered phases marked by ritual observance. In seemingly glaring contrast, women were directed early, definitively, and unconsultedly into the private sphere, there to bear the children and follow the authority of husbands considerably older and sanctioned in their domestic patriarchy by groomed participation in the government of the Venetian state. (p. 386)

Chojnacki demonstrated that many of the modern ideas about adolescence for both genders are more similar to the patrician male developmental process than the female developmental process. And while the idea of adolescence, though possibly unnamed as such, did exist in this time period, our modern concept of adolescence is likely to differ

because of the changes society has gone through since this era. We can see how, in the United States, the demarcation between genders has closed significantly in modern times when compared to Venetian or other medieval or renaissance European societies.

For a balanced, well-rounded description of the adolescent life phase, we turn to Modell and Goodman (1990) who address this issue over the period of history from about the renaissance through present day. They discuss the many forces active in each era, and they demonstrate the growth of adolescence as a distinct life stage. The importance of property, family, and inheritance is stressed in the early modern period, and economic productivity, self-government, self-restraint, and self-will are stressed in the industrial era. Modell and Goodman also discuss how industrialization changed the requirements for employment to include more highly skilled laborers as well as stronger individuals. They state, “Increases in the capitalization of industry rendered the labor of sometimes inattentive young workers risky and potentially costly. But new openings were created by the growth of retail and service businesses — jobs for messengers, for instance” (p. 112). Finally, Modell and Goodman point out that “Euro-American society in and after the Renaissance evolved a special status for young people that gave modest recognition to this period as one of preparation for adulthood” (p. 118).

In Renaissance Europe, many of the lower classes were occupied with agricultural production and developed strong family ties in an agrarian society. Children were treated as miniature adults and played an important economic role in the family (Klein, 1990; Modell & Goodman, 1990). As children became older, they were often sent to another family to complete the transition into adulthood by learning their life role in a service environment and were sent away to lessen intrafamilial conflict (Johnson, 1990; Modell

& Goodman, 1990). In this sense, adolescence was marked by a rite of passage that served to prepare the youth for adulthood.

For the middle and upper classes, adulthood was often associated with marriage, inheritance, and the ability to become head of the household. Due to the roles that men and women played in the patriarchal society, gender was significant in determining when adult status was attained. Females generally married much younger than males—anywhere from 10 to 18 years old (Chojnacki, 1992). Males were expected to wait until they were about 25 to 30 years old. Marriage was considered central to and began the passage to female adulthood whereas marriage for males completed the long passage into adulthood. Female adulthood was based on reproduction; male adulthood was based on social function.

During the industrial revolution, society moved from an agrarian society to an increasingly industrial one. Along with this transition came major shifts in the structure of the family and its role in society. The family realm became increasingly private and was more and more the center for moral instruction. Children were increasingly thought of as priceless rather than useful (Modell & Goodman, 1990).

With the change from an agrarian to an industrial base, there was an increase in urbanization (Southcott, 2003) that led to changes in the family structure. Parents were less likely to work at home and were more likely to travel longer distances to work in factories and other businesses. Jobs became more technical in nature and required more training. Competition of adults and youth for jobs also became prevalent. Children, especially adolescents, were often left to fend for themselves (Modell & Goodman, 1990);

Ginzberg, 1977; Southcott, 2003; Steinberg, 1993). In his writings, G. Stanley Hall talks about the impact of these trends on adolescents:

In all civilized lands, criminal statistics show two sad and significant facts: First, that there is marked increase of crime at the age of twelve to fourteen, not in crimes of one, but of all kinds, and that this increase continues for a number of years.... The second fact is that the proportion of juvenile delinquents seems to be everywhere increasing and crime is more and more precocious. (Hall, 1904, p. 325)

Juvenile crime shows thus the great difficulty which youth finds in making adjustment to the social surroundings, and so far as the law takes cognizance of it, it very often begins as the outcrop of the vagrant instinct which the requirements of the modern school bring out in strong light. (p. 333)

Industrial education is now imperative for every nation that would excel in agriculture, manufacture, and trade, not only because of the growing intensity of competition, but because of the decline of the apprentice system and the growing intricacy of the processes, requiring only the skill needed for livelihood. (Hall, 1912, p. 29)

It was progressive education that many (Dewey, 1899/1981; Hall, 1904, 1912; Mead, 1934) considered an answer to the changing face of society. “Unlike the traditional method of teaching by rote and regimentation, the progressives of the Child Study movement sought to discover what children themselves thought and felt” (Savage, 2007, p. 68).

Oppressive, stereotyped, and ultra-conservative social institutions—like church—which by their more or less rigid and inflexible unprogressiveness crush or blot out individuality or discourage any distinctive or original expressions of thought and behavior in the individual selves or personalities implicated in and subjected to them, are undesirable but not necessarily outcomes of the general social process of experience and behavior. There is no necessary or inevitable reason why social institutions should be oppressive or rigidly conservative, or why they should not rather be, as many are, flexible and progressive, fostering individuality rather than discouraging it” (Mead, 1934, pp. 262-263).

We are apt to look at the school from an individualistic standpoint, as something between teacher and pupil, or between teacher and parent. That which interests us most is naturally the progress made by the individual child of our acquaintance, his normal physical development, his advance in ability to read, write, and figure,

his growth in the knowledge of geography and history, improvement in manners, habits of promptness, order, and industry—it is from such standards as these that we judge the work of school. And rightly so. Yet the range of the outlook needs to be enlarged. What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy. All that society has accomplished for itself it puts, through agency of the school, at the disposal of its future members. All its better thoughts of itself it hopes to realize through the new possibilities thus opened to its future self. Here individualism and socialism are at one. Only by being true to the full growth of all the individuals who make it up, can society by any chance be true to itself. And in the self-direction thus given, nothing counts as much as the school, for, as Horace Mann said, “Where anything is growing, one former is worth a thousand re-formers.” (Dewey, 1899, pp. 19-20)

Social change impacts not only how we understand the concept of adolescence but also how we view the role of schools, education, and society in helping to shape the teen and his or her identity. That battle for progressive education and the shaping of individuals continues even today and is significant in helping us to understand the embodied teen experience.

Without clear direction, age-based groups formed on the streets to cope with the ever increasing amount of free-time with which youths were faced.

Gulick has studied the propensity of boys from thirteen on to consort in gangs, do “dawsies” and stumps, get into scrapes together, and fight and suffer for one another. The manners and customs of the gang are to build shanties or “hunkies,” hunt with sling shots, build fires before huts in the woods, cook their squirrels and other game, play Indian, build tree-platforms, where they smoke or troop about some leader, who may have an old revolver. (Hall, 1912, p. 224).

Partially in response to the developing gang problems, child labor laws were passed and mandatory education extended as a way of lessening the number of children in direct competition with adults as well as reducing the amount of idle time (Steinberg, 1993).

Institutions, such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, were created apart from the family to help deal with the problem of idle youth and to prepare them for adulthood (Hall,

1912; Macleod, 1983). The schools and social arenas of youth became increasingly age-segregated (Modell & Goodman, 1991), and our current understanding of adolescence is similarly segregated into the concepts of pre-adolescence, early adolescence, or late adolescence as is demonstrated by our school system—elementary school, middle school, and high school.

The picture of adolescence in the modern post-industrial era is quite different from that of other eras. Our youth spend a longer time in the adolescent life stage, and the purpose of adolescence has changed as well (Steinberg, 1993). With the advent of the Progressive Era and progressive education (Dewey, 1899; Mead, 1934), adolescence was no longer viewed simply as a process of preparing the youth for their particular station in life; it has become a period of exploration where each has the opportunity to try on many different hats before choosing a specific life path.

Schools have also taken on a very important role in the development of children. Many of our societal norms are taught and conveyed in this arena, and preparation for future adult roles often takes place here. Children spend a large portion of their time together in school and its age-segregated hierarchy. A high school education is considered virtually mandatory for transition into adulthood, and a post-high school education is becoming even more necessary to compete in our highly technical workforce. Our increasingly technical career choices have played a major role in lengthening the adolescent period by necessitating more preparation and experience, and schools have become the milieu in which this preparation and experience takes place compared to the apprenticeship of eons past.

Adolescents are working more now than they did in the past several decades (Ginzberg, 1977; Steinberg, 1993). They generally hold near-minimum-wage jobs requiring little experience or training. Unlike teens of the bygone days, wages earned in our era generally are not used to help support the family but to purchase luxury items and for activities (Steinberg, 1993). In addition, most adolescents attend school and work versus one or the other. It is important to point out that this phenomenon is more prevalent in the United States than in many other countries.

From a developmental standpoint, the adolescent phenomenon of today places greater stress on an individual than may have previously been experienced. Earlier historical periods had adolescents following specific life paths; however, the youth of today are faced with a wider array of choices and opportunities. This makes the preparation for adulthood much more difficult. How does one prepare an individual for adulthood when his or her career choice is relatively unknown?

The prospect of making career decisions can often be overwhelming to adolescents. Also the increasing length of adolescence as well as the lack of a rite of passage creates ambiguous boundaries between adolescence and adulthood that are often confusing to both adolescents and adults. Boundary ambiguity also makes it more difficult for individuals to be recognized as full adults. In what ways do teens experience the ambiguous nature of modern adolescence, and does this contribute to the conflict and arguments that they live through with their parents? How has the parent-teen relationship changed as the structure of society changed?

As we look more closely at specific changes in society, it seems that the trend toward working and going to school allows adolescents to live above their actual means.

Thus, when they establish independence from their parents, adolescents are often ill prepared to handle the economic burden of supporting themselves. With their income, teens have focused on luxury and want rather than focusing on support and need. This places our youth at greater risk of economic failure and life-long poverty. In addition, employment often competes with schools as the main context for socializing youth, thus placing the preparation of youth from the hands of skilled teachers into those of corporations. This could represent a major shift in social ethics and morals. Will they learn to live cooperatively or competitively, and how will this affect our societies? How does cooperation and/or competition impact parent-teen relationships? We have uncovered some of the impact family has on a parent-teen relationship, and we begin to reveal how greater society may also impact that relationship.

From the various studies discussed above, we are able to see some of the historical transformation adolescence followed in becoming a distinct life stage. It is evident that major social, political, and cultural change alters our view of childhood and adolescence to fit with the needs of adult society. Although adolescence has existed in some form since at least the Renaissance, the modern conception of adolescence demonstrates a more pronounced life stage. However, as distinct as it is, adolescents of today experience greater ambiguity in the boundaries between adolescence and adulthood. They experience age boundaries in some areas, such as law and government; in other areas, such as entering the work force and establishing independence from parents, it is more dependent upon their own personal readiness to move forward. These age discrepancies and teens' readiness, or lack thereof, create discord in establishing autonomy and personal identity, and such discord must spill over into the parent-teen

relationship. It seems that adults and teens today may hold differing views of when adulthood begins and what delineates the boundary between these two life phases. When should independence and freedom from parents come to pass, and what is that experience like?

It may be important for us to consider the social ramifications of these trends and to reconsider the trends of the past when we think about the future. If we take time to consider the historic and social changes that have occurred, we may be able to gain a better understanding of how they impact the parent-teen relationship and how they figure into parent-teen conflict and arguments. Similarly, we might want to ask ourselves questions that will not only impact parents and teens but also whole communities: What direction do we want to take in our schools and in our expectations of youth? What labor policies do we want to institute to help ease our children into adulthood? In addition, it may be beneficial for us to consider the definition of adolescence in other cultures, thus expanding an understanding of our own culture from a world viewpoint. Finally, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the future is always in a state of flux and that the redefinition of and shift in the various life stages occur to fulfill the needs of society as a whole. We need to better understand the teen experience in order to understand what it means to be an adolescent in our society.

Interestingly, the terms *youth*, *adolescents*, *teens*, *young people*, and the like have often been used interchangeably. However the problem with this practice is that these terms are not necessarily interchangeable from the perspective of each individual. Each term holds both positive and negative connotations, a history of its own, and the accumulated baggage that may come with that history. Since I come from the field of

parent education, I have chosen to mostly use the term *teen* as it is the most accessible term understood by parents and is a term frequently used in parenting literature. By doing so, parents may better understand the ideas embedded within these writings; they may be better equipped to connect with the embodied teen experience and to look through a teen's eyes. The term *young people* may be preferred by the youth of today, but this term is seldom used in parenting literature and may lose the impact currently afforded by term *teen*.

Due to the overwhelming amount of literature on how (adult) society views adolescents, it is exceedingly important to understand the experience as lived by youth in order to develop programs that respect their feelings, difficulties, and needs. Once again, the question still lingers about the embodied teen experience that is not captured by statistics or by talking to parents, thus highlighting our need to turn toward the source and understand the teen experience through his or her eyes. As Gadamer (1966/1976), tells us:

Thus what is established by statistics seems to be a language of facts, but which questions these facts answer and which facts would begin to speak if other questions were asked are hermeneutical questions. Only a hermeneutical inquiry would legitimate the meaning of these facts and thus the consequences that follow from them. (p. 11)

In other words, that which is missing from statistics can be uncovered with hermeneutics and phenomenology, and it is with such a perspective that we can unearth deeper meaning in the embodied experience of parent-teen conflict and argument.

Research Question

As we can see from the research and the personal example above, family conflict is a major risk factor to adolescent well-being. In my observations, there are many other

families who experience conflict and argument similarly, and it would be beneficial to both families and researchers to better understand the phenomenon of family conflict and argument. It seems that adolescents and their parents experience conflict and arguments differently and hold different meanings of what conflict or argument is. Also, because parents are a child's first teachers, we need to help parents understand changes in the parent-child relationship, how that relationship is influenced by external social, cultural, and political forces, and how children understand this relationship. My research proposes to shed light on one aspect of that relationship, namely parent-teen conflict and the associated argument within this conflicted relationship. The central research question for this study is: For teens, what is the embodiment of the conflicted parent-teen relationship, and its associated argument, as teens live it?

As adults and parents, turning ourselves toward the other's experience of such a phenomenon could ultimately clarify some of the ambiguity inherent in the teen's transition to adulthood and its effect on the parent-teen relationship. Both conflict and the associated argument are dialogical in nature whether it is between two individuals or with oneself. Knowing the other in this dichotomy brings new meaning of the experience to both.

Methodology Selection

Using a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach, this study intends to give voice to the teen in the phenomenon of parent-teen conflict and its associated argument.

Hermeneutic methodology, itself, is an interpretation of text and encompasses the use of etymology and semiotics within its core. Consequently, I will use a semiological and etymological examination of the language we use in relation to this experience and the

language used by these teens when describing their life experiences as well as within the teen culture itself. As van Manen (1997) has said:

Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the “texts” of life, and semiotics is used here to develop a practical writing or linguistic approach to the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics. (p. 4)

Phenomenology, hermeneutics, and semiotics thus complement one another from a methodological standpoint. By incorporating semiotics and etymology in a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach, we can uncover meanings that otherwise might have been overlooked.

Understanding the Research Methodology

When speaking of phenomenology, and specifically hermeneutic-phenomenology, it is important to understand its goals, conception of knowledge, explication of prejudice and subjectivity, basic methodology, and processes of validation. These aspects of the methodology will be described in this section.

The basic goal of phenomenology is to develop a deeper understanding of life as it is lived. It seeks to reconnect us to those meanings ascribed to everyday life events. Many researchers have written about the goals and aims of phenomenological research (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982; Brown, 1989; Dahlberg, Drew, & Nyström, 2001; Gadamer, 1966/1976; Heidegger, 1927/1962; Hultgren, 1989; Husserl, 1913/1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1947/1964, 1962/1967; van Manen, 1997). Bredo and Feinberg (1982) state that “the object of an interpretation is. . . to make something clear or coherent that was previously unclear or incoherent” (p. 124). van Manen (1997) mentions that “phenomenology aims

at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences”

(p. 9). Likewise Hultgren (1989) tells us:

Phenomenology attends to the world as we experience it in everyday life. Simply interpreted, it can be said that phenomenology aims to come to a deeper understanding of what persons go through as they conduct their day-to-day life in the language of everyday life. (p. 50)

Phenomenological research tries to describe an experience from the point of view of the experiencer, and in the process, it hopes to achieve awareness of different ways of thinking and acting in its search for new possibilities. (p. 51)

Simply stated, Hultgren wants to impress upon the reader that, by understanding the experience of everyday life, it is possible to achieve a greater awareness of the world and open new windows onto that world. Phenomenology provides us an opportunity to explore a new territory of human experience, an opportunity to explicate that which was inexplicable.

Gadamer (1966/1976) extends this thought one step further when speaking about the nature of prejudice:

Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us. This formulation certainly does not mean that we are enclosed within a wall of prejudices and only let through the narrow portals those things that can produce a pass saying, “Nothing new will be said here.” Instead we welcome just that guest who promises something new to our curiosity. (p. 9)

We all prejudge in the immediate experience of the world, but our ability to look beyond this into the embodiment of the experience, the lived experience that reveals something new, is the crux of hermeneutics and phenomenology. We recognize our preunderstandings, but we look for more and remain curious about the possibilities.

In relation to the views of reality as objective or subjective, phenomenological researchers contend that reality is subjective. How one perceives the world and its various truths is based upon one's cultural and historic traditions. Brown (1989) states:

What is interpreted has a knowing subject as its author, and the relationship between interpreter and author is one of subject to subject rather than one of subject to object. Hermeneutic experience is not monological as is empirical science; it is dialogical. (p. 274)

The interpreter stands in history and . . . he or she enters hermeneutic experience with certain preunderstandings. . . . knowledge gained through the hermeneutic experience is socially and morally relevant to everyday life, and value neutrality is impossible. (p. 274)

Objectivity in interpretation is secured only by reflecting upon the connection between the subject (author or interpreter) and the object of interpretation in the context of historical influence. . . . interpretation requires a dialogical relation with others, with the past, or with a strange culture and . . . language and tradition are key elements in interpretation. . . . the interpreter approaches his or her task with certain preunderstandings and . . . interpretation changes those to enhance his or her own self-understanding as well as that of persons who benefit (as readers or listeners) from the rational knowledge produced by the interpretation. (p. 275)

From this, we can see that Brown emphasizes the impossibility of neutrality due to the researcher's own prejudices and the research subject's connection with the cultural and historic traditions within which they exist. But as Gadamer (1966/1976) has told us, this is not a problem when we remain curious and when we realize that all experience holds new meanings if we remain open to it.

The values and truths these subjects hold are reflections of the subjectivity of culture and tradition. True objectivity can only be achieved by transcending our limitation of human existence and leaving behind our history, culture, society, and all such preunderstandings. As Dahlberg et al. (2001) state, such pure transcendence is impossible to attain. However, in hermeneutic-phenomenology we come nearer to such transcendent openness by developing intersubjective agreement between the author, the

interpreter, and the text, thereby taking into account the elements of society that influence our interpretations.

We as phenomenological researchers must become fully aware of our own preunderstandings and prejudices as they become subjectively present in the interpretation of others' experiences. By fully acknowledging our prior conceptions, we are better able to keep those conceptions at bay when conducting interpretive research and to remain open and curious. As Hultgren (1989) states:

Prejudices constitute our preunderstandings which have been historically conditioned as we stand always within a tradition. . . . because of our historicity, we cannot fully transcend the prejudices of the tradition to which we belong, nor can we evaluate the prejudices according to the independent criteria of reason. (p. 48)

Our prejudices will always play a role in interpretation; however, being aware of them will help to minimize their influence and will reveal other truths.

Another extension of subjectivity in phenomenological research hinges on the view that knowledge is multidimensional versus unidimensional. Brown (1990) has hinted to this effect in her statements above. She further states that "the background knowledge (lifeworld) by which people understand the meaning of an expression and negotiate common definitions of their situation is multidimensional" (p. 276). On a similar vein, Polkinghorne (1983) highlights a common view of many phenomenologists:

He [Heidegger] maintained that to be human is to be interpretive. Interpretation, then, is not a tool for knowledge; it is the way human beings are. All cognitive attempts to develop knowledge are but expressions of interpretation, and experience itself is formed through interpretation of the world. Being human is a laying-open of what is hidden: we are beings who approach ourselves with the hermeneutic question "What does it mean to be?" (p. 224)

And, thus, “in Heidegger we come to a point where hermeneutics is linked with phenomenology” (Hultgren, 1989, p. 45). Knowing and understanding are united in questioning what it means to be—in the world, human, and alive. Thus, not only is knowledge multidimensional, it is also the essence of human life and human experiences. Experience breeds knowledge; knowledge breeds understanding.

The methodology of phenomenology is based on a principal of going to the root of everyday human experiences and developing a deep understanding of those experiences. It is a moving from the natural standpoint of mundane, everyday living to a phenomenological standpoint of turning toward lived experience in an intentional, directed openness. This openness brings us closer to the essence of the phenomenon, creates new understanding, and reveals to us that which was hidden. This is accomplished through many stratagems, but uncovering these essences in the experience is paramount. Hultgren (1989) tells us:

In conducting interpretive inquiry in the human sciences the task of the investigator is to go to the heart of what calls us, by looking for themes that lie concealed in unexamined events of everyday life. (p. 59)

The real object of phenomenological analysis and description consists in bringing to light, through language and speaking, those elements, which though hidden initially, are in fact the foundation of the revealed traits of that which shows itself to us. (p. 54)

It is a revelation of that which is hidden; it is making known what may be unknown. This thought is extended and gains further support by van Manen (1997):

The methodology of phenomenology is such that it posits an approach toward research that aims at being presuppositionless; in other words, this is a methodology that tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research project. (p. 29)

The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience. (p. 36)

It is important to develop a piece of research that fully reveals to the reader the meanings of the lived event being investigated. Even as Gadamer questioned statistics, van Manen further sets phenomenological methodology apart from empirical science. He has provided us with six methodological structures that should drive any human science research:

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world.
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it.
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon.
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting.
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon.
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

In other words, the hermeneutic-phenomenological methodology involves turning toward a lived phenomenon, exploring its deeper essence in the moment of living, and capturing that essence in our text, thereby connecting the reader with the phenomenon. By maintaining a pedagogical relationship with the phenomenon, its essence is revealed—the phenomenon itself becomes the teacher and lives through our text. “The nature of the hermeneutical experience is not that something is outside and desires admission. Rather, we are possessed by something and precisely by means of it we are opened up for the new, the different, the true” (Gadamer, 1966/1976, p. 9). Being

possessed by the phenomenon opens us to the limitless possibilities and ever-shifting truths of life.

The validation of this type of research is important to highlight. True phenomenological validation comes in the form of developing rational arguments for the phenomenon. Polkinghorne (1989) says that “phenomenological research, however, approaches validity from a more general perspective—as a conclusion that inspires confidence because the argument in support of it has been persuasive” (p. 57). These arguments should ideally demonstrate the dialogical engagement of the text, the development of intersubjectivity between the text and the interpreters, the development of intersubjectivity between themes, and an acknowledgement of the cultural and historic traditions within which the research took place. According to Brown (1989), “procedures of validation in hermeneutic science are those of validation rather than empirical verification. One interpretation is shown to be *more probable* than another through the researcher’s giving reasons to support the interpretation made . . . i.e., through presenting an argument” (p. 283). Alternatively, van Manen (1997) states that “the essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner” (p. 10). Thus, it is through argument and artful description of an experience that validity is maintained. Finally, Dahlberg, Drew, and Nyström (2001) state:

The thoroughness in reasoning, mentioned by Lindström, is often labeled as a ‘coherence criterion’ of validity (Kvale (1987a). The coherence criterion involves a research result that presents an inner logic, that is, it should be possible to follow the researcher’s reasoning all through the study. There should be a ‘red

thread' and it should be visible the whole way through the description of the study. (p. 231)

Procedure

In this section, I explore the process and procedure I used to recruit participants and collect data, and I discuss the interviews themselves as well as the analysis of the transcribed text. While the previous section shares the more theoretical aspects of hermeneutic-phenomenological research, this section sheds light on the practical application of such methodology and how it came to pass in this study.

Participant recruitment process. I identified my research subjects by working with colleagues in Family, Youth, and Community (FYC) and Curriculum and Instruction (CI) and by sending out a recruitment e-mail (see Appendix) to faculty, staff, and students in several colleges within the University of Minnesota. By working with these colleagues, I was able to identify sources of potential subjects who do not have a relationship with me. I had also considered that other faculty and students in these programs might already know of individual youth or youth groups who might be interested in participating. Faculty, staff, and students were contacted via e-mail with (a) information about the study, (b) an explanation of how parents of youth may contact me to discuss the study in more detail, and (c) a statement that the consent and assent process would be my responsibility. Family, friends, coworkers, and other professionals also alerted families (whom I did not know) about this study. The parents contacted me directly before allowing their adolescent children to participate. All participants went through voluntary and informed consent and assent processes with signatures from

parents or guardians as well as the adolescents themselves. Access to data was granted only to me, my advisor, and the dissertation committee.

For the purposes of this study, I included subjects within the age span of 13 to 19. As potential candidates were identified, I contacted the parents through a letter (see Appendix). Parents of potential candidates were asked to sign a *Consent Form* (see Appendix) giving permission for their child to participate. The adolescents were also given a letter explaining the study and related risk factors, and, if after agreeing to participate, they were asked to sign the *Assent Form* (see Appendix). I collected and secured the consent and assent forms in a locked, fire-proof safe.

Data collection and interviews. In addition to the interviewing process, I had hoped to use a writing strategy where, if the participants were willing, I would have them write a 2- to 5-page reflective paper describing an experience of arguing with their parent(s)—how they felt; who was present; their sight, smell, and taste sensations; the environment—temperature, furniture, lighting, and so on; their thinking at each step of the argument; their reactions; their parent(s)' reactions; how the parent(s)' reactions affect them; and other details. Such papers might have allowed me to enter the interview process with an initial understanding of their experience and from which I could begin to explore the phenomenon. Unfortunately, this strategy did not go as planned, and I did not obtain those written materials. As an alternative, I was able to use published teen literature (Beavers, 2000; Bhattacharya, 1997; Constant, 2001; Estepa & Kay, 1997; Franco, 2000; Garland, 2009; Kanarick, 1997; White, 2000) as other sources of data that contribute to our understanding of the full embodied experience of parent-teen conflict and argument.

A preliminary meeting was scheduled in which both the parents and adolescent were present during this first meeting. Four of these preliminary meetings took place in the participants' homes, two occurred in a classroom at an Early Childhood Family Education site, and one was at a coffee shop; one participant was 19 years old and did not require a parent's consent. In the meeting and for those participants who were willing, I asked if the adolescents could write down or record their thoughts and reactions to everyday family squabbles throughout the course of the project either in a journal or audiovisual recording to capture the immediacy of the lived experience. Also, I gathered demographic information about the family as well as asked questions about cultural and historic family traditions and values (see Appendix).

In addition to journals, I asked the permission of the participants to have access to any artistic endeavors in which they were engaged. These endeavors could have included poetry, painting, music, photography, dance, or any other media with which they express themselves. I had hoped to use these items in my data analyses and in the interviews. These items might have shed new perspectives on family life and family conflict and enhance my understanding. In the end, I did not obtain any such media, so I was unable to include them as part of the text analysis.

After the preliminary meeting, I scheduled an interview with each adolescent alone to get to know him or her more familiarly and to encourage an open and productive rapport. Six of these interviews took place in participants' homes, and two interviews were in a conference room at the University of Minnesota. During these interviews, I hoped to elucidate the meanings these adolescents hold about the phenomenon of parent-teen argument and family conflict. Using an interview style as highlighted by van Manen

(1997), I had a couple basic opening questions relating to my research problem that helped prompt the adolescent into revealing his or her experience but still maintained openness in the interview. Some of the questions I used to build rapport and to reveal the phenomenon were as follows:

- When you think of arguments or arguing with your parents, is there a particular moment that stands out in your mind that you can think of?
- So, can you think of an argument you've recently had? And if you can, just tell me a little bit about what was going on and what it was like?
- Do you remember how it started?
- Where do your arguments usually happen?

(See appendix for additional questions.) As van Manen (1997) states, "the art of the researcher in the *hermeneutic interview* is to keep the question (of the meaning of the phenomenon) open, to keep himself or herself and the interviewee oriented to the substance of the thing being questioned" (p. 98). In addition, I occasionally reflected what I understood about the phenomenon to see if there was an intersubjective meaning being established and to ensure a richness of data. I wanted to be confident that I was gaining a clear picture of the whole phenomenon as the teen lived it.

Looking back through the transcripts, there were moments during my interviews that I realized I may have been leading the teen with some of my comments or questions. Being this is my first foray into developing my skills as a phenomenological interviewer, I recognize this as a limitation in this study.

Text analysis. When text is created by an author, that individual brings with himself or herself his or her cultural, historical, and social experiences during the creative process and imbues the text with an understanding that evolves out of that unique lived

experience. However, once the text is created, it exists outside of the author, other than the author. It holds its own essence, and it is its own being living suspended between time and space. This external existence is then transmuted by the reader into new meanings through the reader's own unique cultural, historical, and social experiences. The reader has the opportunity to understand this text from within his or her own world, or he or she can attempt to recreate the world of the author, or the original history of the text, in a transcendent fashion. However, as mentioned earlier, complete transcendence is unattainable from within the confines of human life and corporeal form. We can only strive toward transcendence.

Therefore, the reader can never truly recreate the exact world of the author and his or her subjects, but it is in the attempt to recapture this world, to transcend our "being in the world," to understand it, that new knowledge of the text is created. The paradox in this is that the reader can also be the author of the text, but, due to the temporal nature of being and/or living, one moment of experience is never the same as another moment. Through the passage of time alone, the author, who existed before the text was created, is in some way different from the author who exists after the creative process ends. In this way, rereading one's own text may also create new understandings and new meanings through the attempt of transcendence. How we stand in relation to text is vital to our understanding of that text. Are we "other than" the text, or are we "with" the text? Can we be both at the same time?

This discourse reminds me of a passage from Derrida (1992) who helps capture the transcendent nature of literature and text:

One can interest oneself in the functioning of language, in all sorts of structures of inscription, suspend not reference (that's impossible) but the thetic relation to meaning or referent, without for all that constituting the object as a literary object. Whence the difficulty of grasping what makes for the specificity of literary intentionality. In any case, a text cannot by itself avoid lending itself to a "transcendent" reading. A literature which forbade that transcendence would annul itself. This moment of "transcendence" is irrepressible, but it can be complicated or folded; and it is in this play of foldings that is inscribed the difference between literatures, between the literary and the non-literary, between the different textual types or moments of non-literary texts. (p. 45)

Through this interplay of foldings, this complicated, and sometimes messy, path toward transcendence, we suspend meaning and gain new understanding. We reconceptualize the text in new ways and within new contexts.

From our exploration of text, we begin to understand the importance of looking at text in relation to context. If we consider the prefix con-, we find the meaning "with." Therefore, we are looking at the interconnection of text within text and the interplay of textual parts that create the whole. It is the textual threads being bound together as one in the fabric of time, space, and culture. What I found very interesting and what fits so well with this coexistence, is the historical meanings of context. From Cassell's Latin Dictionary (1963), we find the Latin root *contexo* means—"to weave, to twine together, to connect, to unite, to construct, or to form" (p. 52). This leads us to the Latin *contextus*—"interwoven, connected, or united" (p. 52), and *contexte*—"in close connexion" (p. 52). The Oxford English Dictionary Online (2010) gives us the following for context:

The weaving together of words and sentences, the connected structure of a writing or composition, the connexion or coherence between the parts of a discourse, or the whole structure of a connected passage regarded in its bearing upon any of the parts which constitute it.

The context is the weft and warp of the textual fabric or the lived text. It is the interrelationships and intersubjectivities that support certain meanings that are experienced by those living within that tapestry or context—the essential structure. It is the parts coming together as a whole. Without the weft and warp of context, the intentional threads of understanding fall to the ground in a disconnected, meaningless pile of debris. One must understand the properties inherent in particular contexts in order to fully understand the text that the threads of understanding must follow to create the textual tapestry of an experience. The contextual properties of lived experience are those of history, culture, sociology, politics, and the whole of human experience. The context is, in essence, the lifeworld and all its richness.

Polkinghorne (1989) tells us:

The researcher must glean from the examples an accurate essential description of their contents and the particular structural relationship that coheres the elements into a unified experience. (pp. 50-51)

Phenomenological research is the search for those processes of consciousness that give the objects that appear in awareness meaning, clarity, and discrimination.... They are interested in the structures that produce a common appearance and similar characteristics to each person's experience.... Although the specific experiences of human beings are culturally and historically variable, experience appears to have a primary and basic common structure. (p. 51)

It is that primary and basic common structure that we, as phenomenological researchers, work to draw out of the embodied experience. What is the essence of that structure that is unique to this experience? In other words, what is the essential structure?

The term *thematization*, borrowed from qualitative research, has also been used to describe the process [of phenomenological reduction or bracketing]; in phenomenological research, it denotes that the search for essential structures involves identifying the constituents or themes that appear in the descriptions. (Polkinghorne, p. 51)

With the process of thematizing the textual descriptions, a phenomenological researcher transforms the naïve original descriptions through reflection, interpretation, and rigorous processes into meaning units that clearly support the final written description as well as the original embodied phenomenon being explored.

The shift from the subjects' original language given in the raw data to descriptions in the words of the researchers is a crucial procedure in the analysis of qualitative data. The transformation is not accomplished by technical procedures as it is in quantitative analysis, such as the transformation of a group of raw scores into standard deviation and mean scores. Linguistic transformation is carried out by means of the ordinary human capacity to understand the meaning of statements. (Polkinghorne, p. 52)

This linguistic transformation moves us from the level of linguistic expression to “the experiences to which the language refers” (Polkinghorne, p. 55). The basic steps inherent in most phenomenological text analysis can be seen as follows:

(a) The original protocols [the interview texts] are divided into units, (b) the units are transformed by the researcher into meanings that are expressed in psychological and phenomenological concepts, and (c) these transformations are tied together to make a general description of the experience. (p. 55)

There is a zigzagging between the transformed text and the general description and interpretation of the experience, from individual meaning units to the whole, the process of which is the “finding of the research, the essential structure definition” (p. 53).

With this in mind, I began my text analysis. It is important to note that, because of a wrist disability and hearing impairment, I had all the recorded interviews transcribed with the help of a transcriptionist. However, after I received the transcriptions, I spent time listening to all the recordings in relation to the transcription several times to ensure that they were accurate and complete. Thus the texts were verbatim transcriptions of the recorded interviews, unaltered and true to the reported lived experience.

As mentioned, I first began with reading each interview text several times while listening to the original recordings to ensure that I agreed with the transcription and to reconnect with the embodied experience that was expressed in the voices of these teens. This rigorous process also allowed me to gain a general feel for the nuances of the experience and see the first glimmers of experiential meaning units.

With these naïve original texts, I needed to segregate the individual meaning units that presented themselves through several rereading of all the interview texts. What were the themes that belonged to the embodied experience itself, the basic structures “that produce a common appearance and similar characteristics to each person’s experience” (Polkinghorne, p. 51)? I used the naïve original interview text to perform a thematic analysis exploring the embodied essence as it presented itself to me.

In addition to the naïve original interview text, I supplemented my research and analysis with other writings laden with emotion and a richness that seemed to enhance my connection to several underlying concepts and ideas related to parent-teen conflict and argument; they helped me to live and feel the experience more fully. These other samples included: song lyrics, poems, diaries and/or blogs, lines from motion pictures, and books. Many, but not all, of these were written by teens from different walks of life.

During successive readings, I highlighted text that seemed to hold significance and meaning, and I began to identify common themes in each text. As common themes were revealed, I transformed and organized these threads into essential themes that are paramount to the experience. From these essential themes, I developed a fuller understanding of the experience and the essential structural definition.

To ensure the strength and validity of my research findings, I put away my work for several months and distanced myself from the phenomenon and the essential structural definition and research findings in order to open myself once again to the phenomenon and become closer to the essence—a critically reflective distancing. As Dahlberg et al. (2001) state:

Whenever we invest time and energy to learn about a topic that we are exploring, we develop a certain possessiveness about it, it becomes familiar, our own pet project so to speak. Because we are close to it and invested in it, we may lose [*sic*] our curiosity about it. The temptation is to end the search for other possible points of view. As researchers we need to be close to the phenomenon that we are investigating in order to be open to it. But the inherent danger of proximity to the thing that we are studying is that we run the risk of losing [*sic*] openness as well as objectivity. At the same time we strive to engage our informants and establish a direct and close relationship, a reflective distance must also be maintained. Thus, we constantly move back and forth between nearness and distance in order to avoid immersion in, for example, the interview situation to the extent that objectivity about the interaction as well as the content of the interview is lost. This is the dance of lifeworld research. Its holistic nature is characterized by opposites such as immediacy and distance, and human science researchers know that productive research requires attention to both. (pp. 106-107)

After taking this time away from the research, I was able to see my own work through fresh eyes; to engage in critical reflection and scrutiny of my own writing as well as critical self-reflection, as the researcher, in relation to the work; and to feel confident in how I presented the embodied experience as it was revealed to me. I engaged in that continual zigzag process of parts to whole; I engaged in the dance of lifeworld research and gained new understanding and greater perspective.

Preunderstandings and Assumptions

My basic assumptions underlying this research problem have been highlighted in the introductory literature review and discourse on parent-teen conflict and argument. It is apparent that a correlation exists between family conflict and the adolescent's risk for

poor developmental outcomes. It is also important to note the prevalence of research that examines conflict from the adult's point of view. It is odd that research is conducted on behalf of adolescents, supposedly, without considering their experience, feelings, and emotions. There is a need in the research community for more studies addressing the adolescent experience. From my own history and culture, I have noticed what appears to me as a discrepancy between the experience of family conflict as lived by parents and the experience as lived by teens.

Research that helps us to understand family conflict and how it is experienced could open the doors to new ways of thinking about family conflict. It might also provide new avenues for addressing family conflict through future research efforts. By developing a deeper understanding of the embodied teen experience of conflict and its associated argument, we may be able to better treat adolescents with the respect and dignity that they, and all of humanity, deserve.

Summary

I have shared my personal connection to the phenomenon and discussed the underlying concepts that help to orient us to this phenomenon. We have tweezed apart some of the history embedded in those underlying concepts of conflict and adolescence to consider the evolutionary impact on our present views. In addition, I have highlighted the question that guides my research as well as the methodology and philosophical underpinnings framing this exploration. The beauty and intricacies of the textual analysis dance have also been laid out for us so we may better appreciate and value what is revealed in that process. This chapter has also clarified the assumptions and preunderstandings that were at hand when beginning this journey so that we may move

beyond those to new understandings and perspicuity. Next, we look to the participants themselves—who are they?

Chapter 3: Participants

In this chapter, we consider the teens who participated in this study and begin to uncover their being in the world. It is impossible to capture all the intricacies of their lives in such a small textual space; however, knowing a small portion of their world allows us some context in which parent-teen conflict and argument occurs. It is a beginning in the revelation of the phenomenon as it is lived.

The eight participants were from Minnesota and lived within a 100-mile radius of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. Based on the information provided in the *Eligibility Questionnaires* (see Appendix) that were completed by each participant, I knew that none of the participants were seeing or had seen a psychologist or counselor for emotional or behavioral challenges nor had they been in a drug or alcohol treatment program. They had, however, self-identified as living in a family with typical everyday family conflict.

These were typical teens of varying levels of academic achievement and with many different dreams and aspirations for their futures. Some were definitely more talkative than others, and the female participants were usually more talkative than the male participants, but that may be due to age rather than gender. Below are brief descriptions of each participant and his or her family. The names have been changed to protect the identity of these minors in accordance with American Psychological Association (2010) “1.11 Rights and Confidentiality of Research Participants” (pp. 16-17).

Kristi

At the time of the study, Kristi was 13 years old and in the 8th grade, and she was the youngest participant. She was born a United States citizen and identified herself as

coming from a Finnish cultural and ethnic background. Her mother and father were married and together, and she had an older sister, Erika (below). Their family had a pet cat that enjoyed scratching under the door during our interview. She enjoyed music and had recently joined the swim team at school. Her interview lasted 1 hr 52 min and took place in her parents' home office. The door remained closed while the rest of her family was elsewhere in the house.

Joe

Joe was 14 years old and in the 9th grade when this study began. He was born a United States citizen and self-identified as Polish-American when asked about his cultural and ethnic background. His mother and father were married and together. He had three brothers—one the same age, Craig (below), and two older. He had been learning to speak Spanish fluently and also enjoyed music. His interview lasted 1 hr 39 min and occurred in his parents' home office. The door remained closed while his mom and brother were in another room.

Craig

Craig also was 14 years old and in the 9th grade when the study began. He was born in the United States, but unlike his brother, Joe (above), he self-identified as Polish, French, and American for his cultural and ethnic background. He had the same family structure as his brother, Joe, above. He had also been learning to speak Spanish fluently. His interview ran 1 hr 9 min and took place in his parents' home office. The door was closed, and his mother and brother were in another room.

Katya

At the beginning of this study, Katya was 16 years old and in the 11th grade. She was born a United States citizen and self-identified as Swedish-German for her cultural and ethnic background. She was attending university classes as part of an advanced program. Her parents were divorced, and she lived primarily with her father and their dog; she visited her mother frequently. Her interview lasted 1 hr 44 min and occurred in a conference room at the University of Minnesota.

Tasha

Tasha was 16 years old at the beginning of this study; she was in the 11th grade. She was born a United States citizen, and she identified herself as a White American with a Scandinavian and Irish cultural and ethnic background. Her birth parents were divorced, and she had a stepmother and a stepfather. She also had two sisters and two stepsisters along with three cats and a dog. Music played a very important role in her life both as a performer and as a listener. Her interview lasted 1 hr 49 min and took place in the family room of her home; her mother was upstairs during this time.

Cameron

When the study began, Cameron was 16 years old and in the 10th grade. He was born a United States citizen, and self-identified as Filipino and German for his cultural and ethnic background. His parents were together and married, and he had one brother and three guinea pigs. He was fairly passionate about running and his PlayStation 2 video game system. His interview lasted 1 hr 40 min, and we sat in the living room of his home while his mother and brother were in the basement.

Erika

At the beginning of this study, Erika was 17 years old. She was born a United States citizen, and she self-identified as “somewhat” Finnish-American for her cultural and ethnic background. She shared the same family structure as her younger sister, Kristi, above. She was into music and often felt withdrawal when she had to go without her iPod. Her interview lasted 1 hr 33 min and was in her parents’ home office. The rest of her family was elsewhere in the house.

Sarah

Sarah was 19 years old at the beginning of this study—the oldest participant and a university freshman. She was born a United States citizen, and she self-identified as Caucasian-American when asked about her cultural and ethnic background. Her mother and father were married and together, and she had two sisters, one brother, one dog, and seven horses. Her interview lasted 1 hr 17 min, and it took place in a conference room at the University of Minnesota.

Summary

Looking at all of these teens together, we see that each of them was born in the United States, they all lived in the Midwest, most of them were Caucasian or of European ancestry, and all self-identified as living in a family with typical everyday family conflict. So they were very similar in those respects; however, they were also different from one another in other ways. Some of these teens had parents who were married while others had parents who were either divorced and/or remarried. The number of sibling each teen had in their immediate family ranged from none to four, and some had older siblings who were no longer living at home. The nuances of these similarities and differences all

shape how teens perceive the world and how they live parent-teen conflict and argument.

Our understanding of each individual provides greater depth to an interpretation of the parent-teen conflict and associated argument phenomenon and helps us as we move into the next section where the text reveals the essence of the experience to us.

SECTION II: THEMATIC ELEMENTS

Imagine yourself relaxing peacefully on an inner tube floating on a calm blue ocean. The skies are blue, and there is a gentle breeze carrying the salt spray in the air. Life is good, and you are enjoying it. Looking out at the ocean, you see the gentle, almost imperceptible undulation of the ocean's movements. It is a giant, slumbering creature with whom you are enjoying this moment. As you feel the rhythms of the sea around you, it seems as if you and the sea are engaged in a conversation without words; you know and understand each other, or so you think. This interchange of thoughts and emotions is seemingly harmonious, but it can change in an instant and without warning. For now, your conversations flow peacefully and you are enjoying the moment. Life is good.

As you are relaxing on that inner tube, you glance around and see a gigantic wave of biblical proportions bearing down on you. Holy crap!! Where did this come from, what caused it, why is it happening to you, and how might you have angered the slumbering sea? You look up at this mind-boggling, monstrous wave as you and the inner tube are soon being lifted by it. Up and up you are pulled, no possibility of escape. You stare doe-eyed in shock. It's both bewildering and disorienting. Just moments ago, your life was peace and harmony, and you were having the most wonderful conversation. Now you are facing a maelstrom of chaos and uncertainty. You begin to panic and frantically search for something to lash onto; your base instincts jump to the surface as irrationality and fear grip you in their emotional talons. Where will this go, and how will this end? You quickly shift from a state of shock and bafflement to one of anger and

survival. Your instinct to fight and survive is strong, but who is stronger—the ocean and its wave or you? Who will win?



Photo by Quiksilver (n.d.)



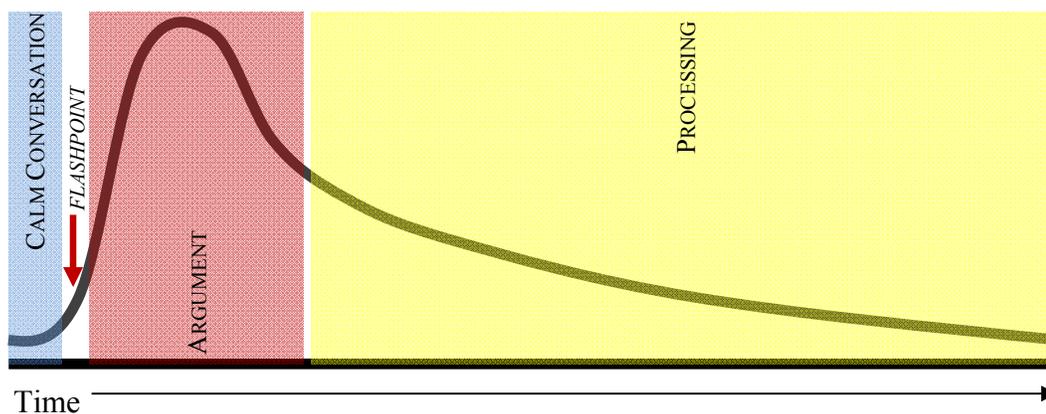
Photo by Mugarby (2009)

You struggle and fight with the ocean, and you hurl insults in your frustration. You have the urge to kick and punch this awful wave or slam your fist into your inner tube, but you know it is of no avail. Still your frustration builds. The wave pulls you under the surface, and you strain to breathe while clawing your way above water. You gain a momentary triumph as your lungs draw in sweet, sweet air and you regain some control. Still the *mêlée* continues as control wavers back and forth between you and the ocean. Will this never end? Your resolve falters, and you grow weary from the exertion. Panic sets in again as you realize you may not win. Escape is paramount! At all costs, you must find a way out of this mess.

Finally, you succumb to the will of the ocean. Realizing no other way out but to give in to the whims of the sea and ride out this horrible wave, you hold on tightly and rigidly fix your resolve against this monster. You will not give it the satisfaction of admitting defeat, but you coolly stare it down as you think, “Do your worst; I defy you!” You bravely, though perhaps naively, face your demise head-on. A final breath and you are pulled under the surface one last time. Tossed and tumbled, swallowed up by the

wave and engulfed in chaos, you sense the ocean hurling its final insults and diatribes before disgorging you upon the beach in a used and emotionally drained heap and retreating once again. And confusion bears down upon you as you contemplate what transpired. Is the ordeal over? And where is my inner tube?

This imagery and the experience of succumbing to the wave gives us one way to consider the experience of argument between a teen and his or her parent(s). For me, the life of the argument has always seemed best represented by a wave:



There is the calm conversation that one can have before the argument. Perhaps families are discussing the weather or what happened for them during the day (e.g., at school, at work, at home)—a casual, everyday conversation while sitting at the dinner table. But then something happens and that conversation changes as if there were a flashpoint, an explosion that suddenly launches the conversation into the realm of argument. Often this happens without warning or with very little warning and escalates quickly into a very heated argument. Sometimes we sense its approach and roll our eyes—“Here we go again!” During the argument, there is the sense of chaos or the maelstrom where it is hard to stay in control or to understand what is happening in that moment. There is confusion:

Chris If you could describe your emotion that usually happens when a regular conversation suddenly turns into this argument, what is your emotion like during all that?

Teen Sometimes I get confused 'cause sometimes our subjects change like from hockey or whatever to snow. You know, it's like random changes, and that's kind of sometimes where it starts, like someone just brings up something new and it's like, "What is going on?!" You know, "Why did we just change the subject?!" So it's kinda frustrating and kinda confusing.

Looking at the graph again, after the argument runs its course, after the chaos, those in the argument seem to need time to process what has happened.

This mental graph of an argument made me think about a tsunami or the rogue wave phenomenon where all the right elements come together to create a wave beyond all imagining. "*Rogue waves* are rare 'giant', 'freak', 'monster' or 'steep wave' events in nonlinear deep water gravity waves which occasionally rise up to surprising heights above the background wave field" (Osborne, Onorato, & Serio, 2000, p. 386). My other inspiration for the tsunami image came from a song that more than one participant said captured how they felt during an argument and to which they often listened after an argument—"Going Under" (Evanescence, 2003):

Now I will tell you what I've done for you—
50 thousand tears I've cried.
Screaming, deceiving, and bleeding for you—
And you still won't hear me.
(Going under)
Don't want your hand this time—I'll save myself.
Maybe I'll wake up for once (wake up for once)
Not tormented daily defeated by you
Just when I thought I'd reached the bottom

I'm dying again

I'm going under (going under)
Drowning in you (drowning in you)

I'm falling forever (falling forever)
 I've got to break through
 I'm going under

Blurring and stirring—the truth and the lies.
 (So I don't know what's real) So I don't know what's real and what's not (and
 what's not)
 Always confusing the thoughts in my head
 So I can't trust myself anymore

I'm dying again

I'm going under (going under)
 Drowning in you (drowning in you)
 I'm falling forever (falling forever)
 I've got to break through

I'm...

So go on and scream
 Scream at me I'm so far away (so far away)
 I won't be broken again (again)
 I've got to breathe - I can't keep going under

I'm dying again

I'm going under (going under)
 Drowning in you (drowning in you)
 I'm falling forever (falling forever)
 I've got to break through

I'm going under (going under)
 I'm going under (drowning in you)
 I'm going under

When I asked about this song, one teen said:

Teen That one just really puts into words and puts into sound what I'm
 feeling [after an argument], and so then I can listen to it and kind of
 identify with it, and then move on.... And in knowing that someone
 else has felt almost the exact same way, I'm just comforted by the fact
 that I'm not alone.

Another teen said, “If I’m angry, it’s an Evanescence day.” The images of drowning and being pulled beneath the waves, of screaming and fighting your way to the surface, struggling to breathe again, of being confused and feeling defeated and overpowered are very strong images that help us connect to the lived and embodied experience of an argument in progress.

Although the recollection shared in the Evanescence song is not a teen’s voice, it certainly helps to give voice to what many of the teens in this study felt during the argument. It is meaningful in that there was an intersubjective connection between the experience of the song’s creator and the teens’ embodied experiences of argument. The text of the song is profound in its ability to give voice to an experience the teens themselves had difficulty, at times, putting into words. The song text helps to give nuance to the phenomenon as a whole and extends our understanding.

As is the case with all data in phenomenological studies, these thoughts and experiences are shared from a recollected viewpoint. It is difficult or even impossible for such data to be conveyed in any other way because even in the moment an image or experience is captured on film or recorded onto some medium, that moment has passed. What has been preserved on that medium is a moment in time, a snapshot if you will. We now live in the future beyond that moment. That experience has been transformed and is interpreted from a future perspective. In his work, van Manen (1997) tells us that:

All recollections of experiences, reflections on experiences, descriptions of experiences, taped interviews about experiences, or transcribed conversations about experiences are already *transformations* of those experiences. Even life captured directly on magnetic or light-sensitive tape is already transformed at the moment it is captured. Without this dramatic elusive element of lived meaning to our reflective attention phenomenology might not be necessary. So, the upshot is that we need to find access to life’s living dimensions while realizing that the

meanings we bring to the surface from the depths of life's oceans have already lost the natural quiver of their undisturbed existence. (p. 54)

As teens reflect on and recollect the moment of conflict, they are sharing a vision and understanding of that moment. Most often, it seems, the conflicts these teens are experiencing on a daily basis are the small arguments that crop up because of living in proximity to another. These conflicts can be thought of as bumping up against another's reality or truth. I am reminded of logging in days gone by when logs were floated down river to a sawmill. As these logs would flow together down the river, they would bump against one another with small splashes of water spraying in the air with each collision. Many everyday arguments look like this—little splashes in the great river of life, minor disruptions in the overall harmony, but the flow continues. Learning to successfully navigate these smaller collisions may reduce the likelihood of a log jam that greatly hinders the natural flow.

Another interesting observation that came to light was that many teens had a very difficult time sharing their experience of the actual argument or giving it a life and a presence in our conversations. I wanted to know what it was like in that moment; how would I experience it if I were able to occupy their being. I wanted to know about the unique experience of their *being in* the argument; not just the physiological bodily experience, though that is part of it, but the full essence of *being in* that moment—mind, body, and soul interconnected and inseparable, the subjective being who cannot but see the world from their corporeal center within the world.

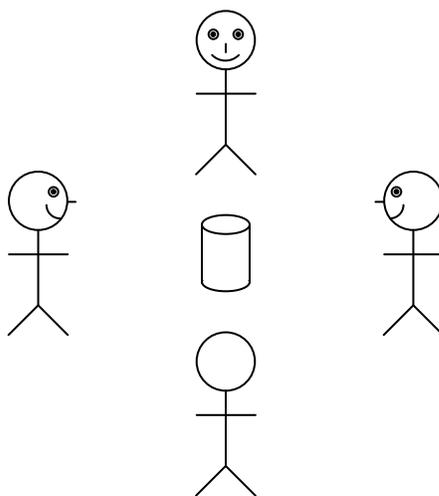
Heidegger (1927/1962) talks about this concept of being-in-the-world through the notion of Dasein:

The kind of Being which belongs to Dasein is rather such that, in understanding its own Being, it has a tendency to do so in terms of that entity towards which it comports itself proximally and in a way which is essentially constant—in terms of the ‘world’. In Dasein itself, and therefore in its own understanding of Being, the way the world is understood is, as we shall show, reflected back ontologically upon the way in which Dasein itself gets interpreted. (pp. 36-37)

We have no right to resort to dogmatic constructions and to apply just any idea of Being and actuality to this entity, no matter how ‘self-evident’ that idea may be; nor may any of the ‘categories’ which such an idea prescribes be forced upon Dasein without proper ontological consideration. We must rather choose such a way of access and such a kind of interpretation that this entity can show itself in itself and from itself [an ihm selbst von ihm selbst her]. And this means that it is to be shown as it is *proximally and for the most part*—in its average *everydayness*. (pp. 37-38)

As living, breathing individuals present in the world, all things that we encounter with our own being can only be experienced as *other than ourselves*. Likewise, we are only able to live that experience and connect with that other through our own being. We cannot transcend the corporeal embodiment to which we are connected, so we are thus limited to only one perspective that we can experience immediately and directly. What we see and experience in the immediacy of the moment can only be viewed proximally from the limits of our corporeal being—the one perspective.

To understand this better, let us say for example that four of us are looking at one can of soda from one of the four cardinal directions (i.e., north, south, east, and west).



If we are all to describe that soda can at the same moment, our individual experience of that soda-can can only be from our one unique perspective. It is in the sharing of our recollected experiences of that moment that we gain access to the other three perspectives of the soda-can. Merleau-Ponty (1947/1964) helps to explain such paradox of perception created by our subjective being in the world:

Perception is thus paradoxical. The perceived thing itself is paradoxical; it exists only in so far as someone can perceive it. I cannot even for an instant imagine an object in itself. As Berkeley said, if I attempt to imagine some place in the world which has never been seen, the very fact that I imagine it makes me present at that place. I thus cannot conceive a perceptible place in which I am not myself present. But even the places in which I find myself are never completely given to me; the things which I see are things for me only under the condition that they always recede beyond their immediately given aspects. Thus there is a paradox of immanence and transcendence in perception. Immanence, because the perceived object cannot be foreign to him who perceives it; transcendence, because it always contains something more than what is actually given. (p. 16)

As an outside observer of a parent-teen argument, we see only what is given to our own senses. But there is something more happening for the teen in that argument than what is actually given. Thus for myself and for the reader, it is important to know how teens live this experience of arguing in the moment so we can begin to know all the other sides of this figurative soda can above and beyond the one small part that we see from our adult perspective, always keeping in mind that it is an ever-evolving phenomenon and never exactly the same from one moment to the next. Nonetheless, the essence of many teen experiences of argument begins to reveal itself to us through some common themes.

Inevitably, the full and true essence of this phenomenon is beyond our subjective corporeal limits, but we begin to come closer to this essence as we consider the nuggets of insight that are contained in these thematic revelations. As I struggle to congeal this

amorphous cloud of information and ideas under manageable umbrellas of cohesion, the complexity of this undertaking humbles me, and I begin to recognize the import of my actions. I strive to remain true to the data that have been revealed to me, but I also understand that, by exerting my own will on the information and containing it to one of several themes, I am subjecting it to my own interpretations. It is a necessity of the human mind to organize and categorize his or her understandings and experiences in order to make sense of what has been encountered. I hope the reader can look beyond this action to recognize that any such themes overlap and exist in an amorphous state that, by the paradoxical nature of perception, is open to other interpretation and understanding. Look, thus, with an open mind at additional possibilities that may exist beyond my own reflective and interpretive restraints; consider what else may be revealed to you in your reading that is beyond my own momentary perceptions.

This section uncovers the essence of the embodied teen experience of parent-teen conflict and the associated argument. Through our exploration, we begin to dig deeper into the lived moment of the argument, and we investigate the conflicts and everyday bumps in living that lead up to the argument. What is unique to the teen experience, can we live this moment with the teen, and what new understandings will we discover along the way? Each chapter in this section focuses on a specific cluster of thematic elements that, together, envelop the essence of the teen experience. By the very nature of these thematic clusters, there will be overlap since the essence as a whole embodies more than the combination of these individual clusters. This overlap can be thought of as the weft and warp threads of a tapestry, the overall context that envelops the whole, that holds it together and creates stability and validity in the revelation of the essence, and the

thematic clusters are the many hued threads woven together to reveal aspects of the larger tapestry image and providing nuance to the overall composition. In other words, looking at the thematic clusters is like looking at the individual primary colors in the tapestry—reds, yellows, and blues—that reveal themselves to us individually as they are and overlap one another to create the orange, green, and violet tones of the larger image.

Chapter 4: Theme One—Feeling Powerless, Small, Devalued, and Oppressed

Just as we visualized in the tsunami imagery, an argument can leave one feeling small in the face of something so large and overpowering. As we look at the approaching wave, we swallow hard and think, “Oh crap!” We recognize our vulnerability, our fragility, and our insignificance in the face of something so big and powerful. Such fragility or vulnerability is overpowering and overwhelming; it is feeling small and insignificant. But how do we understand feeling small? How do we experience such a moment? In this chapter, we have an opportunity to think about such moments and to connect our own understandings with those revealed to us in the teen experience.

Consider the universe. When we, as humans, try to conceive the entirety of the universe, it too is overwhelming and can leave us feeling less than the smallest ion revolving around a single atom in the great vastness of the universe—we are nothing; we are insignificant to the entirety of the universe. We are a speck on the planet Earth, revolving around the Sun, which is itself a speck on the arm of the Milky Way Galaxy, which is also a fleck in the cluster of galaxies that occupy this little corner of the universe. If we allow ourselves to continue down this path of thought for too long, it is possible to become defeatist—why bother? Our life has little meaning in the scope of things so large. What impact could my existence possibly have on the vastness of the universe? I feel smaller than small. A word that captures that essence is *diminution*:

The action of diminishing or making less; the process of diminishing or becoming less; reduction in magnitude or degree; lessening, decrease. Representation of something as less than it is; extenuation. Lessening of honour or reputation; derogation, depreciation, belittling. (OED Online, 2010)

Reduction, derogation, depreciation, belittling—becoming less than I am. It is a heaviness hanging over me. Understanding such a feeling of insignificance in the scope of something so vast can help us relate in some small way to the teen experience. The concept of diminution gives us a starting point of understanding the idea of being overpowered, especially when considering the power structures inherent in parent-teen relationships.

In general, arguments may have the same impact on us—creating a feeling of insignificance. A powerlessness from which you ache to break free but under which you feel trapped—a line from the motion picture, *The Holiday* (Meyers, Block, Eatz, & McNeill Farwell, 2006):

Iris [Kate Winslet]: I understand feeling as small and as insignificant as humanly possible. And how it can actually ache in places you didn't know you had inside you. And it doesn't matter how many new haircuts you get, or gyms you join, or how many glasses of chardonnay you drink with your girlfriends... you still go to bed every night going over every detail and wonder what you did wrong or how you could have misunderstood. And how in the hell for that brief moment you could think that you were that happy. And sometimes you can even convince yourself that he'll see the light and show up at your door. And after all that, however long all that may be, you'll go somewhere new. And you'll meet people who make you feel worthwhile again. And little pieces of your soul will finally come back. And all that fuzzy stuff, those years of your life that you wasted, that will eventually begin to fade.

Although this quote relates to a breakup, it also touches on the experience of an argument that has gone very wrong, one in which what you wanted to say came out in a garbled mess and was completely misunderstood, “you still go to bed every night going over every detail and wonder what you did wrong or how you could have misunderstood.” It's like the aftermath of the tsunami when the ocean has disgorged you onto the beach, leaving you wondering what happened.

This sense of being powerless also frequently happens when teens run up against a parent who gate-keeps, especially gate-keeping how chores are performed. A gate-keeper is “a person or thing that controls access to something, or that monitors and selects information, etc.” (OED Online, 2010). In our case, it is often controlling access to what is considered the “right way” to do something. In order to highlight gate-keeping, I ask these rhetorical questions:

- When it comes to laundry, do you expect bath towels will be folded a certain way, and if they aren’t folded that way, it is wrong?
- When it comes to loading the dishwasher, do you expect it to be loaded a certain way, and if it isn’t loaded in that way, it is wrong?
- When it comes to mowing the lawn, do you expect it to be mowed in a certain way, and if it isn’t mowed in that way, it is wrong?
- When it comes to hanging the toilet paper roll in the bathroom, do you expect it to hang in the proper over-hand fashion, and if it is in the improper under-hand fashion, it is wrong?

If so, then you are likely a gate-keeper. When individuals come up against gate-keeping, they often decide that they may as well let the other person do it since they can never do it right in the other person’s eyes. Teens are no different, and you can hear it in their voices when they talk about feeling powerless or when they think, “Why bother?!”

When talking about her mother, one teen tells us that “she had asked me to make the bed in a particular way. But I had done it another way. ‘What difference does it make?’ I asked” (Bhattacharya, 1997, p. 34). If the outcome is the same, what difference does it make which steps I took to get there? Why must it be your way? You begin to sense the frustration and anger that teens experience in the face of something so unbending. There is an ache, a yearning that cries out from underneath. It is a yearning

to break free, to escape, which we discuss in another chapter but which is connected to this yearning created by such powerlessness. It is a feeling of oppression and of submitting to the will of another. It beats you down, it pulls at your soul crushing your own identity or individuality, and it wipes away any glimmers of power or control that you might have felt in your possession. It is a loss for which you grieve.

Teen She [my mom] is very good at making you feel small, I guess. You know, sometimes with little things like, oh, I can't remember the last time, but it usually happens with every argument or little disagreement that we have, like, oh, you know, "My opinion is the right one, I'm always right, your opinion is not the most correct," as she's put it sometimes. And I'm like, "Well, that's just another way of making you say that I'm wrong." She's like, "Well, no, I don't want to say that." You know, she tries to play it back so that she's being from both views, but you know, she's just from her view.

Chris What is it like to feel small?

Teen [sigh] Not great. I mean, being, you know, especially in high school you want to feel like you have a sense of your own voice and being able to put it out there without people, or especially your parents, not trying to push you back down. But when that happens, I don't know what to do, I just kinda sit there and stay quiet just knowing that maybe she'll just end the conversation and I can just build up back to where I was before.

"I can just build up back to where I was before." This speaks volumes. It suggests that something was lost or taken away in this exchange. You hear the teen yearning to have a voice and to be respected and to be seen as capable. It is almost as if the teen is asking her mother, "Can't you see what I've become? Can't you be proud of my thoughts and ideas? Why can't you hear me?" If you were looking in her eyes as she was speaking like I did, you could see the frustration boiling underneath. The teen is struggling to find the words that will give her the power to stand up and have a voice, to speak out against

her mother's unyielding belief in her own rightness. This moment is crushing, and it is the embodiment of feeling truly powerless.

- Teen I try to help my mom with stuff but then she tells me that I'm not doing it right, and I try to do it right but I just can't seem to get it right. So I try... I just give up, and then she says, "Don't give up," and then we kinda get in an argument about that.
- Chris What would you say to her at that point usually or what would you do?
- Teen "I give up, I don't want to do this anymore."
- Chris Okay. Do you walk away?
- Teen I start to walk away but then she calls me back.
- Chris And you do go back then?
- Teen Yeah, I go back.
- Chris Why do you go back?
- Teen So I don't get in any more trouble.
- Chris Okay. So you feel like you're getting in trouble at that point?
- Teen Yeah.
- Chris I'm trying to put myself in your shoes so I can sort of get a sense of what it's like as you're going through this, 'cause that can be pretty stressful and tense. What sorts of things are you feeling at that moment when she says get back here?
- Teen Why does she even bother to ask me to help when I just can't get it right?

It is as if she is setting him up for failure in his eyes. He knows he can't do it the "right way," but he can't escape from it. He knows that his way will accomplish many of the same things with very similar results, but he is not given permission to even prove that his way might work. This powerlessness and feeling of oppression creates frustration in the face of unyielding rigidity and not being able to prove oneself.

- Chris What usually starts the argument for you?
- Teen Either my unwillingness to do it or their how it should be done.
- Chris How it should be done, what is that about?
- Teen If I'm not doing it right, they'll try and tell me how to do it and that'll just get us both annoyed because we're gonna have to repeat it a couple times for me to actually get it. But then I get annoyed for them having to repeat it and telling me how it's done when I thought that I was doing it good.
- Chris So when they tell you you're not doing it right but you think you're doing it right, what are you thinking at that moment?
- Teen Why do they have to tell me this, I think I'm doing it good. Why can't it just be acceptable?
- Chris And do you ever ask them that?
- Teen No. They'll just probably say that, "This is how it should be done and I want you to learn how it's supposed to be done."
- Chris If I'm understanding, if I were in your shoes, you're thinking but I am doing it right, it's getting done. Is that right?
- Teen Uh-huh.
- Chris So what's the difference between how they want you to do it and how you do it?
- Teen I might not being as thorough or just doing it a completely different way but getting the same outcome but they want it to be the way that they learned how to do it so they know that it's actually becoming right.

Although he admits that there is a chance his way isn't as thorough, he also knows there is a potential for him to reach the same outcome doing it his own way. He doesn't bother saying this too often because he is defeated—why bother? "They'll just probably say that this is how it should be done." Even though he is defeated, the teen has an air of frustration about him as he relates his story. Sometimes he does try to prove himself, but it is a definite path to an argument:

Chris What is it about that moment that makes it an argument for you?

Teen That I thought that it was good and that I want it to be what I was doing not what they were doing, so I was going to try and go against what they were trying to say ‘cause I thought that I did it acceptable.

You can hear him feeling beaten down, his yearning to break free, and his desire to develop an identity apart from his parents. He wants to prove himself to his parents and to himself, but when the force against him is too great, he falls back on this idea of “I’ll be who you want me to be rather than who I want or need to be.” He feels small and dependent. He is not trying to be disrespectful; he is looking for a chance to validate himself. There is this underlying thought that “I must subjugate my will and being to your whims,” again that sense of feeling small, but you can hear him wanting to break free and discover himself and have pride in his autonomous abilities—“‘cause I thought that I did it acceptable.”

While our physical dimensions do not actually change in the process of feeling small, there is almost a physical sensation that accompanies the process. This is captured in the following text from Garland (2009):

I’ve put a lot of work, time, passion and effort to do things that didn’t turn out 100%. I tried very hard, but all my effort resulted in negatives. I was crushed, but had to tough it out. I’ve heard negatives every day this week, and have felt really small.

There’s very little worse than walking around at your normal height, but feeling about 2 inches big. Being constantly reminded on the outside is doubled when you’re telling yourself exactly the same things. It’s hard not to feel as if you yourself are inferior, when really it’s not you, it is your actions that didn’t have the desired result. (¶2-3)

While he is not a teen, the text does capture an essence of what it was like for teens in the study to feel small. Feeling 2 inches big; being reminded that the outside is doubled—it is a sensation that “I am smaller and the world is bigger.” That perception in and of itself

can leave one feeling overwhelmed. Things in this doubled [in size] world are now insurmountable. It is like an ant trying to reach the dining room table laden with food. Where does he start? And when you have previously run against barrier after barrier in the moments and days preceding this, your resolve is that much less already. You are shaken and defeated before you begin.

This defeated feeling can come from feeling powerless or overpowered—when the will and authority of another commands us to do something and we have to submit. It is a feeling of parents having “power over” that often leads to an internal struggle, which can spill over into an argument (if the teen’s resolve is strong enough):

- Chris What about your mom or your dad, do you ever feel like they have power over you or you have power over them?
- Teen I don’t have power over them, but I know they have power over me, and I have to listen to them.
- Chris Yeah. What do you think of that?
- Teen I think it’s alright but sometimes I just don’t want to do what they tell me to do.
- Chris Why is that? What’s going on at that point?
- Teen At that point I just want to do what I want to do and not have to do what they’re trying to tell me to do.
- Chris How do you feel when they’re trying to get you to do what they want you to do?
- Teen [sigh] Why? [hands raised in the air]
- Chris The big *why*. Does that frustrate you?
- Teen Sometimes.

This feeling of defeat and powerlessness also rings through in the text below:

- Chris What would you be grumbling under your breath?

- Teen I'd be like, "That's not fair; I don't want to do this; blah-blah-blah." Stuff like, "I shouldn't be treated this way as an individual," but I'm their kid, they can treat me how they want.
- Chris You shouldn't be treated that way? [teen shakes his head] Why not?
- Teen Well, because they have more authority on me than I do on them because me being their kid, I should have to listen to what they say no matter what, which is really how it should go.
- Chris Do you agree with that though?
- Teen In situations like that, no.

You can hear the frustration and defeat in these teens' voices. They give in to the will of their parents, but struggle with their own wants and needs in the process. These teens know that the "right" answer is that parents should have power over them, but they don't really agree with that. There is a struggle over their own need for respect—respect for their abilities, respect for their time, and respect for their own thoughts despite their status as teen. It doesn't really feel right.

This being overpowered can also feel like being pushed down, which is another sense of feeling small:

- Chris So if I were in your shoes and I'm living through this, what would it be like for me? What would I be experiencing in that moment?
- Teen You'd probably be experiencing frustration [chuckle] a lot of the time. And just not being able to say much without it being pushed back down.
- Chris Pushed back down...
- Teen Yeah, like... you know, sometimes I say stuff and I feel like "Okay, that was good." I, you know, stood up, I said what I needed to, and she's like, "Well, no, that's not really right." So it's kinda being put back down. And then I feel smaller and it's just not the greatest feeling, I guess.

This feeling of being pushed or beaten down is captured nicely in this poem:

What I Am
(In the Eyes of my Father)

I am nothing
in the eyes
of my father

beaten down
from heaven
by the shaft

When I get
good grades
he doesn't say

of my father.
It feels like
a bullwhip

anything, not
one good word.
When I didn't

going across
my back
every time

get into a top
high school
he said I was

he puts me,
beats me
down, down. (Beavers, 2000)

nothing, never
going to be
nothing. I am

The emotion is poignant, and we can almost imagine the weight bearing down on us and reducing us to mere nothingness. It's a feeling of worthlessness. It feels like a black hole sucking the essence from our being, draining our will and individuality into oblivion.

As adults, we sometimes fail to recognize the import or significance of things in children's and teens' lives. How could the texture of the blanket be enough to push a child over the edge into a tantrum? What possible significance does the color of the cup one drinks his or her milk out of have in the scope of things? Why can't he just do it the way he is told (it's so much easier than the way he was going to do it)? In a child's or a teen's mind, the texture, the color of the cup, and the ability to do it in his or her own way are very important. The teens' world view has been formed only by their limited years of experience and access to the world. So, for them, these seemingly insignificant things are

highly significant. The same is true for adults. We all have our realms of significance and points of reference from which to measure importance. So if it seems that what we are discussing and looking at here seems insignificant to you, then I ask you to look through the eyes of a teen, someone who is struggling to discover his or her individual identity, to establish autonomy apart from his or her parents, to learn about the larger world through direct experience, to escape, and to find freedom. Teens need to establish their identity, they need to find autonomy, they need to experience the world directly, and they need to find their own personal freedoms that help to define many of these things. They are not wants; they are needs.

There is an underlying question that so many teens seem to want to ask but often they don't bother because of their feelings of futility, but it is a question that gives voice to their autonomous needs:

Chris Do you ever come back still feeling like you're right and they still think you're wrong.

Teen Uh-huh.

Chris And then what happens in that situation?

Teen Then basically I just leave it alone 'cause I know that I won't get anywhere.

Chris What are you feeling at that moment when you know that you're not gonna get anywhere?

Teen Why can't they ever see things my way?

“Why can't they ever see things my way?” That question pulls at my heart as I read it. It seems to be crying out for someone to listen and for someone to stand in his shoes and see things in a new way. But that voice stays silent, “I know that I won't get anywhere.” You can hear this in the text below:

Chris What is that like and what’s happening with that?

Teen It just feels kinda like shadowed, like, you know, like she’s like ignoring my opinion. And it just feels like a sense of loss right there, like I’m not being heard. It’s just.... All I want to do is get my point out. So. And it just kinda feels like, you know, just no sense, nobody listening.

Chris How does it make you feel when you can’t get your opinion across?

Teen Frustrated. It’s just so frustrating. It’s like, “Can you at least take two minutes of my time and just listen to what I’m saying?” And then, of course, after she listens and she like has some way of like coming back at it, you know, but a not a type of reason. It just keeps on interweaving that way.

“Can you at least take two minutes of my time and just listen to what I’m saying?” It is as if his time and his voice are not respected or valuable. And even if she does listen, she doesn’t really hear his words, and she comes back without reason or with irrationality. It makes him feel shadowed, ignored, or simply oppressed.

What is oppression? This dictionary definition connects well to the teen experience—we’ve heard some of these concepts declaimed above:

Oppress, *v.*: To overcome, put down, or subdue; to suppress; to check or put an end to; (*spec.*) to overwhelm (a person) in a fight or battle.; to be overwhelmed; to conceal; to inhibit; to remove or erase from consciousness or currency; to press forcefully on (a person or thing), esp. so as to cause damage or discomfort; to crush; to crowd; to smother; to affect with a feeling of pressure, constraint, or distress; to afflict; to (mentally) overwhelm or weigh down (a person); to keep (a person or group of people, esp. a minority or other subordinate group) in subjection and hardship by the unjust exercise of authority, power, or strength; to exploit; to tyrannize over; to govern harshly; to rape, violate; to attack, make war against; to persecute; to afflict; to deprive (a person) *of* or *from* something by force; to press or urge (a person); to force or exert oneself; to close, to shut up. (OED Online, 2010)

Put down, overwhelmed, crushed, constrained, and kept in subjection—all of these elements come through in the teen experience. For these teens, the experience is truly oppression, and oppression begets frustration and anger.

When faced with the irrationality of a parent, this sense of frustration is even greater—”*Irrational*, adj. Not endowed with reason; contrary to or not in accordance with reason; unreasonable, utterly illogical, absurd” (OED Online, 2010). The sense of the absurd; the utterly illogical—how often this rings through. This is especially true when parents utter those two statements that are often completely devoid of reason—”No!” or “Because (I said so).” Adults often use these statements as their fall-back when they can’t think of any other logical response, or parents say them right off the bat without thinking why they are saying them just to quell an argument from happening in the first place. But at what cost?

Teens are smart enough to see through this; they know these statements are devoid of reason and are just reactionary remarks. Such statements are completely absurd, they are burdensome and weigh teens down, and teens are likely to withhold information and avoid conversation in the face of these remarks. The cost is teens who are likely to close down and avoid open communication, to search elsewhere for their voice to be heard.

Teen No, I just... it’s like, I tried and I tried and I’m wasting too much energy on that, it’s just like, I don’t know, I’m just gonna give up. I’m not even gonna put anymore energy or effort into it. What’s the point, I’ve already tried a million times.

Chris So it’s almost like you have to give up, in a sense.

Teen Yeah.

Chris What does it feel like when you give up?

Teen Really, really frustrating. It’s just like, “Ah, why doesn’t she get it?!”

There is a definite need for logic and rationality with teens. They are trying to learn about their world, and they want to know the reasons for why things are, or happen, the way they do. They become angry and highly frustrated in the face of irrationality:

Chris Because.... What about the word because? What do you think about that word?

Teen Well, there's a proper way to use because and the improper way. The proper way is because of this, this, and that. You know. Actual reasons. And there's because with no point following it. There's nothing after it. You can't just use because and then end.

Chris So, the floating because at the end of whatever doesn't work?

Teen Yeah. It doesn't, that's not a complete sentence. It doesn't work. If you ever put that in like a literature paper, you're gonna get an F.
[laughter]

Chris What do you want to say to her at that moment when she ends it with because?

Teen I just want to be like, "Oh, my gosh, I guess it's like you're being totally irrational," which I have said before. And then she freaks out, she's like, "I'm not being irrational, raaaah!" She makes that noise, too. [laughter] That's like the noise that goes against the freak out.

Chris Tell me about that noise a little bit more.

Teen [laughter] I'm serious. Like. I don't know, I guess, you know, it's like, I don't know, a pterodactyl swooping down on you. [laughter] Like, I learned it from a friend. I did! Whenever her parents freak out, she uses that noise and I think it's hilarious. And it explains it so well.
[laughter]

Chris So, this freak out noise is happening and what's going through your mind at that moment you hear that sound?

Teen [laughter] Well, I guess that specific sound you just laugh your ass off. [laughter]

She knows that her mom has lost her grip on rationality when the scream, that pterodactyl voice, comes out and mom "freaks out." You can feel this teen's energy

ramping up as she talks about facing that irrationality. Her body language gets tighter, her voice becomes louder and more agitated, and you can hear the deep frustration in her words. It is truly an embodied experience of frustration being shared in this moment that we are living with her. But what is a freak out? How does she understand this?

Chris Earlier you mentioned parents freaking out. What is a freak out? How would you describe it?

Teen Freak out is, “No way! No, you’re not gonna do that. Absolutely not. Go to your room.” That’s a freak out.

Chris What do you think about freak outs?

Teen It’s stupid. It’s like a child throwing a tantrum, you know, sitting on the floor screaming. It’s the same concept. [chuckle]

Chris Tell me a little bit more. This tantrum, how does it happen? What does it look like when it happens?

Teen Oh, it’s just, I mean, pretty much... you know, they get the angry face on, and they’re already yelling before that, obviously, because they don’t just start yelling. And then it’s, you know, “NO!” that just very set, they’re gonna say that.

Chris Is there a point of no return in this freak out where up to that point you might be able to stop the freak out from happening?

Teen Well, I mean, yeah, because you can just be like “Oh, I’m sorry, I was totally and utterly completely out of line, I was completely wrong, you’re completely right, everything’s in your power. I’m gonna back down completely.” I don’t do that. [chuckle] That’s silly because nobody is ever completely right.

So a freak out is a tantrum or loss of control. It is a loss of reason or rationality. But how do these teens tend to face this irrationality?

Chris She’s not being rational at that point. So, how do you handle it?

Teen By then it’s just like, let it out, I’m gonna do it anyways, you know, I’m not gonna say anything anymore. “Fine!”

Chris So you sorta close down.

- Teen Yeah. And just completely shut her out, which pisses her off beyond all belief. But it's like, "Too bad!" [chuckle] You know.
- Chris Do you think you could have done anything else but shut down yourself?
- Teen I could either shut down or I could grovel, and I don't grovel.
- Chris What does groveling mean to you?
- Teen Well, it's like the thing before, "You're right, I'm wrong, I'm sorry, bow down, and...." [chuckle]
- Chris What does that mean, bowing down and doing that? What would that mean if you did it?
- Teen That just means, you know, abdicating every point that you've ever had in that argument and just being.... Just giving it up completely.

So some teens shut down and do it their own way, while others seem to shut down and do it their parents' way. The key is that most of these teens shut down when faced with the irrational; they close up and retreat inward. They are frustrated, but they know the futility of trying to voice those frustrations or to bring the argument back to rationality and reason. They give up and either ignore or give in, and they will search elsewhere for their voice to be heard. In the group of teens I interviewed, it seems that those who were 14 years old and younger tended to give in more often while those who were 16 and older tended to ignore more often when faced with what they see as irrationality. But both groups hold back their thoughts nonetheless.

Sometimes feeling small is feeling like, "I am being treated like an ignorant child." This too is accompanied with feelings of anger, frustration, and defiance. "You never give me a chance! Why don't you trust me? I'm not a baby anymore! Can't you see I've grown up? Screw you!" There is often so much venom and anger bubbling underneath. This text from Constant (2001) helps connect us to the venom and anger:

My mind reacts; a flurry of vengeful comments, hateful, stupid actions held back, held in check by the self that says, *It's not worth it. Don't do something stupid because of hair.*

Oh, but I do think. He can't stop me from that. I wonder, *How do you know who I am?* You dismiss my every thought as a stupid eighteen-year-old flight of fancy. My dreams, my hopes, my needing to write are all just immature things that I have to get out of the way before my real life can begin. *How can you know me?* I scream in my mind. *How can you even look me in the eye and say that you know me? You've never tried!* (p. 21)

And my mind screams. *You don't ASK me anything. You TELL me things.* I have gone to YOUR church every single week since I was born, and hear people who belong to YOUR church tell me what my morals should be at Sunday school. IT hasn't been MY life, MY morals. It's been yours. You don't ask. You give me no choice. (p. 22)

“You're being so childish! I don't understand.”

And everything, every part of me, wants to fight that statement—I'm being childish. This afternoon, in a restaurant, you pulled my hair... YOU PULLED MY HAIR! That's childish. That's abusive. It's humiliating to have you pull my hair just to get me to realize that my hair is long. You've told me that I couldn't go anywhere with my friends until my hair is cut.

I realize my father is a bully, a childish, brutal bully who will pout and complain and moan until he gets his way. He'll bully anyone into his way of thinking. There is no other viewpoint in a bully's frame of mind, only his own. A bully will keep pushing, keep demeaning until finally you just roll over and let him control you. He will hurt you physically, mentally and spiritually until there's nothing strong left, only a child who can't defend himself. (pp. 22-23)

Constant's experience typifies the essence of feeling diminished or belittled much like the teens in the study lived such moments. There is a feeling in the teen experience that “I am not respected as a young adult” and that “I'm expected to defer to my parents because they are older.” But how can a teen have respect for his or her parents when that respect isn't reciprocated?

Chris Tell me a little bit more about respect.

Teen Well, respect for her is me doing exactly what she says. And I don't get an opinion in the matter and it's just dumb.

- Chris How do you feel about that?
- Teen It's very irritating because I like to be treated like an individual, like I'm older than I am, I hate being referred to like I'm a 16-year-old. Like curfew laws. Oh, my gosh... pathetic.
- Chris So it's sort of a similar feeling with the curfew laws that you're having with your mom's idea of respect.
- Teen Well, it's like, the police should not have.... They even say on their curfew law exceptions, the exception, last one, is using your first amendment rights. What the hell? They can't go against that.
- Chris I didn't know that.
- Teen Yeah, I actually looked into it.
- Chris So, do you feel that your mom's version of respect is really respect or is it something else?
- Teen I believe that it's more deference. Like back in the patriarchal society where everyone had to defer to father, do whatever he says. She thinks that she should get that absolute respect versus I prefer to, you know, have like actual discussions. 'Cause she used to be like, "You can't have a sleepover. Why? Because I said so." Like, "No, we're gonna talk about this and you're gonna give me an actual reason." And then she called that disrespect.
- Chris So she said that your behavior was disrespectful.
- Teen Oh, yeah.
- Chris Well, how did you feel about that?
- Teen Well, I mean, it's just silly 'cause I should be able to question authority without being called disrespectful, because I usually am a pretty respectful person. Like I've always... adults have always said I know how to handle myself in situations, I'm very respectful, you know, I help out. I'm a decently good person. I don't, you know, go off and just say, "I'm right and you're wrong."
- Chris You're in that moment, your mom says, "Because I said so," and "You're being disrespectful." What's going through your mind at that particular moment in time?
- Teen Extreme frustration. Because, you know, at 16 I can't vote, I can't smoke, I can't drink, I can't do anything. So I have no power in

anything, you know. And you know, that's really irritating 'cause I'm around people all day who are allowed to do these things. Why should I not be able to when I'm on their level in other areas?

To get a sense of the importance for rationality and reason, I wanted to check the validity of this teen's claim on the curfew law exception (in her county) that she mentioned. And the teen is, indeed, accurate:

(1) The following shall constitute valid exceptions to the operation of the curfew:
 (i) if the juvenile is exercising First Amendment rights protected by the United States Constitution (or those similar rights protected by Article I of the Constitution of the State of Minnesota), such as free exercise of religion, freedom of speech, and the right of assembly; (Juvenile Curfew Ordinance, 2000, § 5)

Teens need rationale and reason; they need to understand the whys. As adults we may feel that there are too many whys, but, without answers, we risk shutting down open communication. We need to take time to pause and think when necessary, and we need to reciprocate respect to garner respect. Would we, as adults, be satisfied with a simple, "Because I said so," response from our spouse, from our coworkers, or from our peers? How would we respond? It makes me wonder if adults would consider this to be a respectful or disrespectful reply and what our own response to that might be.

But what is respect, and how should respect operate in a relationship? If we consider the definition from the OED Online (2010), respect is seen as giving consideration to another, honoring, valuing, and standing in relationship with another. In the obsolete aspects, there was more of a *deference* quality—submission to the acknowledged superior claims, skill, judgment, or other qualities, of another. In our current interpretations, there is a sense of *reciprocity*, reciprocation of cooperative or altruistic behavior, or an *intersubjective* aspect, existing between conscious minds, of being in *relationship with* someone. But when someone is belittled or devalued, they do

not feel a reciprocation of altruistic behavior; they feel required to submit and defer, the obsolete connotations of respect.

- Chris What buttons does she push?
- Teen The “you’re a little kid” button.
- Chris So what does it mean when she says you’re a little kid.
- Teen Well, she won’t literally say it, but it’s kinda like deferring to it. And like, the only time where I’ll appreciate that is when I’m really sick, like.... ‘Cause I get strep throat probably once a month, it’s terrible. Yeah. So, like, then, you know, I’ll sit on the couch, “Oh, honey, I’ll go get you some chicken noodle soup.” That’s cool. But it’s like, on a day-to-day basis when it’s like, “Oh, I’ll make your lunch and I’ll do this and stuff,” I’m just like okay, I’m 16 years old; I’m perfectly capable of making my own lunch and driving myself, and like, she’ll be like, “Oh, honey, you know, you’re too young to drive a couple hours to go see your friend.” And I’m just like, “No, I’m not.” [chuckle]
- Chris So when she says that you’re too young to do this or that, what does she mean by that?
- Teen Well, like, she won’t literally say that. She’s just like, “It probably wouldn’t be a good idea for you to drive down there because, you know, you’re not quite as experienced.” I’m just like, “I’m perfectly capable of driving two hours on a highway. I’ve done that since I was 15 years old.” [chuckle] I have my own car, I drive everywhere.
- Chris So you’ve had experience. So, I’m wondering what she means.
- Teen Well, it’s like still thinking “Oh, you’re still, you know, my little five-year-old,” and all that fun stuff. [chuckle]
- Chris [chuckle] I see you fidgeting a little bit as you say that. How does that make you feel when someone’s talking to you like a little kid?
- Teen Well, it’s stupid.

And other moments of being belittled are even accompanied by the language indicating that stance:

- Teen When I was younger and she would like have a hangover or something, she'd be really crabby towards me and I wouldn't know why. And, you know, dad always used to get after her and be like, "Don't take it out on Katya," you know. And it was just like stuff like that where she won't tell me what's going on, but she'll just be like, "Oh, you know, you're too young to understand."
- Chris So, it's almost as if she's treating you younger than you actually are.
- Teen Oh, my God, she does that all the time. And of course, she'll use the phrase "You're still my baby," and I'm like, "Yes, but babies grow up, and you need to comprehend the idea." That's why I'm never gonna be a parent. Ever.

"You're still my baby." A classic phrase that parents use, and in one fell swoop, it takes away one's legitimacy of adulthood, one's identity, and makes one feel like he or she is two inches tall (well, maybe $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches tall or 8 lbs 11 oz). This phrase also announces a parent's irrationality and lack of reason. From a teen's perspective, parents seem to forget how old their teen is.

How do you argue against the *you're-my-baby* ploy? It is frustrating and shuts you down. If you push against it, you're seen as disrespectful. How do you prove yourself in the face of this? From a teen's perspective, parents hold onto an image of who they imagine their teen will become, and teens themselves struggle against that image to show and discover their true identity:

- Teen I will never prove to my mom that I'm older until I am that age. 'Cause she has certain standards that she puts toward certain ages, and it's like a time-block, and she has this all laid out in her mind, 'cause she's very methodical. And it's like, well, if something goes past the method, uh-oh, freak out, system breakdown, "What are we gonna do?" [chuckle]
- Chris So she has a plan in her mind that you're supposed to follow.
- Teen Yeah, and of course, you know, the plan's a straight line and I'm curved off way to the left. [chuckle]

Teens recognize the discrepancy between the two images. They fight against this doppelganger constantly. They are trying to prove themselves as an adult to themselves, to their parents, and to others. They are trying to be independent and self-sufficient and to have their own identity. But it is a challenge, especially when confronted with this image of the teen as a child.

When an argument brings about feelings of smallness similar to what was described above, such feelings of smallness can also be accompanied by feelings of guilt, regret, defeat, and worthlessness; feeling less important or that “My way isn’t good enough;” feeling devalued; feeling like, “I can’t please them;” feeling like, “My way works too—why don’t you see that!!” These feelings can make one think, “Why bother?! I’ll do it wrong anyway.” It’s a sense of being powerless, especially in the face of absurdity and the irrational.

Summary

From this chapter, we see how feeling small and oppressed and wanting to escape seem to go hand in hand, which connects us to some of the other themes described in the following chapters. Being oppressed brings feelings of wanting to throw off the shackles, to come out from under the weight bearing down, and to find freedom. The themes of feeling powerless, small, devalued, and oppressed in this chapter overlap the ideas of freedom and escape contained in Chapter 6. How do teens experience freedom and escape, and what might it feel like for them? In addition, feeling powerless, small, devalued, and oppressed overlap the ideas in Chapter 5 of the frustration and irritation teens experience when they feel weighed down and small. How does irritation relate to the experience and development of the argument? These elements are interconnected,

and the tapestry of the parent-teen conflict and the associated argument takes shape as we move to the thematic elements of the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Theme Two—Experiencing Irritation, Frustration, Hypocrisy, Pettiness, and Defiance

As we began to hear in the previous chapter, feeling small and oppressed breeds frustration and anger. This chapter will uncover and expand on the ideas of frustration and irritation as they are lived. How do they relate to a sense of hypocrisy and pettiness within an argument or the parent-teen relationship? And what might be the connection of frustration and irritation to defiance if there is one?

If we go back to an earlier quote, it reveals an underlying question that many teens ask, and this question draws us closer to the essence of experiencing irritation and frustration as it relates to parent-teen conflict and associated arguments. “She had asked me to make the bed in a particular way. But I had done it another way. ‘What difference does it make?’ I asked” (Bhattacharya, 1997, p. 34). That underlying question of “what difference does it make?” seems filled with frustration. This question is significant. Teens often feel that conflict and arguments happen over things that just aren’t important—they are small, insignificant things. It is irritating and frustrating when the seemingly small and insignificant are blown out of proportion. Again, it touches on the difference adults and teens have in their realms of significance and points of reference from which to measure importance. What parents may feel is important, teens may not, and vice-versa.

- | | |
|-------|--|
| Chris | It sounds like sometimes you have a normal conversation that suddenly turns into an argument... how does that conversation shift, what’s different from beginning to the end? |
| Teen | It’s just like a certain level where something is said that like really bothers me, and then I’ll just kinda be like “No, you don’t understand!” Then they get mad at me for like yelling, I guess. Or |

vice versa, like if they start yelling first, then I'm like "Well, you don't need to yell at me about it." I guess sometimes I get frustrated when they do yell at me instead of just talking to me about things because "Why do you even need to make it into such a big deal when I don't feel like it's that big of a deal in the first place?"

Chris Okay. So their making it a big deal gets you frustrated again.

Teen Yeah. Escalates the problem, I guess.

Chris So that moment when it becomes an argument could either be, um, because their voice is getting louder and they're getting mad, or it could be because you're frustrated and you feel like you're not being heard.

Teen Yeah.

Sometimes arguments will be over things that seem completely devoid of meaning, just so absolutely empty that teens are baffled it is being brought up.

Teen Sometimes it'll be on an inimportant [*sic*] subject that doesn't really matter, something that just doesn't even matter to anything.

In the scope of the world, what possible importance could this have? Teens are irritated and annoyed; it's like pouring salt in an open wound. However, "there is no coming to consciousness without pain" (Jung, 1928/2008, p. 193). This annoyance and irritation in relation to the conflict and its lack of importance can be the catalyst or flash point that launches the argument into existence. The words of Carrington-Smith (2010) tap into the essence of this experience as teens would live it—we can almost imagine the pain associated with the experience:

When we are hurt by someone's words or actions, the pain we feel may not necessarily be caused by the words or actions themselves, but by our heightened sensitivity triggered in that particular situation. Salt poured over healthy skin is merely irritating, but it is downright excruciating when sprinkled over an open wound. (¶5)

Because these issues and things are seemingly unimportant, when they are brought up, it feels petty or even vindictive. The words in this moment are almost painful.

Teen I know. . . It's just petty things like that. 'Cause we don't get in fights about big things very often. It's just the petty little things.

It's the pettiness of a thing that brings about so much frustration and irritation. It seems so spiteful and aggravating. It is this sense of parental spitefulness and small-mindedness that burns through our core. From the OED Online (2010):

Petty, adj. and n.: Of little importance, insignificant, trivial. Freq. *depreciative*; characterized by an undue concern for trivial matters, esp. in a small-minded or spiteful way.

Petty-minded, adj. and n.: Having, or characteristic of, a mind that dwells on the trivial and ignores what is important; narrow, small-minded, spiteful.

Narrow, small-minded, and spiteful—that begins to capture how teens experience their parents' attitudes and behaviors during times of parent-teen conflict and in many parent-teen arguments. The sentiment I hear lying underneath sounds like, "If only they [my parents] would stop to consider what I am doing at this moment and to realize how much more important it is than turning off their damn lights, closing their damn drawers, putting away their damn pencils, or taking out their damn trash!! Seriously! Get a grip people!" As the irritation builds and the figurative salt is poured into the already festering wound, it puts the teen over the edge and fires him or her to action or reaction.

Teen It really is annoying 'cause it's like you're in the basement working on homework and they're like, "Come up here and turn off the light!" It's like, "You are right there, why can't you turn it off!"

Chris I'm hearing like a lot of frustration behind that. They're standing there right by the lights and.... What else are you thinking right at that moment?

- Teen It's just so irritating. It's just... [growl].
- Chris Why is it irritating?
- Teen Because you're right in the middle of doing this really hard piece of homework, and you're getting into it and then.... "Can you come up here and turn off the light!"

"It's just so irritating. It's just... [growl]." The irritation is so primal and digs at the teen's soul. The teen become so ensnared by the talons of pettiness that he or she just wants to cry out in frustration. This moment is a guttural and visceral experience both in how it is felt and how it comes out in vocalizations. For many teens, they want to growl, scream inside, gnash their teeth, and want to lash out. This moment is frustration in its primal form that comes out of the irritation that is being lived.

So what is irritation? If we really look at this word and its implications, the very essence of the word hints at moving to action or reaction—the provocation to activity or incitement. Again from the OED Online (2010):

Irritation, n.: The action of irritating, or condition of being irritated; the action of stirring up or provoking to activity; incitement; excitement of anger or impatience; exasperation, provocation, vexation, annoyance; excitement of a bodily part or organ to excessive sensitiveness or morbid action; the resulting condition; the inducement of some vital action or condition (as motion, contraction, nervous impulse) in an organ, tissue, etc. of an animal or plant by the application of a stimulus.

The body itself will fight against an irritation and try to purge itself of the annoyance. As the pain receptors and immune systems are fired into action, the body's systems work in tandem to rid the body of the irritation. At a corporeal level, we all fight to ward off irritation in order to protect the body from pain and infection. Even our autonomic bodily systems' automaticities are responses to irritations caused by the nervous impulses from the brain. Also, in the same vein, it only makes sense that we

would eventually react in some way to psychological irritation and annoyance. In his great work, *Zoonomia*, Darwin (1796/2007) touches even more on the ideas of irritation, the organism, and its response to the irritation:

Irritative ideas are those, which are preceded by irritation, which is excited by objects external to the organs of sense: as the idea of that tree, which either I attend to, or which I shun in walking near it without attention. In the former case it is termed perception, in the latter it is termed simply as irritative idea. (p. 91).

But, when any consistent train of sensitive or voluntary ideas is flowing along, if any external stimulus affects us so violently, as to intrude irritative ideas forcibly into the mind, it disunites the former train of ideas, and we are affected with surprise. (p. 146)

The irritative ideas of objects, whilst we are awake, are perpetually present to our sense of sight; as we view the furniture of our rooms, or the ground we tread upon, throughout the whole day without attending to it. And as our bodies are never at perfect rest during our waking hours, these irritative ideas of objects are attended perpetually with irritative ideas of their apparent motions. The ideas of apparent motions are always irritative ideas, because we never attend to them, whether we attend to the objects themselves, or to their real motions, or to neither. Hence the ideas of the apparent motions of objects are a complete circle of irritative ideas, which continue throughout the day. (Darwin, 1796/2007, p. 162)

As we move through our day, our senses perceive minor irritations that we tend to ignore but that are always in the periphery of our senses. When the irritations mount or become significant, when we become more and more sensitive to the littlest thing, those irritations intrude forcibly into the mind and we react or are affected by them. Imagine going on a hike and having your shoe rub against your ankle just a little bit. When you're first starting out, you don't notice that rubbing—it's a subtle irritation. However, after several hours, it is all you can think about as the blister forms and ruptures causing great pain. As you react to that pain from the blister on your ankle, you may also become even more sensitive to the other pains and irritations that are related to this hike—aching leg muscles, thirstiness, the sunburn on your shoulders, the rough texture of your socks that

you hadn't noticed before. An annoyance or irritation that brings you to a flash point or reaction in one area can lead to hypersensitivity to other annoyances that had been lurking subtly in the background.

In a similar way, teens who are engaged in other endeavors try to ignore the minor or subtle irritations that they perceive in the pettiness of certain requests from parents. It is when these requests become more persistent and irritating, when the figurative blister forms, that they are fired to action and reaction. The teen becomes inflamed, angry, and very sensitive to every little thing. It feels like and sounds like "Arrrgh!":

I'm irritated at life. Irritated that there don't seem to be any genuine people out there. Angry that every time I give my heart out, to friends, family friends, etc, it feels like someone crushes it under a steam-roller. I'm irritated at this fly circling my room. I'm angry that people don't care about anyone but themselves. I'm frustrated that I feel like I can go somewhere with my talent, but I don't have the money to invest in training! ARGH! (Help.com, 2010, ¶1)

Once a person has reached a state of irritation, he or she becomes even more sensitive to the tiniest little annoyances—the buzz and flicker of the fluorescent bulbs overhead; another person's slightly whistling nose as he breathes; the drip, drip, drip of the leaky faucet; the phantom itch she feels on her arm that just won't go away; or as mentioned above, "this fly circling my room." Normally, these minor irritations would be things to which our attention would not be affixed, things in the periphery of our consciousness, but in a state of full irritation, they become significant and bothersome. Much like the expression says, "It is the last straw that breaks the camel's back" (Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs Online, 2010). As these irritations build one upon the other in our irritated state, we can reach that final straw and be pushed over the edge; we need to cry out in some guttural vocalization—Arrrgh! Aaaaaaa! Grrrr! Hmph! They are the

sounds of our soul howling out in frustration, and for some they are accompanied with a compulsion to lash out physically too—punching a pillow, kicking a hole in the garage door, throwing a golf club into the lake. Living the last-straw moment is a full-body experience, mind, body, and soul; it is full of vitality and replete with energy.

The following texts are from two different individuals who were not in the study, but these texts provide a connection to how teens also experience this last-straw moment and the vital aspect of irritation itself:

All I was trying to do was help her and she threw up road blocks at every juncture. I told her I had enough. If she wasn't going to let me help her she could get out and do whatever she wanted but I couldn't stand by and watch her destroy everything I had worked for during the last 2 months. (I had called and made all the appointments, I had arranged for a family meeting, I had spoken with her social worker, her doctor and all the specialists just to get her tested) Now she won't even cooperate by helping me fill out the forms. It was the last straw! I wanted to knock some sense into her. I was so angry! I cried myself to sleep that night. (CareGivingHelper.com, 2010, ¶1)

I'm feeling irritated today. Not really sure why, but I am. Well, there are a myriad of things that are currently ticking me off. I like feeling ticked off as opposed to sad. When I'm feeling a little ticked, I will try to do something about it, and that's a good thing. (Kim, 2010, ¶1)

At least with irritation and action, we are more likely to feel alive. It is easy to get bogged down with the irritations and burdens of everyday life. Without feeling a little ticked, we might become mired with feeling oppressed and sad; we could become weighed down, much as we explored in the first theme above. But with irritation, the weight and burden of everyday life can reach a flash point that burns away the figurative mass bearing down on us just as it does for teens. As in an explosion, the detritus that weighs us down and buries us is blown away in a single moment spraying the landscape

with shrapnel and dust and impacting anyone in our path. The following text from an anonymous source captures some of this moment:

Recently, the relationship between my family and I has gotten alot worst. We are arguing really badly and I have got to swearing at them because I am fed up of how they treat me.... I used to believe that that is how normal families run, that parents are supposed to insult their son and make him feel like garbage and then tell them that it is for his own good that they treat him like that. I am not in that belief anymore.

Yesterday, I couldn't take any of it anymore. They were lecturing me once more on how if I fail my first year at University (I finished my high school diploma with an 85% average) they would support me no longer and it was up to me to do this and that and this and that. Simply, I am tired of their constant pressure, I cannot take feeling as though I have to consistently do everything perfectly otherwise my life will be in shambles and my parents will look down upon me.

Anyways, I lost it. I started getting angry and I hit my fork into my food a bit harder than normal. My father screamed in my face and told me to "Stop! And don't do this in my house!" I banged my plate.... At that point, I totally lost it. It escalated from there. I lost control of myself and felt as though I did not care in any way how I treated my parents, because they did not care how they treated me. In their minds, they are never wrong, and they have the right to do anything simply because they are my parents. I lost it and I did a few impulsive things and as well as did they, and it's a long story.

This morning I came to tell my mother sorry for the horrible things I did the day before.... I told her it's not just that night, and its from so many years of me feeling pressured and having this constant 'gloom and doom' feeling over my shoulder because of their pressure. She wouldn't take any of it, and said that if I'm unwilling to say sorry sincerely, then there's no point in saying it. She said I have no right to compare myself to her, and that, once again, she's a parent and has the right (as one) to do what she does. It escalated and gotten [*sic*] into a shouting fight.... Recently, just this evening I have gotten a feeling of feeling self-confident, something I haven't had for a while. I am feeling as though I don't have to take what they do to me anymore and I will not let them do to me. I feel kind of stronger, if you can get what I mean.... I feel trapped, I feel as though I can do nothing, I am always losing and there is no way out for me. If I try and say sorry, it comes back in my face, if I control myself they keep going, if I fight back they fight back harder. I'm stuck. (Yahoo! Answers, 2009, ¶1-8)

I can almost visualize this flash point in the image of lighting a campfire. A bunch of crumpled newspaper is wadded up in a fairly dense mound that is then covered

with kindling wood and heavier logs. When the match is struck (a type of flash point) and is applied to that pile of newspaper, you can watch the weight of the newspaper burn away to nothingness in an instant—a blackening spot that spreads, reds and yellows, gaping holes develop, and then ash disintegrating and floating away to nonexistence. Then the fire is set free to engulf the wood above just as the argument and our vehemence is set free in our response to the irritation.

What triggers this flash point can be almost anything. Even the smallest things, or especially the smallest things, can push us over the edge—”it’s just the petty things like that.” It’s the cascade or domino effect that sets it in motion. Once released, it must be allowed to run its course; there’s no containing it.

Finally, silence.... I sprawled out on my bed, and grabbed my book. Just as I was about to start reading... “Sophia!” I sighed. “WHAT?????” I hollered. My mother came up the stairs and said, “Don’t yell at me.” I glared. “Sophia,” she said in a warning tone. “I need you to go collect the trash.” I sighed, but, I got up and did it. I was about to go to my room, when my mother called again, “And the dishes!” That did it. I totally lost it. “You can do it yourself! Because, I’m LEAVING!” and with that, I ran up to my room, grabbed my duffel, (which was packed because I had been planing [*sic*] on going to a sleepover) and ran downstairs. I wrenched open the door, and ran, and ran, and ran. Finally, I stopped running. (Skate Girl, 2007, ¶1)

“I was about to go to my room, when my mother called again, ‘And the dishes!’”

These three little words set things off. The button is pushed, the flood gates are opened, and the blood boils. You can almost feel the heart beat, the pulse quickening, and the anger building. The exasperation in her voice rings through, and she snaps. Boom!

For teens, irritation and frustration over the perceived pettiness of their parents seems tied to aspects of respect and colliding viewpoints. It’s the seeming disregard a parent has for a teen’s time and the importance of this time that worms its way into the

teen's mind and puts him or her over the edge. The lack of respect that teens experience in the face of seemingly vindictive parental pettiness can lead to a flash point in a conversation, thus launching that conversation into the realm of argument. "Don't you see what I'm doing is more important than shutting off YOUR lights or doing YOUR dishes?" This perception of disrespect is interwoven with a teen's sense of parental pettiness and of small things being blown out of proportion.

Teen For me it's just "I don't see what the big deal is for you guys!" It's often a miscommunication just because they think it's important and I don't. It's different views on things. You know. 'Cause I don't think it's important to go around the house and pick up pencils. [chuckle] You know, everywhere pencils are and just put them away. I mean, if I have time for that, sure I'll do it. But, you know, I just don't have time for that a lot of the time. So, I don't see why it's such a big deal for me to go turn off a light switch. You know. [chuckle]

Chris So why don't you think of that as a big deal, and what is it about that particular...

Teen Because it's petty. [chuckle]

When moments like this happen, it feels vindictive and petty for the teen. Instead of parents putting the pencil back in the drawer or the pencil cup, they call the teen over to do it while they are standing there watching. It may not have even been the teen who left it out in the first place. The message is, "You WILL submit!" Parents are exerting their force on the teen, making him or her acquiesce, and watching over the teen as he or she performs the action. It is the parent as taskmaster, and it feels petty. So what is pettiness from the teen perspective?

Chris When someone's petty, what's going on?

Teen It's just, like they want to find something wrong. You know, like they pick out the tiniest little thing that's wrong and then make a big deal about it.

For the teen, it feels like parents purposefully search for something wrong and then hold it over him or her. But for the teen, it is just so unimportant and infuriating.

Teen It's just the petty little things. I don't know. 'Cause, again, my sister and I don't find it important that the drawer is open or that the light is on. I mean, sure, it's like 10 cents for the bill, but it's just... "Ugh!"

Chris So, I'm trying to picture myself, if I were standing in your shoes in those moments, what would it be like for me to see this happening, what would be going on for me?

Teen You'd go upstairs, 'cause they'd call you upstairs and you'd be like "Okay, I understand that the light is on, I'm sorry that the light is on," 'cause every time it seems that I forgot. Like I went up there, I was gonna go grab something, and come back up, and then I found something else to do real quick—real quick. [chuckle] And then... yeah, so then it's like "Oh, I forgot that the light is on." It's a typical roll-your-eyes moment. I don't know what you'd describe that as other than frustrating and irritating. But it's that moment where you're just going up there and you're gritting your teeth 'cause you just don't want to say anything 'cause you know that if you're gonna say anything that it's just not gonna get you anywhere... [chuckle] They do not move when it comes to that kind of thing.

Chris I feel like I'm getting my nose rubbed in it. [laughter]

Teen Yes, yes. Exactly! [laughter]

For the teen, regardless of him or her forgetting, it is a trivial matter of little importance. "Sometimes it'll be on an inimportant [*sic*] subject that doesn't really matter, something that just doesn't even matter to anything." Often it seems that the point a parent is trying to make is about something so trivial, so lacking in importance, that it seems there really isn't any valid point to it. It feels like getting your nose rubbed in it simply because they have that power over you. It's almost shaming, and it causes the teen great irritation and frustration in addition to feeling devalued and/or disrespected. Inevitably, irritation often leads to the flash-point of argument; the match is struck. The teen's sense of relative importance is bumping up against the parent's concept of what is important, and this

conflict breeds irritation and, perhaps, contempt. Why is a parent's way the only right way or the only important viewpoint? According to whom or what? It's a figurative slap in the face, which stings, burns, and lingers around as a constant reminder of a teen's powerlessness. In response, revolution begins to bubble in the teen's core.

Besides a teen's frustration with the triviality of the vindictive pettiness felt in this conflict, there is a truly embodied or lived aspect about this moment that comes through quite intensely. "It's a typical roll-your-eyes moment." That is such a vivid image, and we can all imagine living such a moment. We can feel it, and we may even have personal experience with this moment of rolling one's eyes. Derision, disregard, and/or contempt shine through in the non-verbal act of rolling one's eyes. It's a potent non-verbal statement that is understood all but universally. It's when something is about to happen, you know what's coming, and you think, "Oh geez, here we go again!"

- Chris Do you sense in your gut when an argument is about to happen?
- Teen Kind of, yeah. Like if someone says something, it's like, "Oh, you shouldn't have said that." [chuckle]
- Chris Have you ever said something like that and said, "Oh, I shouldn't have said that!"?
- Teen Yes.
- Chris What would that moment be like for you?
- Teen Well, it's... the moment of realization where you know you shouldn't have said something when you did... [chuckle] it's the regret... it's like, "Oh, geez, I shouldn't have said that." [chuckle] And you just know that some lecture about whatever it is you're talking about is coming on.
- Chris What goes through your mind at that moment you realize a lecture's about to happen?

- Teen “Oh, geez!” You know, you just sit there and you’ve got the roll-your-eyes expression, you know, [sigh].
- Chris Are you sort of playing out in your mind what the lecture’s going to be already before it happens?
- Teen Yes. Yes. [laughter]

When a parent calls the teen upstairs for something that seems so petty and trivial and a lecture is about to happen, the lecture has already played out clearly and completely in the teen’s mind, and she can fairly accurately predict the diatribe that will be unleashed against her. The teen feels like a puppy whose nose is rubbed in its accident on the floor even though the accident can’t be undone, “You see that? Do you see that?! BAD dog, Bad!!” And, like the puppy, the teen sulks away with her tail between her legs humiliated and diminished, irritated and frustrated that her voice was quelled without a chance to make it heard. She thinks, “Yes, I realize I left the lights on; it happens. Can’t you just shut it off for me? After all, there have been times I found YOU leaving the lights on by accident.” Parents become the hypocrites—the imperfect proclaiming blamelessness and perfection in spite of the contrary. The hypocrisy and spite unleashed in this moment compounds the irritation and frustration teens feel.

- Chris Do you ever catch your parents doing some of those things? [teen nods] Tell me about those moments.
- Teen Yes, I have. Well, like sometimes I’ll walk into my parents’ room ‘cause I have to get something out of their bathroom, and then what do you know, the light is on. So then it’s just like you know, not gonna say anything about it ‘cause, I just, you know, they’re gonna rub my nose in it the next time I do it. So I just try and not make a big deal out of it.
- Chris [laughter] But you’re tempted, I can see.
- Teen Exactly. You’re tempted to do it, but I just don’t even bother ‘cause it’s petty and we all... you know, we’re all hypocrites.

“We’re all hypocrites.” We sometimes see ourselves mirrored in the very thing that irritates us, and we might think twice about addressing the irritation. Will that make me equally petty? Is pettiness that is laced with hypocrisy even more irritating and frustrating? We need to think more about this idea of hypocrisy. How is the concept defined (i.e., what is a hypocrite; what is hypocrisy)?

Hypocrite, n.: (Latin: *hypocrita*, ad., Greek: ὑποκριτής an actor on the stage, pretender, dissembler, f. ὑποκρίεσθαι). One who falsely professes to be virtuously or religiously inclined; one who pretends to have feelings or beliefs of a higher order than his real ones; hence generally, a dissembler, pretender.

Hypocrisy, n.: The assuming of a false appearance of virtue or goodness, with dissimulation of real character or inclinations, esp. in respect of religious life or beliefs; hence in general sense, dissimulation, pretence, sham. (OED Online, 2010)

We all have moments where we might assume a lofty sense of virtue or goodness in respect to certain things or actions—“I never leave the lights on;” “I would never go over the speed limit;” “I would never let my child scream in public like that”—and then find ourselves doing, intentionally or unintentionally, just the opposite of what we professed. But trying to call a parent on this likely comes with a hefty price and can lead to another argument or even punishment. And the question is whether or not it’s worth the price. How far will teens go when confronted with hypocrisy? When is enough, enough?

Chris So you say music sometimes can trigger some of these things [arguments].

Teen Yeah. It was the standing rule forever when Kristi and I didn’t drive that whoever was driving got to pick the music. So then when I started driving, I started picking the music. And then the rule got changed real fast when it was us. It was the parents’ call who got to pick music.

Chris So did you argue that one?

Teen Hypocrisy. Yeah. Yeah, I did, and I lost. I feel like a lot of the fights that I have with them are about it being hypocritical and about it being kind of a double standard where they can pick the music but I can't pick the music. So they can argue between those two who wants to pick music, but as soon as I get involved, "Woop! You don't get to pick." I feel like I catch them doing almost the same things they yell at me for doing and they're completely okay with it. Like for instance, this messy desk over here, my room looks like this a lot, and I always get yelled at about it even though neither one of them ever have to come in my room for anything. And this is a family space and this is all messy, and nobody gets yelled at about that.

The obvious power relationship becomes even more significant at this point.

Pointing out the hypocrisy of someone with power over us can be much more costly than pointing this out to someone with equal or lesser power than ourselves. A parent's power over his or her child is perhaps why parents are more likely to point out their child's errors and transgressions. But teens know and are fully aware of this power relationship and its impact on them whether or not they agree with this power over them. They understand the cost involved in feeling empowered enough to stand up against that power over.

Teen Well, as much as you want to rub their nose in it, I just don't even go there because then it's that "Well, you leave your light on more than we do," and... you know, it's just not worth it. If you can just turn the little switch off, you're good.

Chris Do you say something to them?

Teen No, I didn't honestly because I just didn't want to make a big deal about it. [chuckle]

The teen knows the retaliation against her will be even greater if she were to point out the hypocrisy of the moment and call her parents up to shut off the lights. To blatantly show how parents are being hypocritical, by not modeling what they preach, is to set the stage

for further trouble down the line, and in many cases, it's just not worth it. Still, the inconsistencies and double-standards are extremely frustrating and irritating.

Chris When you think of the word hypocrisy, what does that mean to you?

Teen It just... it makes me so mad because, I mean, I want things to be consistent, and it's like, "If you tell me something is wrong, it's wrong for me and it's wrong for you and it's wrong for everyone, so let's just fix it." But, I don't like inconsistencies in what people tell me. So that really just frustrates me.

The blatant inconsistencies press in on a teen's consciousness and spawn frustration and ignite the fire within. The power relationship embedded in this hypocrisy and the double-standard can feel oppressive and weigh the teen down, and again, the threads of this moment become intertwined and overlap one theme with another.

Teen It makes me feel so unempowered. Like, you can fix whatever you want and you can be the best person that you can be, and then someone else can just wreck it because they don't preach the same... or they don't follow the same things that they preach. And so it just... it leaves you with almost no power, no choice.

Chris So it's disempowering, it just sucks it away.

Teen Yeah. Yeah.

Chris. Does the same thing happen with your parents then in that situation, that hypocrisy?

Teen I think so because there's just very little you can do about it, I mean, 'cause they're still in a power position. And so no matter what happens, what they say has to go. And that's frustrating because it... I mean, it does leave you with no choice.

Chris So what they say has to go. What does that make you think and feel?

Teen It's so dictator-like. It just... it bothers me because I feel like I'm at an age right now where I do have logical reasons for the things that I do. And even though they might not reach the same conclusion as I do when I present my arguments, I feel like sometimes they don't even listen to them, they just are so set in what they think is right and what

they know is what needs to happen. And I don't think they're right a lot of the time.

Chris So it's almost like they're not willing to hear your logic.

Teen Yeah. Yeah.

Chris Okay. What message does that send to you?

Teen Well, I mean, it makes me feel like I'm not... that I'm not important, that I'm not growing up. I mean, I've... I don't... [sigh]

The teen is so frustrated in this moment as she relates her experience to me that words can no longer express how she's feeling. She is reliving the frustration and defeat even in this recollected moment. Hypocrisy is so infuriating that she is speechless in the end and can only sigh. I can feel this moment as she lives it in front of me; it touches my own heart. And, as mentioned earlier, there can be a larger cost involved if a teen were to confront the hypocrisy and inconsistencies of the rules—referred to as “Rulety [*sic*]”:

Teen Like I said out there [in the world or at school] it's more like law, here it's more like *rulety* [*sic*].

This text and the earlier text give a sense of dictatorship and *eminent domain*—“ultimate or supreme lordship; the superiority or lordship of the sovereign power over all the property in the state” (OED Online, 2010). Such dictatorial inconsistencies reduce the teen to mere serfdom under the whims of the monarchy, their parents.

It is such callous and seemingly ignorant hypocrisy that incites the soul. It is not unlike that legendary phrase supposedly declared in a time of famine, “Enfin je me rappelai le pis-aller d'une grande princesse à qui l'on disait que les paysans n'avaient pas de pain, et qui répondit: Qu'ils mangent de la brioche [Finally, I am reminded of a last resort of a great princess to whom it was said that the peasants have no bread, and who answered: Let them eat brioche (a luxury bread enriched with eggs and butter)]”

(Rousseau, 1769/1849, pp. 252-253). It was a rallying cry of many revolutionist in 18th century France embodying the ignorance and small-mindedness of the ruling monarchy. Just as the revolutionists did, teens feel unimportant and, in a sense, disrespected by the inconsistent and uncaring hypocrisy—"I'm not valuable enough for you give me the courtesy of following the same rules and law." And the cost of addressing this inconsistency is a potential lecture or greater punishment.

It makes me also wonder about the effectiveness of the lecture strategy in which parents engage so often. Does it have the impact that they think it does? These mini-lectures happen all the time, but sometimes adults don't stop to recognize them for what they are—that is part of the ignorance. What do petty mini-lectures look and sound like?

The essence is captured in Coloroso (2002):

Joey's outside without a coat. He's not freezing—that would be life-threatening, and I would have to intervene. In this case he's just cold. I could minilecture him: "If you had put your coat on, you wouldn't be cold." He already knows that. Minilectures contain information the kid already knows, or could easily figure out.

Some classics in the world of minilectures are: "If you hadn't hit your brother, you wouldn't be in your room." "If you hadn't eaten all of the sweets, you wouldn't be sick." "If you had done it the way I told you to, you wouldn't be in this mess." "If you had studied, you wouldn't have failed." These messages are akin to my husband saying to me, "If you hadn't put the car in reverse, Barb, we'd have two cars." I don't need that information as I'm getting on the city bus, any more than a kid needs to hear, "If you had put your coat on, you wouldn't be cold." (p. 95)

It is very irritating and frustrating to be told what you already know in a way that is unhelpful and doesn't solve the problem. It simply comes across as pettiness and is belittling, and makes the teen roll his or her eyes, "Oh for the love of...!"

For the teen, the dilemma is not really seeing the importance of a thing (e.g., the lights being shut off, the bath towels being folded a specific way, etc.)—he or she likes having the lights on and feels comforted by them, being able to fold towels in his or her own way and taking pride his or her accomplishment. A parent saying, “If you had turned the lights off when you were done like I asked, you wouldn’t be coming up here now to shut them off,” is unhelpful since the teen already know this. But it still doesn’t address the problem of why they want the lights on or off in the first place. It is more like a demand to submit to their will without question than it is a request for open dialog on the merits of the lights being on or off.

Teen Well, it comes down a lot to just really little things. Like leaving lights on. I mean, if there’s a light on in someone’s bedroom and my dad happens to be upstairs, it’s like, “Whose light is this, who left it on, why is it on?” And that in and of itself is irritating to hear because he could just turn it off himself and cause no fights. But he feels like he has to bring attention to it and that maybe Kristi and I, if we hear it enough, will realize that we’re not supposed to leave lights on. But neither of us think about it because I don’t think it’s important, and so if it’s not important to me, it doesn’t matter what he thinks because it’s not important to me. And so, he thinks that by nagging me he can get me to remember to turn the light out. But if I just don’t care it doesn’t even matter. I tried to explain this to him and he still comes back to this theory that “If I tell you enough times it will start to matter.”

Chris Has it worked? [chuckle]

Teen No. No.

Chris Why would you say it hasn’t worked? What’s the key piece of it?

Teen The fact that it comes just down to personal preference. I like the lights on, I always have the lights on when I’m home alone. And so like it just doesn’t matter to me that he thinks the lights should be off because if he wants them off, he can turn them off. And otherwise I’m gonna have them on.

Chris If you were in his shoes in that situation, what might you do differently, how might you handle it?

Teen Maybe I would sit down and talk about why having the lights off matters to him because the fact that I know it matters isn't enough. I mean, I honestly don't know why he thinks it matters. And so maybe if I heard why I'd be more likely to consider, but when it's just presented as a black and white, "You will! This is the rule." You know?

The teen's frustration and irritation mount as she speaks. There is a vindictive pettiness that comes through in asking the questions "Whose light is this, who left it on, and why is it on?" A parent's reasons and intent for asking such questions is one thing, but how teens perceive these questions and motives is another. Such questions can bring out sarcasm and flippancy in teens' responses, to do whatever they can to be insolent. In response to the question, whose light is this, we could envision a teen's response: "I don't know, the dog's perhaps? I think it belongs to Janet across the street. Whose light do you think it is? Seriously!" It feels like a dumb question and is irritating. Such questions feel condescending, belittling, and petty when you think about them. If parents truly want to know why the lights are on, they should sit down with the teen and discuss the merits of leaving them on or turning them off. Otherwise, it is irritating, insulting, and petty, and our response is sometimes to become insolent in the face of it. Teens perceive these questions as nagging mini-lectures that mean nothing to them.

Sometimes the frustration is caused not so much by the parents themselves as it is the teen's inability to put into words what it is they are desperately trying to say. The teen "knows" he or she is right, but the teen's brain doesn't successfully find the words to convey the nugget of truth embedded in his or her consciousness. This nugget comes out all wrong and is misinterpreted. In the end, the teen feels discounted and unheard, and he or she reaches the point where the frustration builds, and the dam breaks and releases the

torrent that has been building. The flash point culminates in a conflagration of fury and passion and may come out in an incoherent string of disjointed thoughts and comments.

Ultimately, teens are trying to say “Enough is enough!” What compels them to find their voice and speak out?

Chris Is there a moment when it becomes an argument and what happens in that moment?

Teen It’s just... it’s kinda... it’s natural. You know. When I’ve been thinking about it and we argue. It just kinda gets to a point where, you know, we’re just kinda like “Rrrr!” to each other.

Chris So like pushing each other’s buttons almost?

Teen [chuckle] Almost. Yeah, pretty much.

Chris What does that moment feel like to you when you’re in it?

Teen It’s in the moment, you know, it’s just like I’m really trying to get my point across what I’m saying, you know. Like, I know... it’s like basically trying to tell her something and she’s not listening. It’s like I’m saying it over and over again, she doesn’t get it, and so it just keeps getting more annoying. So then it just comes to a point where I’m just like “Gaww!”

The tension and frustration can build and build and build, and eventually the compulsion to speak might override a teen’s restraint, and the teen finally says what he or she is thinking. The irritation builds to the flash point that triggers the teen’s soul to action, and the words that, perhaps, should have been held back escape his or her mouth, sometimes in a garbled mess.

Teen I’m very open about the way that I feel about things. I will say exactly how I feel. Sometimes that’s not good.

Chris Why not?

Teen ‘Cause it gets me in trouble sometimes. Like my parents will be like, “You never know when to shut up.” And I’m like “Well, I can’t help

it!” ‘Cause it’s just how it is.... That makes me mad, it wants me to keep talking.

Chris So you end up talking more?

Teen Yeah, because I just get more mad. Like my brother does the same thing, too. We’re like the same that way.... Because I feel like I do have control over it [knowing when to shut up], I just don’t want to because I have something to say.... It’s just irritating. And then eventually I just be quiet and don’t say anything at all because I’m like, “Screw it!” [chuckle]

Chris So you give up on making your point?

Teen Yeah. ‘Cause they’re not listening anyway, so why talk. They just get mad.... I’m just like, “Whatever, it’s not worth it!” And I’ll talk to somebody else about it instead of them.

Chris So if they don’t listen to you or take the time to listen to you, you’re just gonna turn around and talk to someone else instead?

Teen Yeah.

This is when other roll-your-eyes moments can happen—when we say something knowing we, perhaps, should have kept quiet, when we know something is going to be interpreted the wrong way. This happens for teens as well:

Chris What happens for you at that moment when what you say is taken the way it is?

Teen I kinda roll my eyes ‘cause I tend to expect it. [chuckle]

Chris So you know it’s coming.

Teen Yeah. Well, it’s like, I can’t tell my mother a lot of things. And by a lot I mean a lot, ‘cause when she finds out she freaks out, and then she gets emotional and cries and does whatever.... It’s like, it’s not that big of a deal. I mean, like, there are moments in life when you should cry. [chuckle] But having one little petty argument with your daughter is not one of them.

Chris So you’re talking, going along, you say something... do you regret that moment when you say something?

- Teen Yeah, 'cause after that I realize "Oh, I probably shouldn't have told her that I was gonna stay home alone, I probably just shoulda done it."
- Chris What else is going through your mind as you think about that?
- Teen Well, just kinda the same thing, it's like, "God damn it, I should," you know, "keep my mouth shut!" Shouldn't have said anything. [chuckle]
- Chris So how does that affect your conversations like the next day or the day after?
- Teen Well, I try my best to be as neutral and boring in my conversation as possible so as not to arise any argument. We're getting along lately, I've gotten this down to a system. [chuckle]
- Chris So through practice you've learned to be a lot more "boring" [makes quotation marks in the air] in the way you talk to your mom because that fits with her style.
- Teen Yeah.

The words come out, and the parent reacts in a highly emotional way, the freak-out. Because the teen knows what to anticipate if he or she were to share certain information, the teen often decides not to say anything, to withhold information, and to be as boring and flat in conversation as he or she can be. It is simpler that way, and the teen can avoid an argument or mini-lecture at the outset. Still, teens feel it is silly for a parent to react this way since it simply creates a communication roadblock between parent and child when they could have a much more open relationship.

- Chris What other thoughts do you have about those moments when you're having a regular conversation, say something, and then you regret it because you knew you should have kept your mouth shut, so to speak?
- Teen I mean, it's just kinda silly because it's like I can go up to my dad and tell him anything. But it's like, I have to check what I say before I say it with my mother. I mean, think about it, kids are doing this all across America, they're blatant lying to their parents in front of their faces, and parents are always saying, "Oh, you can tell me anything." No you can't.

Chris Why not?

Teen Because then you get in trouble and you get forbidden to do things. Kids know this, we're not stupid. [chuckle] And so it's like, just that type of parenting is so stupid 'cause it's like who knows where I am at 1 a.m. in the morning, my mom or my dad? You know. It's like obviously it's my dad. So by not forbidding me, by saying it's okay, I'll tell him where I am 'cause he knows that I'm gonna do it either way no matter what he says, because that's what teenagers do.

In listening to this, teens seem more shut-off from and to have more arguments with parents who are likely to forbid teens from doing the things they are going to do anyway. Also it sounds as if teens would be more likely to lie to parents and keep information from them because of how parents react in these moments.

There is open defiance and insolence in the teen's voice that cries out to us. This essence is captured in the words of the immortal Frank Sinatra (1968):

My Way

And now, the end is here
 And so I face the final curtain
 My friend, I'll say it clear
 I'll state my case, of which I'm certain
 I've lived a life that's full
 I traveled each and ev'ry highway
 And more, much more than this, I did it my way

Regrets, I've had a few
 But then again, too few to mention
 I did what I had to do and saw it through without exemption
 I planned each charted course, each careful step along the byway
 And more, much more than this, I did it my way

Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew
 When I bit off more than I could chew
 But through it all, when there was doubt
 I ate it up and spit it out
 I faced it all and I stood tall and did it my way

I've loved, I've laughed and cried
 I've had my fill, my share of losing

And now, as tears subside, I find it all so amusing
 To think I did all that
 And may I say, not in a shy way,
 “Oh, no, oh, no, not me, I did it my way”

For what is a man, what has he got?
 If not himself, then he has naught
 To say the things he truly feels and not the words of one who kneels
 The record shows I took the blows and did it my way!

Yes, it was my way

“I’ll do it my way!” It embodies an unwillingness to cower and submit—to say the things he truly feels and not the words of one who kneels”; it represents the courage to face off with something larger than ourselves—”when I bit off more than I could chew...I faced it all and I stood tall.” The teen is irritated to the point of action and realizes the desire to shake off the chains of oppression and tyranny, to do it “My way!” and become free and autonomous.

Summary

There is a sense of liberation in that flash-point moment. The teen who was weighed down and oppressed feels irritation and frustration, and he or she is suddenly freed in the moment of the flash point. It is in this moment that we sense the essential overlap of the thematic elements in the previous chapter with the elements of irritation and frustration experienced in this chapter and also with the experience of freedom and autonomy that are discussed in the next chapter. They are all interwoven.

The essence of the embodied teen experience of parent-teen conflict and the associated argument begins to reveal itself in the overlapping of thematic threads across these chapters. In exploring the teen experience of irritation, frustration, and pettiness in this chapter, one can sense the link between these ideas and these embodied experiences

to the aforementioned teen experience of oppression and being weighed down as well as to the struggles for autonomy and freedom discussed in the next chapter. In other words, teens' reactions to the pettiness and their frustration can overwhelm them into submission and feeling oppressed—teens may look for a place to cower and hide away from that force, to shrink away in smallness. However, their reaction to frustration, irritation, and pettiness could also be toward the opposite end of the spectrum, firing them to action and movement towards autonomy, towards exertion of their will, and ultimately to their yearning for freedom. There is a sense of wanting a different kind of connection or relationship than currently exists. Understanding the connection of frustration and irritation with these other embodied experiences helps one to see the whole phenomenological fabric that is taking shape. So, what is this autonomy, and how do teens shoulder freedom itself? The question moves us to the next chapter, and the embodied essence continues to be revealed.

Chapter 6: Theme Three—Wanting Freedom and Autonomy; the Battle for Control

Autonomy, escape, and freedom are things that most teens seem to desire and, perhaps, need. Part of growing older is their knowing they will need to have self-sufficiency one day and be able to survive out in the world. Freedom and escape—why does the argument seem to bring out a greater yearning for freedom itself, and how do teens experience such longing? This chapter continues the exploration of argument's embodiment and begins to uncover a clearer image of freedom and autonomy as they relate to the overall embodied experience of parent-teen conflict and the associated argument.

If we stop to think about it, most of us can imagine a state of total escape and freedom and how that might feel as we are living it. It could be the sensation of standing out in the middle of a vast, open field with no one and nothing around—just you, the land, the sky, and the creatures of the earth—total openness and limitless possibilities spread out before you. However, for some, it seems freedom can also be felt in a much more enclosed or enfolded space like that of a sensory deprivation chamber devoid of light or sound where an individual floats in a warm saline solution that tricks the body into thinking that it is floating on nothing at all and with very little sensory stimuli whatsoever—no sight, no taste, no touch, and no sound, like a cocoon. For some, the enclosed space can be oppressive; for others, it can be liberating and freeing. So freedom is experienced through both wide open spaces and dark enclosed spaces. It can seem dichotomous but really depends on a person's temperament as to which is most cathartic. What is freedom, when and where is it lived, and how is it embodied in parent-teen conflict and argument?

Dark Cellar

I like to hide in my dark damp cellar
 Where rats scurry across the cold cement floor.
 I don't know why I like to hide in my dark damp cellar.
 All I know is that anger and sorrow
 Evaporate into clouds of air
 And bad thoughts disintegrate
 When I'm there.

Every boy should have a cellar.
 (White, 2000, p. 6)

Eyes Wide Open

The wide open space is filled with the gentle ocean spray.
 The smell of fresh air permeated the air.
 The feel of the warm sun caressed my skin.
 I sat watching the surf crashing into the cliff's below.
 As I heard the clandestine chorus of the seagulls confer with each other
 as they fished for their evening meal.
 My eyes are wide open.

My mind is free to capture the pleasure in the tranquility of nature.
 Nature on the edge of living life to it's the fullest.
 I feel their energy surging through my body.
 Like their crescendo, emotions surface, crashing into my tranquil mind.
 Just as the simple pleasures are encircling the peaceful moments of my life.
 My eyes are wide open

I feel a disconnected presence searching for the calm within the storm.
 A storm of emotional upheaval has torn me apart.
 I feel the pieces of my disconnected obsessions forces me to scrutinize my
 existence.
 I have watched as the timeless passionate quest for happiness does not exist in
 monetary gain.
 Only the shallow find happiness in wealth.
 My eyes are wide open

An emotional void leaves me with a superficial existence.
 I desire the taste of true freedom.
 The freedom to feel the warm sun embrace my body.
 The freedom to experience energy surging through my soul.
 I recognize the value of happiness being measured by the people you have met.

The friends you have gained.
 The family you have in your fold
 and the God that you are at peace with.
 My eyes are wide open.

I will hold on to the quiet moments.
 Embrace the diversity of life with each surge [*sic*] of energy.
 The simple pleasure is within.
 I will enjoy the simplicity of existence
 and welcome all that life has to offer.
 For my eyes are wide open and the simple pleasure is You.
 (Kogel, 1997)

Two very different experiences can result in similar feelings of freedom and escape, being unburdened by the troubles of everyday life. One text proclaims a dark enclosed space as inducing a sense of freedom and comfort; the other uses the metaphor of a wide open space to capture that same essence.

Common in both experiences above are the notions of space and empowerment, especially space in which one feels safe and one feels in control. Safe space is explored in greater detail in the next chapter, but it is mentioned here because of its relationship with the embodiment of freedom or escape and one's sense of autonomy. It is being in or out of control that is most important to explore in this chapter, and it seems to be strongly connected to a teen's experience of being with or without freedom or having autonomy.

As teens and parents struggle and vie for control, they often find themselves embroiled in argument after argument. They are bumping up against one another's living realities, trying desperately to win out over the other. I continue to wonder how teens experience these conflicted moments. In the text of earlier chapters, I began to hear faint cries for freedom or escape and a deeper yearning for autonomy. For teens, the act of arguing and battling for control seems to draw out thoughts of freedom and escape. As

they approach their own sign post of freedom, the 18th birthday, and this potential for freedom and escape feels even closer, they are more likely to have thoughts of freedom quickly percolate to the surface of their psyche—a longing for what will be so close at hand.

In understanding freedom itself, one can experience either the presence or absence of freedom and still understand what freedom is in either of these experiences. And in many instances, it is the absence of freedom and lack of control that is felt most poignantly.

Chris Do you ever think about when you leave home and what that's gonna be like?

Teen Yeah, sometimes. It's kinda like, "Geez, I'm almost out of high school, where am I gonna go now," like, you know, they expect me to go to college, so I mean, it's like, I gotta go to college but for what? They also expect me to go in the Navy. It's like, "Navy?!" like I know if I would go in the Navy I'd be a pilot, but it's like, "Do I want to be a pilot?" That would take a lot more school work and everything. So it's kinda hard to say like what I'm gonna be doing after school 'cause like they're throwing a whole bunch of things at me at once.

Chris So what will it be like when you're in your own place and living?

Teen Oh, I picture myself as rich as Bill Gates, my own, you know, Playboy mansion. Just kidding. [chuckle] I don't know. I just own a simple house. I'll probably be, you know, a loner, I mean, that way 'cause after a stretch at work, me coming home, just like, don't want to take it out on anybody else, just steam off myself.... I'd like to make my way. That's why.... Another reason I'm showing responsibility is I'd like to make my own pay and what not. Like I'd like to get a job so I could at least make money and be able to get a car on my own.

Chris What would that be like having the car?

Teen I have no idea. Like, just having the car to myself it just would show a sense of freedom is how I see it 'cause, I mean, a car you can just go anywhere as long as you got a license. Once you have a license, it's just like you can get out more often. But you're under the household of a parent, it's more like you have a chain at the back of the car, you

gotta make sure you get home at a certain time and what not. You have a tracker on you, you gotta keep tabs.

Chris So when do you lose the chain?

Teen Lose the chain... probably after high school, hopefully, when I move out. That's like the day of freedom. And then after that it's like "Now what do I do?" [chuckle] It's like, "I'm out here in this big world," it's like, "Where do I go?" It's gonna be really different after high school, 'cause I mean, then, like the argument... I don't know how the arguments gonna go anymore, 'cause you know. Might argue about like family deals, like "When you gonna be coming home for Christmas?" or something like that.

Chris After an argument, do you go up to your room and you think about "Oh, I wish I was just out on my own and I didn't have to deal with this!"?

Teen Yeah. Sometimes like that. I've heard like people... Couple of my friends have moved on, they've said they moved out of their parents house and lived with somebody, a close friend of theirs or something like that... That's sometimes I've thought about, too, but it's like, even though we argue all the time, I still respect, you know, I got a roof over my head and food on the table, so, you know. I sit there and I wish, but at the same time, you know, it's like, you know, "I shouldn't be saying something like that," because, you know, I'm still grateful for what they did for me, so.

Chris But we all say we *should* do this and that, when really in the back of our minds we're thinking "Oh, I just can't wait until I'm on my own and can do this and do that."

Teen Yep. For me it's just, like I heard a lot of people saying like they'd like to take a year off after high school, you know, and then like start college. I don't know if I'd like to take... I don't know how long I'd like to take off, just get out and see it 'cause I know.... We're moving out to Arizona you know. I don't know, maybe drive route 66 or something like that. Just take some time off away from everybody, you know, just me and my car, just driving along 'cause... you know, 'cause I'm a big car fanatic. So, it's me and the road, that's what I'd like to do.

Chris So just the thought of being out on the road.

Teen Just a sense of freedom right there. Just not having to worry about arguments... no arguments, no nothing. Just me, the car, and the road.

And then just seeing the world... whatever it has it's best. Then, you know, college comes along and reality hits you in the face. "Oh, what happened?"

Chris When I watch you talk about the road and being in the car, there's just this sense of calm that I see in you as you talk about it.

Teen Yeah. I don't know. It's just that sense of being free. That's all it is right there.

"They expect me to go to college, so I mean, it's like, I gotta go to college but for what. They also expect me to go in the Navy." Even when teens are out of the house, they can feel the pressures of parental expectations weighing on their conscience, the chains of control still strongly connected. In imagining this moment of being out on their own, teens feel free, but at the same time, they don't. As with car ownership, there is an internal and external struggle with having a car, a form of freedom, with parental admonitions against owning a car, and with the rules to be followed while still living under their parents' roof. Teens may wrestle with their own wants and desires and their parents wants and desires. It feels like an internal struggle between being dependent and being independent—who should they listen to?

So some of the freedom they see in the near future is not true freedom but freedom with strings attached, that is, until teens can get out from under that parental oppression and ultimate control they feel. "Like, just having the car to myself it just would show a sense of freedom is how I see it 'cause, I mean, a car you can just go anywhere as long as you got a license." Car ownership itself embodies freedom and escape for teens. Such ownership is a means to escape, achieve freedom, and access the world. But when a teen is still living in his or her parents' house, "it's more like you have a chain at the back of the car." It doesn't embody complete and true freedom until

the chain is lost. The teen is bound to another, and in the process, his or her access to the world is restricted.

Part of being free is having fewer obligations. “I’ll probably be, you know, a loner, I mean, that way ‘cause after a stretch at work, me coming home, just like, don’t want to take it out on anybody else, just steam off myself.” Being alone lends itself to feeling free—you don’t have any obligations to another and your actions don’t impact another. Having freedom can be seen as being without commitments. In this way, freedom is being defined by what it isn’t or what it lacks—the absence of something. As in the sensory deprivation chamber, freedom can be embodied in the absence of something, sensory input, rather than the presence of something. It is here that a distinction between negative liberty or freedom and positive liberty or freedom would be helpful.

Negative liberty is the absence of obstacles, barriers or constraints. One has negative liberty to the extent that actions are available to one in this negative sense. Positive liberty is the possibility of acting — or the fact of acting — in such a way as to take control of one’s life and realize one’s fundamental purposes. While negative liberty is usually attributed to individual agents, positive liberty is sometimes attributed to collectivities, or to individuals considered primarily as members of given collectivities. (Carter, 2007, ¶1)

Thus, the perception of freedom, and in this case, negative freedom, can be experienced by many teens as the absence of obstacles, barriers, or constraints. Freedom itself begins with negative freedom and the removal of constraints. From there, positive freedom becomes a possibility in the opening of a channel for action and in taking control of one’s life; it becomes a channel of access to the world and all its potential.

Teens can experience freedom and escape as particular moments in time when they occur rather than as a general state of being. It happens “after high school,

hopefully, when I move out.” For teens, such moments of freedom are rites of passage and embody sign posts on the road to adulthood. “Beyond this point is freedom. Cross at your own risk!” It is freedom, but then again it isn’t. Teens know that they’ll be free out in the world to do what they want, but the reality of supporting themselves also weighs in on their reality. Teens become free, but they have to be able to support themselves and survive. Therefore, it becomes freedom at a price, so it isn’t true freedom in its fullest form.

But what is true freedom for teens and how does it relate to the essence of argument? “Just a sense of freedom right there. Just not having to worry about arguments... no arguments, no nothing. Just me, the car, and the road. And then just seeing the world... whatever it has it’s best.” You can almost feel the lightness and unburdening of the teen soul in this statement, and you can also see the absence inherent within. For teens, freedom embodies no arguments, no nothing. Again it is defined by what it isn’t. Freedom is the absence of constraints, and it isn’t arguing.

As mentioned earlier, our understanding of what freedom is can be governed by our living without freedom—“I live without freedom, so I understand freedom to be the opposite of what I already have.” Living without freedom can be recognized in a moment when a teen’s physical dependence gets in their way (e.g., they have to rely on another to finish a task).

Chris If I go back a little bit, it sounds like when you’re cleaning even, you’re focused on that task, you like to get it done, and if someone interrupts you while you’re cleaning, does that bother you?

Teen Yes. Well, a lot of the time I’m cleaning my fish tank. And I used to have to rely on someone to lift the bucket into my fish tank, but now I’m strong enough that I can do it myself. [laughter] Well, that was

always hard ‘cause it was like, “Mom can you come help me dump this in, or papa can you help me dump this?” And two minutes later, “Can you help me dump this please?!” [laughter]

Because of a teen’s physical limitations, he or she may need to rely on another to finish the task, and this causes frustration and irritation, drawing us back to the previous chapter. This moment signifies a forced dependency when the teen yearns to be independent and liberated. Much of the frustration is directed inward, but some of that frustration and irritation seeps out from the teen and gets directed at those around him or her igniting the argument. All we see from outside is often this frustration and irritation, and perhaps we interpret it as “hormones.” However, for the teen, it may be a deep yearning to be free or to escape the bonds of dependency that is at the heart of it.

- Chris There’s something about that that’s annoying when you can’t get through where you want to be through...
- Teen ‘Cause I want to be a totally independent person where you don’t need... well, I mean, obviously you need family and parents for the entire house, but. [chuckle] It’s like, okay, I want to be able to do this task myself, so. . . I start weight lifting Now I’m just big enough that I can lift it up.
- Chris But before you were big enough to lift it up, you had to rely on someone else?
- Teen Yes. And that was irritating because for something little like that it’s just, you know....
- Chris I can see this tension on your face. What is that, what’s going on?
- Teen Well, I can remember when I was littler... ‘cause I’d be sitting there at the tank ready to dump the fresh water into my tank, and then I’d be waiting, and you know, “Can you come help me now?!” I mean, they’re usually really good about it, but if someone’s in the basement cleaning, “Can I just finish cleaning the litter box or whatever?” So it’s “Okay, whatever.”
- Chris What do you really want to say in that moment though?

Teen Just, “PLEASE!” [laughter]

For a teen, being shackled to his or her physical limitations and living without freedom is so irritating. And the irritation and frustration associated with this lack of physical freedom sometimes leaks out and impacts parents. The teen, bound by internal and external constraints, is dependent and has an absence of freedom. It sounds like, “If you could only stop what you’re doing to help me real quick! Why can’t you just do this right now?!” Teens know why. Admittedly, it’s irrational because teens know that parents are busy doing something else that is probably equally important, but they would prefer that parents operate on the teen’s time and come to do this task quickly to get it over with. However, that preference is kept silent and claws at them from the inside.

Teens are bumping up against a lack of control. They can understand this afterwards, but in the moment, that rationale escapes them, and often an argument can ensue if the frustration builds enough. For teens, the absence of freedom itself generates a greater yearning to be free, so they may take steps to achieve that freedom by working out and overcoming the physical dependence that is causing them so much frustration and irritation. If the route to freedom exists and appears open, the teen is likely to follow that path to freedom thus becoming liberated or empowered through the process.

For teens, the drive to overcome dependence or come out from under parental control is strong, and this drive sets up tensions between parents and teens that lend themselves to argument. The battle for control seems never-ending from the teen perspective. Setting limits is one aspect of control, and the question of who should be setting limits, parents or teens, can be strongly contested in the parent-teen battlefield. In this sense, freedom is seen in the absence of *external* limits, limits one puts on another

versus limits one puts on oneself. Again, it represents negative freedom—an absence of constraints.

Chris What do you think about setting limits, what is that all about?

Teen I think that limits that one person sets for him- or herself are very important because they display a person's own value system. And when people set limits on other people, it's kind of belittling, I guess, 'cause it just.... People should be able to set their own limits, and that's what.... I mean, that's what people do because people know what's best for them. And when other people get in the way and start talking about how they know what's best for everyone else, it just... it's not good, it doesn't work for me.

Chris You're shaking your head, I can see this frustration.

Teen "Ugghh!" I know!

Chris Tell me about that. [laughter]

Teen It just happens.... Well, over the summer I had a standing curfew.... I mean.... Well, at the beginning of the summer I didn't have an online curfew, it was just I could get on when I wanted, get off when I wanted, whatever. And some.... I mean, some nights I could get on at nine and get off at midnight and just be fine. And then there were other nights where one of my friends would be having a personal issue that I needed to help them with, or this, that, and the other, and so I wouldn't be off until two. And I mean, this only impacted me because I was the one that would sleep in late the next morning when no one was home anyway. So, I mean, it wasn't like.... But they, my parents, then got really upset about it and set a curfew that I had to be off at midnight. So I was like, "Okay. So now I guess the front end of my curfew is gonna be a little more loose and I'm gonna start getting on whenever I can." And so then there was a problem because I wasn't spending enough time with the family. And so then I had this standing curfew of 10 to midnight, and there were penalties if I like got on too early or got off too late. I mean, it was just... it was so upsetting to me because it didn't.... It just didn't matter. As long as I was spending time with the family and dealing with my own schedule, it just doesn't matter. And so, I feel like my parents don't pick their battles, because if they only picked a few issues to be really strict on and kinda let loose on other ones, I'd be so much more likely to follow their strict guidelines. But they pick so many little issues that I don't think matter, that I am just more tempted to do whatever I can to just be insolent about everything.

“If they only picked a few issues to be really strict on and kinda let loose on other ones, I’d be so much more likely to follow their strict guidelines.” There is a sense that, if a teen was given more control over more issues, he or she would be more likely to follow the few constraints that remained under parents’ control. “But they pick so many little issues that I don’t think matter, that I am just more tempted to do whatever I can to just be insolent about everything.” For teens, parents’ retaining control over “so many little issues” breeds a desire to fight against all of the constraints rather than being flexible on a few.

By not having opportunities to be in control, teens are denied the opportunity to prove themselves, their value systems, and their overall responsibility—self-imposed internally motivated limits “display a person’s own value system.” When denied this, teens are not given the chance to show that they can be adults and that they know what needs to be done to be successful. So for teens, freedom is embodied in the moment of being able to prove oneself to the world and to himself or herself and being able to shine.

Teen Well, on the average weeknight, I need to get about six hours of sleep. I just know that about myself. And so I know that if I get online at 9:00, I need to be off by 11:30. I just, I know that about myself. And so when they come in at 11:15 and go “Erika, Erika, you need to be getting off soon.” It’s just.... It’s so belittling because I *know* that I need to be off soon, and I would be off soon, and so it irritates me to have to give them the satisfaction of knowing that they got me off because they know better, when I would have done it anyway. So I feel like sometimes they need this power control to, like, feel good about themselves as parents.

Chris In those moments, if you could say something to them that would make a difference, what would you say?

Teen I mean, I would love to at some point when that happens just sit down and go, “Look, here’s what I know, here’s what I do, here’s what I’ve

been doing for the last few months, like, give me a break.” But... I don’t know; I don’t think I ever would.

Chris Why not?

Teen I think I’d get probably a very long lecture about how I need to respect them more and how, you know, they know what’s best for me and I can just listen to them and not be so rude.

In this moment, we can see the struggle for autonomy and self-identity. “Let me be me! Let me show you who I am!” For a teen, being denied that opportunity to prove oneself is so very frustrating and infuriating. We can also hear the impact of a mini-lecture rearing its ugly head, “Erika, you need to be getting off soon.’ It’s just... It’s so belittling because I *know* that.” Why can’t parents give teens a chance and see what happens? And why is it disrespectful to engage parents in a conversation about what they (teens) know? Again, without hearing that internal struggle, it is easy to jump to conclusions about teens’ apparent behavior rather than considering what they know and what they are going through internally—the internal battle for control.

Beyond simple freedom, this frustration and irritation are about the ability to exert one’s freewill, and with this shift, we begin to move toward the concept of autonomy.

Young (1980) helps to distinguish autonomy from freedom:

Autonomy involves freedom. But autonomy involves more than just being free since self-determination is hardly displayed in, for example, freely but mindlessly mimicking the tastes, opinions, ideals, goals, principles or values of others. The free choices and actions of an autonomous person are expressive of his or her *own* preferences, aspirations and so on. The autonomous person in popular parlance is his own man or her own woman. (p. 566)

The concept of self-determination sets autonomy apart from simple freedom—”I can be me!” This struggle for free-choice and self-determination is the battle for control at the core of parent-teen conflict and the associated argument. I am reminded of the struggles

colonized territories experienced as they lived under the control of the colonizing power. As the occupied peoples gained strength and power, it often took revolution and war to overthrow that dominion and control and to prove the colonized territory's ability and desire to self-govern. We can see this happen in the parent-teen realm as teens gain strength and move toward adulthood.

To better understand the concept of autonomy, we can look to the OED Online (2010)—the etymology and definitions are intriguing:

Autonomy, n.: [ad. Gr. *αὐτονομία* the having or making of one's own laws, independence, noun of quality f. *αὐτόνομος*]; the right of self-government, of making its own laws and administering its own affairs; liberty to follow one's will, personal freedom; freedom (of the will); the Kantian doctrine of the Will giving itself its own law, apart from any object willed; opposed to *heteronomy*; *Biol.* the condition of being controlled only by its own laws, and not subject to any higher one; organic independence; a self-governing community (cf. a monarchy).

In this sense, autonomy is the freedom of the Will, the Will giving itself its own law, personal freedom, not being subject to any higher one, or the right of self-government. Autonomy is independence apart from any other. There is a sense of aloneness contained within—one, apart, self, and personal—as well as a sense of freedom from external limits and even from internal limits. But some may argue that real autonomy is impossible when one exists in relation to another (i.e., in a society, in a family, in human relationship). We are bound to certain moral, social, or political laws that govern propriety in living with others and set the boundaries for our deeds.

Christman (2009) explains the difference between basic autonomy and ideal autonomy:

Individual autonomy is an idea that is generally understood to refer to the capacity to be one's own person, to live one's life according to reasons and motives that are taken as one's own and not the product of manipulative or distorting external forces. (¶1)

Personal (or individual) autonomy should also be distinguished from *freedom*, although again, there are many renderings of these concepts, and certainly some conceptions of positive freedom will be equivalent to what is often meant by autonomy (Berlin 1969, 131-34). Generally, one can distinguish autonomy from freedom in that the latter concerns the ability to act, without external or internal constraints and also (on some conceptions) with sufficient resources and power to make one's desires effective (Berlin 1969, Crocker 1980, MacCallum 1967). Autonomy concerns the independence and authenticity of the desires (values, emotions, etc.) that move one to act in the first place. Some distinguish autonomy from freedom by insisting that freedom concerns particular acts while autonomy is a more global notion, referring to states of a person (Dworkin 1988, 13-15, 19-20). But autonomy can be used to refer both to the global condition (autonomous personhood) and as a more local notion (autonomous relative to a particular trait, motive, value, or social condition)... We must keep separate the idea of basic autonomy, the minimal status of being responsible, independent and able to speak for oneself, from ideal autonomy, an achievement that serves as a goal to which we might aspire and according to which a person is maximally authentic and free of manipulative, self-distorting influences. Any plausible conceptualization of basic autonomy must, among other things, imply that most adults who are not suffering from debilitating pathologies or are under oppressive and constricting conditions will be autonomous. Autonomy as an ideal, on the other hand, may well be enjoyed by very few if any individuals, for it functions as a goal to be attained rather than a condition assumed for most people. (1. The Concept of Autonomy, 1.1 Basic Distinctions, ¶2-3)

This helps us to distinguish the subtle differences between basic autonomy, ideal autonomy, and freedom as individual concepts. While freedom entails being without constraints or limits, basic autonomy demands being independent, self-directed, and a certain sense of self-confidence (i.e., being able to speak for oneself). We can hear some of these subtleties ring through in the text of the phenomenon.

- Chris Do you ever feel in an argument that you just want to get out and escape and be free?
- Teen Sometimes, you know. Like I always had that idea of running away or what not. But you know, at the same time, in the back of your head, you're like, "You better not do that. You'll end up losing a whole lot." I mean, like I said, it's like you're throwing out a gamble, and you're just gonna lose a whole lot more than, you know, what you just offered right there on the table.
- Chris But you've thought about it at times.

- Teen Yeah. It's like, thought about it, then in the back of my mind, bad idea. [chuckle] Better not do it.
- Chris So what do you do when you think about it then?
- Teen I just grab a backpack, just throw a couple clothes in there, then you just... That's where it hits you, da-da-da throw the bag down and you sit on the bed and it's like [sigh], look outside [moan]. Look back at the floor and that's where it starts, the reflection and everything. You just have that sense of just wanting to be free, you know, 'cause that way you'd be able, you know, your opinion and ideas, you know, you'll be able to do them on your own terms, you know, in your own household if I went out and got myself my own house, you know, so.
- Chris It's interesting to hear how you've lived through that sort of experience, what that moment is like when you're throwing clothes in the bag. What stops you ultimately?
- Teen Just like, you're throwing it in there and then you're like, before you grab the next piece of clothes, you're just kinda like sitting there and then you just realize like where you gonna go, what are you gonna do? "Oh, great!" you know. You have nothing planned out 'cause I mean this is, Boom! all of the sudden. So, it's just like better not do it 'cause I mean, it's not planned out, you're pretty much gonna... like instead of getting a future event, it's gonna be bad, so... whatever you do right there at that moment, if you leave right there, then you're just gonna wreck the rest of your future. A) I didn't finish school, B) you know, I got nowhere to live, C) how am I gonna get a job, you know. So. It's just like right there, all that, just [breath], two-three seconds, you know, just start thinking about that stuff, it's [sigh], bad idea, I mean, you just kinda throw it down. And that's where you start sitting and that's where the reflection starts, like, could that have been the right idea, you know, whether I was running away. And then you start with the argument. And so on and so forth.

Much like Christman (2009) mentions earlier, "Autonomy as an ideal, on the other hand, may well be enjoyed by very few if any individuals, for it functions as a goal to be attained rather than a condition assumed for most people" (1. The Concept of Autonomy, 1.1 Basic Distinctions, ¶3). Teens hold onto the ideal of autonomy as they pack their bags in those moments, but the reality or, perhaps, the impossibility of true ideal autonomy filters its way back into their consciousness. Teens realize that there will

always be a higher authority or necessity to which they are bound whether that be the law, money, or the basic necessities of daily living. Autonomy is bred out of a deep yearning for self-control and for something better. This song by Forager (2009) seems to embody the teen's yearning for autonomy:

SEEK

A call from deep inside
 A yearning that drives me out of my mind
 A longing for freedom and the night sky, outer space and spirals that dive into infinity and way beyond
 Meet my desire to search along what is a dissatisfied, emptiness that binds me to my mind

I need to wander away, I need to climb the ladder
 I need autonomy, I need to find the better

Go, release that hold
 I had a feeling you will be seeking
 For that old holy gold, you will be digging.

Life and liberty
 Pursuit of happiness to be
 A call to the quest to cross the threshold, so much to see
 Open road moves right through, starting out there moving into... deeper abyss... the bottomlessness in me
 A dissatisfied emptiness that binds me to my mind

I need to wander away, I need to climb the ladder,
 I need autonomy, I need to find the better.

Go, release that hold
 I had a feeling you will be seeking
 For that old holy gold, you will be digging deep into your soul...

As I walk and seek other sides to be, I hope it's not forgotten. This trail I walk alone to find the silver stone I have forsaken.
 I strive together with love to find an individual line to take away within me. Will I find, hopefully in time, pieces that lie in circles all around me?
 Will I find peace of mind? Will I find... as I travel into my life...

There is a thirst deep within the soul, “a yearning that drives me out of my mind,” that pushes the teen to climb out from under another’s control, “I need autonomy, I need to find the better.” And the teen is compelled to test the limits and cross the line and to see what exists beyond, “A call to the quest to cross the threshold, so much to see.” It is that compulsion to fight against external control and authority within this parent-teen conflict that may also fire teens to action and argument. Best-Oliver (2009) captures this yearning for autonomy that teens have:

I’ve learned that I don’t deal well with authority (my mom just snorted and said “No shit.”) and that I need autonomy over my day. In principle, I hate the idea of having to justify to someone else why I can’t fucking work today, because I have a life and sometimes the shit hits the fan and that life is much more pressing than any trivial thing that could come up at work. I want to be able to work when I can, in a t-shirt and jeans, and stop that work and do yoga or walk my dog. I’d also not to [*sic*] not talk to complete idiots every day who think they should be sharing their lack of knowledge with the youth of America. ¶(6)

The teen, like many of us, will have some yearning for freedom and autonomy—a wish to be one’s own master, a wish to make one’s own decisions, a desire to be self-directed—and some aspects of these things are attainable to a certain extent. The philosopher, Berlin (1969/1970), touches on the self-directedness of autonomy:

The ‘positive’ sense of the word ‘liberty’ derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men’s, acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer—deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role, that is of conceiving goals and policies of my own and realizing them. This is at least part of what I mean when I say that I am rational, and that it is my reason that distinguishes me as a human being from the rest of the world. I wish, above all, to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by references to my own ideas and purposes. I feel free to the degree that I

believe this to be true, and enslaved to the degree that I am made to realize that it is not. (p. 131).

As Berlin says, “I feel free to the degree that I believe this to be true, and enslaved to the degree that I am made to realize that it is not.” This connects the themes of autonomy and freedom to the theme of oppression that we discussed earlier. The degree to which a teen feels free and autonomous in relation to the degree to which he or she feels enslaved in a particular moment may serve as a catalyst in the flash-point moment of the argument, the imbalance of which may create the ignition to action or argument. We can begin to better understand the internal struggles for control that teens endure and that leak into the environment like so much compost. Though it may smell and or taste bad, compost is mostly good after it is released to the outside world and as it nurtures and nourishes the earth strengthening all.

Summary

Drawing this all together, by recognizing how feeling small and oppressed and the relative absence of freedom and autonomy in a teen’s daily living can cause frustration and irritation, we begin to see more clearly how the interrelationship of these themes embodies the flash-point moment when the normal parent-teen conversation becomes conflict and argument. There is a struggle to be heard and a yearning for a different kind of connection or relationship with parents. Thus far, the overlap within the thematic chapters of this section reveals a great deal about the phenomenological tapestry of the embodied teen experience. In the wave metaphor, these two preceding chapters have taken us through the most difficult and chaotic moments of the tsunami, and the teen is now left to sort out the pieces, the detritus left on the beach. What happens after the

argument, after the teen has been consumed by the wave and is disgorged on the beach?

This question moves us toward the last threads of the tapestry and our final thematic chapter.

Chapter 7: Theme Four—Needing Safe Space and “Me” Time

In the previous chapter, we explored freedom and autonomy in greater depth, and this has brought us to the final phase of the parent-teen argument. At the beginning of that last chapter, we looked at two examples of where freedom and autonomy might be experienced—dark enclosed spaces or wide open spaces. As I mentioned, the concept of space was common to both of those spatial examples, especially space in which we feel safe and in control. The previous chapter allowed us to look more closely at the aspect of control in relation to freedom and autonomy; in this chapter, we will expand on aspects of control in the embodiment of safe space itself. What is unique to safe space, when and where is safe space experienced, and how is it used? And finally, how does safe space link to the whole embodied experience of parent-teen conflict and the associated argument?

Tying back into the idea of autonomy, from the perspective of the teen, it seems that many parents are still operating on the premise that this is the parents’ house, these are the parents’ rules, and the family will do it on the parents’ time, versus considering the growing autonomy and expression of free will that teens have and need or understanding that this is the parents’ and teen’s house, these are the parents’ and teen’s rules, and the family will do it on the parents’ and teen’s time as adults living together in community (Coloroso, 2002). For teens, the issues of time and space are big ones. Teens often feel that their time is not respected or that it is devalued, subjugated to that of the parents. Teens’ free will is often overlooked or ignored, and their ability to make decisions about their own life or their own time and space is constrained. They yearn to have control over their own lives, over their own, figurative or literal, personal space.

- Chris Are there certain buttons that your mom pushes for you, does she know what bothers you and sometimes pushes them?
- Teen Right away in the morning, like sometimes... Like this morning's a good example. You know, I got up and I thought we had, you know, get ready for church right away. So, I got up and I realized I had like an hour or so, I could just kick back and relax for a little bit. So I'm like "Well, I'm gonna go down and play my PlayStation." I'm down there playing, you know, and the first thing my mom was like, "Ah, you're down there playing already." And it's just like, "Here we go again." So, you know, sometimes she'll do that, like, do that right in the morning, like, "Geez, you've been playing all day, why don't you shut it off." Well, you know, this is the only time I get to play so I might as well throw it in. I know I had time, too, to get ready for church and everything. I'm like, I had all my clothes laid up and ready. So it would only take me like five minutes to get dressed and get in the car. And it's just... I thought, well, I had some time, I might as well go and play for a little bit. And then comes right downstairs from the morning shower and she's like "Right away in the morning?!" I'm like "What, what did I do wrong?!" She'll like, "You're always playing that." It's like, "No, I'm not!" And something like that could have started an argument.

This moment is a battle for control and authority over oneself and, more specifically, the ability to make decisions about one's own time and space and an opportunity to be alone with his or her thoughts. If teens can't find this control and authority in relation to their parents, they will find it somehow and somewhere else. All beings with freewill need to find a place where they can exert authority and control over their own being—spaces where they have relatively complete control. A space does not embody safeness when one feels out of control. To be a safe space, an area or location must lend itself to making a person feel safe and in control. It is a space in which they have dominion and authority.

Especially after an argument or "battle for control," teens need to regain some command and find a place to experience freedom and autonomy. After arguing with their

parents and feeling small, insignificant, devalued, disrespected, and shut down or pushed down, or perhaps after feeling irritated and frustrated and reaching that flash point, teens need a space to process all of that and find meaning in what they just lived or to at least get out from under the weight bearing down on them and feel in charge of their destiny. The essence of this moment is the need to process in the comfort of my safe-space, an area where I feel in control, my own space where I can escape, my space in which I have some freedom. It is a feeling of empowerment, of lightness, of buoyancy; a sense of floating and relief. In this space, we're back on the peaceful comfort of the inner tube contemplating life and floating where we want to float—a sense of freedom or autonomy from another.

Chris What do you get by being in this space?

Teen More quiet and more peace, you know, for me to think, you know, okay this argument just happened, what do I do now, I'll just let it go. It wasn't a big deal, I mean, usually they're not big arguments.

Chris So you let it go. Do you ever think about it and then continue it?

Teen I've never really continued it, I guess, because I hate to fight, but sometimes you can't help it and you have to. And with my mom, she makes it easier [chuckle] for me to say, "Okay, I have to." [chuckle]

Chris Why do you think that is?

Teen I don't know, just the way she says things sometimes, or how she says them or what she says can just really throw me off or just really make me want to argue back at her. But usually I'm not a big fighter, like, you know, with my friends, so. That's why it's nice to have sisters 'cause they both know [chuckle] exactly, you know, they went through high school with mom, they're like "Is she doing that?" I'm like "Yes!" And they're like "Yep. [laughter] That's mom."

"More quiet and more peace, you know, for me to think." Within this text, there is calm, comfort, and control, and there is almost a sense of release or relief. The pressure builds

during an argument as teens bump up against a parent's control. "What she says can just really throw me off or just really make me want to argue back at her." The button is pushed, and teens lose balance or control and are pushed over the edge. The flash-point is reached, the point of no return. Teens struggle to break through and gain control over the argument, but when that doesn't happen or even if it does, they must retreat and regain control and composure elsewhere. Teens need to release the pressure and gain relief from the oppression and frustration they felt during the argument. In a safe space, teens find solace and are able to regain the calm and control and to let go of the argument—"it wasn't a big deal."

The idea of this safe space was prevalent in every conversation with these teens. They all spoke of the figurative or literal safe space and what qualities such space holds for them. So how do teens experience safe space?

Chris Is there anywhere else besides being in the car that you feel a sense of freedom?

Teen Just anywhere outside like the family household. Like if I'm outside just walking around. Or like if I'm riding my bike, you know, around town. I just have that sense of freedom right there, you know. It doesn't have to be in the car on the road, you know. That's something, you know, that I dreamed about someday, but like being here in town, you know, I like to just get on my bike and just ride around town. Sometimes I'll stop at a friend's place and talk to them for a while. Just being out of this house, you know... this house kinda just reminds me of like a cage, you know. It's like... I don't get out a lot with friends and stuff like that. It happens every once in a while, not a lot.

Chris It sounds like you like going outside just doing stuff.

Teen Yeah. Being away from the house, you know, the family and what not, you know, even though at the same time, you know, I like being home and what not. But at the same time I'd like to get out and get away from everything.

Chris What sorts of things do you think about if you're out there?

- Teen Sometimes I think about what could, you know, happen in the future or like what else I could have been doing right now if I wasn't stuck in the house. You know, like people I could go see, you know. And it's like hey, I'm free, you know, I can go anywhere I want, inside the town.
- Chris I'm picturing that again. That sense of freedom that you're talking about. Does that sense of freedom ever make you frustrated when you're here?
- Teen Hm, it just depends on like what sense it is. Like if I'm stuck in the house like all day, you know, not able to do anything, you know, then looking outside and seeing the open world right there it's like, "Doh! I want some of that!" You know. Yeah, it can be frustrating, you know, in that kind of sense in a way.

For teens, you can hear how the idea of freedom permeates their vision of safe space or place of comfort—"I just have that sense of freedom right there." Teens' destinies, at that moment, are wide open to them, and they are in control—"I like to just get on my bike and just ride around town.... It's like hey, I'm free, you know, I can go anywhere I want, inside the town." Teens get to make the decisions about their time and space without worry or concern about what parents may think.

- Chris What is it about your room that draws you?
- Teen It's like a safety zone or something 'cause it's mine. And like I just like to be alone so I can just like think. Like sometimes when I'm really upset I'll like write or just like talk on the phone to my friends or just... I don't know... just be away from them [parents], I guess.
- Chris When you write, what sorts of things are you writing?
- Teen Just like how I feel kind of... questions, stuff like that.
- Chris How does it feel when you've finished writing some of that stuff?
- Teen Kinda like a relief, like I just feel better about it after, because it's out there and it's not just like all inside, 'cause I'm like the type of person that really needs to talk about things when they happen because it just like upsets me until it's like out there and it's off my chest, kind of.

- Chris So what does a safe space feel like? How do you know what a safe space is?
- Teen I guess I just feel alone, like nobody can like yell at me or say anything to hurt me 'cause I'm just by myself.
- Chris If you were to draw a picture of it, what would it look like?
- Teen Maybe like my own bubble with like my bed, that's where I always sit is just on my bed.
- Chris You said your parents sometimes come down there when you're in your room?
- Teen They come into my room, yeah, and talk to me then, and sit down on my bed by me and talk about it.
- Chris And what do you think about that?
- Teen Well, it helps, but I don't necessarily like it because I don't really.... Like once I talked about it I'm kinda like I don't want to talk about it again, "I don't really want to listen to what you have to say about it because that's why I left in the first place."
- Chris So what's your immediate reaction when your parents come into your room in those situations? What's the first thing that comes to mind?
- Teen Probably like "Oh, boy, here we go again!" [laughter]
- Chris So when your parents come into that space, what other things go on in your mind about it?
- Teen I guess sometimes it's kind of like relief, too, because then you are going to talk about it and it's going to be like just over then after that point. But it's kinda like I just don't really want to have to deal with it anymore than I already have.
- Chris Why don't you want to have to deal with it more than you already have?
- Teen Because that makes me feel bad, I guess. I don't like to think about it if I don't have to, and it kinda makes it like heaviness on my heart, I guess, 'cause I feel bad about it.

For teens, this space is "like a safety zone or something 'cause it's mine. And like I just like to be alone so I can just like think.... Just be away from them [parents]." The safety

of this zone is connected to a feeling of self-control as well as being alone in that space. For teens, the importance of aloneness or being solitary was tied to the concepts of freedom and autonomy in the previous chapter. Being without obligations to another and being in total control of one's destiny, those are significant aspects of being autonomous and free as well as connotations of safe space. "I just feel alone, like nobody can like yell at me or say anything to hurt me 'cause I'm just by myself." Being alone pretty much guarantees that one will be in control and that no one can intrude on that space and mar the seemingly perfect autonomy inherent within. In the text, we hear safe space as "maybe like my own bubble with like my bed." In some ways, safety is embodied in the image of that bubble, almost a subtle representation of the comfort of the womb or, again, the sensory deprivation chamber—protected, floating, and free.

- Chris What would you do right after an argument?
- Teen I'd tend to walk to the living room unless everyone was in there, then I'd go to a different room like my room or here [computer room], unless someone else was here, then I'd pretty much go downstairs.
- Chris So if you could pick one those places, which would you choose to go to first?
- Teen Probably my room.
- Chris Why is that?
- Teen Because they don't usually go up there and I feel that I can be in a space where I can be myself and calm down.
- Chris So being up in that space makes you feel calm? Why is that?
- Teen Basically I spent a lot of time up there. I can relax up there, wind down. It's white and I just lay on my bed or sit down and just read.
- Chris What would you do up there?

- Teen Probably just sit and read, those two. Comic book or chapter books that I've been reading. I'd probably pick a comic book if it was a new one that I haven't read yet, and if I had, I'd just read the chapter book.
- Chris Why would you pick that to read after an argument?
- Teen Cause I haven't read it and it will get my mind off it if I haven't already read it. I pretty much get sucked into it and come into the book instead of where I was and the aggravation and the annoyance that I had.

For teens, we see how space can impact them significantly—"I feel that I can be in a space where I can be myself and calm down.... I can relax up there, wind down." There is a subtlety in these words, but you hear the sense of calm in relation to being in control—"I can be myself." For teens, freedom and escape are inherent to safe space and such space can be realized in the context of books read in those moments after an argument. Books represent an avenue for escape and achieving a state of autonomy apart from the rest of the family, bringing with it a sense of safeness. Teens often look for ways to escape the confines of their current predicament, to "get my mind off it," through the worlds they find in those books and comics. But reaching this state of safeness is often achieved only when one is alone. The physical presence of another can be enough to disrupt the sense of aloneness and autonomy or safety within a space.

There is emotion tied to that space too. It's calming and has solitude, but the space itself can exude happiness—it is almost a living entity unto itself:

- Chris Tell me a little bit more about space. What does space mean to you when you think of it?
- Teen Space is like an area where I know that I can be alone and have my thoughts and not be interrupted or bothered or, you know, in any way bugged. That's the happy place. Like I love my couch in my living room 'cause it literally sucks you in. Like you'll get stuck in my couch, it's not even funny. And like, I'm a big reader ... I think I read probably 80 books a couple summers ago. So, I lived on that couch.

- Chris So, there's really some energy or memories with that couch and in that space, really comforting? How else do you feel in that space?
- Teen Well, it's kinda like the home part of the space, you know, where it's like everything else might suck in the world, but I got my couch.
- Chris So it's almost like a bubble of safe space, protection.
- Teen Yeah. It's like in the rest of my life I kinda go out and do things that normal kids wouldn't do, like obviously bus up here [the University of Minnesota] every day, but it's like that's the one place where I'll sit down, pop in an episode of *Gilmore Girls* and relax.
- Chris So when a parent walks into your space, what's your immediate reaction?
- Teen Well, it depends on which one. 'Cause dad, he has the chair adjacent to the couch where we just kinda will sit and watch *Bullshit*, which is an actual show. [chuckle] And, you know, hang out and stuff. You know, that's fine because we can sit there and read in harmony. Mom, she would come up to me and be like "Katya, Katya!" when I was sitting there reading, and when I read, nobody else exists. I don't hear them, I don't see them, they're not there.
- Chris So you're absorbed by that book. You're literally in that book.
- Teen Literally absorbed. That's why I can't watch horror shows, for the same reason. I get so absorbed, I freak out. So it's just like ... it's kinda like popping the bubble, versus dad understands, you know, creep in quietly and....

"Space is like an area where I know that I can be alone and have my thoughts and not be interrupted or bothered or, you know, in any way bugged.... That's the happy place."

Being alone, not being bothered or intruded upon, these again are important aspects of freedom and autonomy for teens as well as the embodiment of safe space. Living in a space that gives one a sense of freedom or autonomy creates a feeling of happiness or comfort and hominess. This image suggests to me that the place, which is representative of safe space for teens, is very reminiscent of the type of space adults associate with the entirety of their home.

Chris Is there something special about your room that you choose that as this place?

Teen Other than the fact that there's a door. [laughter] I mean, there's a door on a lot of rooms in our house, but it's just.... Kind of like.... If I close myself off in there it's just my place. People can go in and everything, but it's my place for relaxing.

As adults, we have complete control over the entirety of our home and the space within. It's our space, our place for relaxing. We are comforted and often find comfort when we are in our homes. Granted the comfort and freedom that a home represents can be shattered in an instant when something goes wrong or intrudes on that space—the furnace breaks down, a burglar breaks in, a tornado rips off the roof, a violent crime occurs within, or someone dies in the home. The image and reality of that safe space is destroyed in an instant. When that happens, there can be a sense of entrapment or confinement in that space. This feeling is similar to when parents or others intrude into a teen's safe space—"it's kinda like popping the bubble." It's abrupt, it can feel confining, and it's like an invasion—teens feel violated to an extent.

Chris Now, if they come down in a huff, pounding down the stairs....

Teen Yeah, then it just feels like they're invading my space. [chuckle]

Chris Tell me a little more about that.

Teen Well, it's the same with my room, too. And I'm sure most teenagers would tell you that. That it's just.... I can't stand it when my parents are mad and they invade my happy space. It's like, "I am coming to this room to retreat and you just.... You need to leave your bad feelings at the door! 'cause if I wanted to sit and argue and scream, I wouldn't be in my room."

Chris So your room is important, too, as a space for you to go.

Teen Yeah. It has a door with a lock [laughter] so that's how it's nice. And I've got my CD player in there so I can kinda just listen to whatever

music I'm feeling that I need to listen to at that time. I like the fact that there's a window I can look out, and just a bed I can relax on.

Chris So it's almost calming or soothing to hear you talk through it.

Teen Yeah.

Chris What activity you would do in those situations when you go to your room?

Teen I usually ... I do a lot of writing, so I usually just write. Mostly just short stories. I usually try to take whatever feeling I'm experiencing and write it with different characters in a different situation, 'cause ... I don't.... Like I journal a little bit, but I just tend to find that I look back on it later and just go [sigh], I was being lame or something. So I feel like it just helps me a lot more if I can kind of create a feeling and then create another situation with different characters to kind of just play it again.

Chris So by creating that story, what does that do for you when you create that other story?

Teen It lets me let go of the feeling, 'cause then I know that I won't forget it and I know that I've already experienced it so I can just kinda put it away for a while and then look back on it later. I think I'm much more likely to recognize the value in the feeling 'cause I know.... I know that instead of just writing and blaming people and blaming the world and sounding like an angsty teen, I can just realize that that's what I was feeling at the time and move on.

Just as we, adults, retreat into our homes and lock the doors to protect ourselves from the evils of the world, so too do the teens when they retreat to their rooms. If a violent neighbor who is screaming at us and wielding a weapon such as a rake or shovel were to follow us home and break through our locked door, we would feel extremely violated and in danger, and we would likely call the police. Now imagine a teen retreating to his or her room, having a parent screaming, yelling, and practically foaming at the mouth and then charging into the teen's room. Regardless of the parent's intentions, the immediate impression is one of violation and intrusion—the hackles are

instantly raised, and teens feel like cornered animals trapped in their own rooms. The space no longer embodies safety or comfort.

The inviolate nature of safe space needs to be preserved. Otherwise teens will find solace and comfort in other spaces that are less likely to be subject to the invasion and disruption represented by parents' intrusion into teens' space. This happens with adults as well. When adults no longer feel safe in their homes, they will often choose to vacate that space and find new ones in which they can feel safe again. It is the inherent need of all humans to feel comfort and protection. Living in a violated or insecure space entraps, confines, and closes in on us, and it creates discomfort. It is contrary to safe space. We are constantly looking over our shoulder worrying about whom or what will burst our bubble. We are no longer free.

Chris If you're down in the basement sorta just hanging, and someone came down and started yelling at you, how would you feel?

Teen I would probably be like, "If I walked away, why did you follow me? If I wanted to end it, why would you come and keep going with it?" I'd probably be pretty mad. If it was my parents, I'd probably just ignore them. But if it was my brother, I'd probably just like shove him out of the way or something. I wouldn't use excessive force, like I wouldn't beat on him, that wouldn't be cool.

Chris What is it about them walking into that space?

Teen Well, usually we like to use the term bubbles about if you're in your.... Like, depending on your mood, your bubble gets bigger or smaller. Like if you're mad, your bubble's gonna be big and you want people to stay away. Usually we just like to tend to people's personal space, except me 'cause I like to bug people.

Chris So what's it like being in that bubble?

Teen Well, it's a bubble, your personal space, that if someone's bugging you enough that you don't want them to come anywhere near to you, and you can either tell them to go away or you can just push them away. Done with it.... It [the bubble] gives you like a sense of security that

there's no one there to bug you and that you're okay with yourself and that the bubble will actually get smaller if you're understanding and getting over the problem and stuff like that.

Chris So it sounds like you have a chance to sort of think through more in that space.... But if they start coming into your personal space.

Teen Then it'll bug you. Then the bubble thing will get bigger. That's how I feel.

We get a sense of the violation or intrusion that happens when someone encroaches upon a teen's safe space, even the figurative safe space. "If I walked away, why did you follow me? If I wanted to end it, why would you come and keep going with it?" The frustration and bafflement is implicit in this moment when the teen feels disrespected. It sounds like, "How could you?!" Or "How dare you?!" And there is anger and defiance bubbling through. In the teen's voice, I hear, "I will ignore you. I will do what I can to regain control of my space, or I will move to a new safe space."

As teens move closer to adulthood, they begin to feel the pressures and demands on their time more and more. This makes their alone time and the time they are in full control of their world more precious. And when we have something so valuable, we will fight to retain it, and we will do what we can to protect it. "This is MY time!"

Chris When you go off by yourself, is there something unique about those moments that you really enjoy?

Teen No, other than it's just "me" time and I don't get a lot of that now with school and everything 'cause, I don't know why, but this year's been really busy and packed. But, so, yeah, I kind of.... When I get "me" time, plug my stereo in, start cleaning my room, do whatever, you know, and just sit and relax and maybe read or do whatever. And it's just fun 'cause I don't get much of that time anymore.

Chris So what if someone comes in and interrupts your "me" time?

Teen Well, depends. Like if it's something like "Can you go down and wash the dishes?" That kind of irritates me and it's like, just "Can I

please just have this time for me?” You know. Irritating and frustrating and kind of bothering.

This statement, “Can I please just have this time for me?” It says to me that “I need some time every day in which I can be in control and do what I want; I need freedom and autonomy.” So freedom and autonomy are bound inexorably to time and to space. The struggles for control and so many of parent-teen conflicts and the associated arguments are caught up in the tensions inherent in a teen’s finding oneself and his or her relationship to the world.

As humans, anytime we feel we have lost ourselves or our identity and realize the need to rediscover who we are, there are tensions that come into play between ourselves and those we love. There are key life events that can cause this to happen—divorce, escaping from abusive relationships, entering adulthood (i.e., the teen years), entering childhood (i.e., leaving toddlerhood), and so on. We are changing and the person that we were is no longer clear. Our family and friends must stand back and wait to see where we land, but there is tension and trepidation inherent in those moments because of all the uncertainties. We are sometimes uncomfortable with change, and we are known to fight against it sometimes subconsciously and within ourselves.

Again, this experience of safe space can be figurative or literal. Safe space can be an actual separate location where we can be alone with ourselves and our thoughts, or it can be more like a figurative bubble surrounding us and giving us a mental separation between our space and the rest of the world. In all cases, safe space is embodied in the experience of comfort, freedom, control, security, and refuge apart from the world. This space affords an opportunity to find oneself in solitude and to work through the

uncertainties of life. Again, looking back at the wave metaphor, it is within this safe space that we find ourselves back on the figurative inner tube basking in the calm blue ocean in peace and comfort even when this ocean (i.e., parent's house) is so uncertain and could change in an instant.

Summary

Our voyage through this chapter and the other thematic chapters has brought us full circle, and we have lived the teen experience of parent-teen conflict and the associated argument through the text itself. By exploring the essence of the phenomenon through the overlap in themes, we gain a greater picture of the whole, and we have a richer awareness of how it is lived—the essential structural definition reveals itself to us. The threads of this contextual fabric have created a clearer tapestry for us to behold. This text by no means explicates the entirety of the phenomenon, but it reveals many aspects that may have been previously veiled by our preconceptions of this moment. We have come one step farther on the journey to understanding the embodiment of family conflict in general and, more specifically, the embodiment of parent-teen conflict and the associated argument. How can we use the knowledge we have gained thus far, and how will this knowledge inspire others to excavate even deeper into this phenomenon? With this question, we move to the last section to explore the implications of this research and ideas for further studies.

SECTION III: RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER QUESTIONS

Calm; then bafflement and shock; followed by weight and oppression; leading to frustration and irritation, creating a longing for freedom, autonomy, and control; and finally, retreating to the solitude of a safe space in order to reclaim that control. The life of an argument as teens live it is embodied in movement, energy, emotion, and so much complexity. There are many insights this living tapestry can help us to see, and there are many ways we can use this experience to improve our relationships with teens as well as adults.

As we move forward, we touch on only a few of the potential opportunities and implications this research affords us. What does the text reveal; what does it tell us? How *do* we move forward as teens, as parents, as educators, and as researchers? In this section, I pull out specific pieces that relate to each of these domains and tie-off each thread to complete the tapestry that has been revealed. As with the themes of this embodied experience, the implications will also inevitably overlap, and there can be much to gain by looking at ourselves through the lens of each domain—"me" as teen, "me" as parent, "me" as educator, "me" as researcher, and "me" as all three at once. How am I impacted?

Polkinghorne (1989) tells us:

It [phenomenological research] seeks understanding for its own sake and addresses the question *what?* not *why?* Productive phenomenological research supplies a deeper and clearer understanding of what it is like for someone to experience something. The research results amplify our understanding of these experiences and lead to several consequences: (a) we can appreciate and be more sensitive to those involved in these experiences..., (b) some of the understandings derived from logical-mathematical theories and research can be enlarged on, deepened, and, in some cases, corrected; and (c) social action and public policy

can be amended so as to be more responsive to the way in which we experience various situations. (p. 58)

In addition to the findings of phenomenological research, participation in the process itself can be useful for subjects. Wertz (1984) has described the beneficial effects that sometimes accrue to the interview participants in the study. In his study with Fischer (1979) on victimization, the process of engaging in the interview was itself helpful for the subjects in restoring their broken sense of community. (p. 58)

Sensitivity and deepened understanding are definitely imbedded in my discoveries. We will consider how sensitivity and deepened understanding may impact teens themselves, we will explore the parent-teen relationship, and we will look at how parent educators can support both parents and teens.

Chapter 8: Implications for Parent-Teen Relationships

Throughout we have listened to the teen voice and gained new perspective. We have learned from teens themselves, but what are the implications of the research for teens themselves? In this chapter, we will explore how teens may benefit from this study. How can the research make a difference in their lives? Also, we will discuss implications of this research and consider strategies that may help improve parent-teen relationships, communication, and mutual understanding. The challenge to any researcher is to remain true to what the research itself says to us. What can we learn with regard to our practice of parenting, and in what ways can this knowledge be translated into strategies for harmonious living?

What Teens May Find:

As I was listening to the teens' voice, it almost seemed cathartic for them to talk about the conflict and argument they were having with their parents. They voiced their frustrations and how irritated they were. They were able to talk about the weight of the world bearing down on them and how parents were adding to the pressures. And they were able to share their hopes and dreams for the future. As Polkinghorne (1989) mentioned, just being able to participate in the study seemed to give teens a sense of community or solidarity. I recognized the feeling of empowerment as they spoke, suggesting the process helped to instill a sense of confidence. To be able to tell an adult, who was very interested in what teens had to say about their experiences, allowed teens an opportunity to be frank and share their pent-up frustrations.

As I listened to these teens, I gained a greater understanding of how peer relationships may be so vital to teens. It seems that peer relationships can lend

themselves to a sense of community and can provide an arena for venting with others who are equals (in power, in age, in perspective, in experience, etc.). Being heard is empowering. The opportunity to speak frankly without worrying about consequences can feel liberating in and of itself. The question remains, can teens only go to other teens for this open dialogue, or can this openness be developed and encouraged in the parent-teen relationship? Can parents help create an environment for teens to speak frankly without negative consequences, and how might families benefit? After all, in Section II, it was clear that teens would look elsewhere if they weren't able to find that within their own family:

Teen Sometimes I'll stop at a friend's place and talk to them for a while.

Teen Like sometimes when I'm really upset I'll like write or just like talk on the phone to my friends or just... I don't know... just be away from them [parents], I guess.

For teens, the research can (a) help them to become more sensitive and responsive to their own needs as well as (b) encourage them to advocate for their own voice within the family and in the greater community. Teens can help educate and work with parents to create a family environment where frank and open communication can take place and to help others hear their voices.

Teens being able to see themselves and their experiences laid out in such a text as this lets them know they are not alone:

Teen And in knowing that someone else has felt almost the exact same way, I'm just comforted by the fact that I'm not alone.

Teens can see themselves in the rich descriptions and know that there are others who understand their everyday challenges and the weight they carry with them on a daily basis. It creates a greater sense of community.

Every time I hear about another case of teen suicide, I am left wondering if there was no one he or she could have talked to or if he or she felt so completely alone. So this research is an opportunity to restore teens' broken sense of community and to simply let out what may be bottled inside unburdening their soul, easing their stress, and giving back hope. If you ask whether this research will prevent suicide, that is not for me to say, and that is not its intent. But, in my work as a parent educator, I have seen firsthand and I am confident that being part of a community who is living the same experiences gives hope and restores confidence. I believe we can restore teens' hope and confidence by sharing their voice with the world.

We have experienced the embodiment of a teen's perspective, and we have closely examined the intricately woven pattern of the conflict and argument tapestry. To some, the experience may, at first, appear strange, surreal, or nonsensical, but, as we stand back from the finished product, the tapestry, as a whole, speaks to us through all our senses, bringing clarity. How we choose to use this revelation may depend on each person's connection with the tapestry and how it speaks to her or him. What insights does it reveal to the reader? What will the reader see during the exhibition of the phenomenological tapestry? There may be several different ways to see the greater picture, but I choose to share my interpretations and the assessment of the implications this research will have on the parent-teen relationship.

Being in My Shoes

“Why can't they ever see things my way?” “Why doesn't she get it?!” The first revelation we can use to enhance the parent-teen relationship is to develop a greater sense of empathy and allow ourselves to be shown the world through teens' eyes. What do

they see? How is their picture of the world different than my own? And which side of the figurative soda-can am I possibly not seeing from my vantage point? We need to gain a greater sensitivity to the teen experience and be respectfully responsive.

Remember, if you will, the words of Merleau-Ponty (1947/1964) about the paradox of perception:

The things which I see are things for me only under the condition that they always recede beyond their immediately given aspects. Thus there is a paradox of immanence and transcendence in perception. Immanence, because the perceived object cannot be foreign to him who perceives it; transcendence, because it always contains something more than what is actually given. (p. 16)

We transcend what is immediately given by filling in the missing information with what we imagine exists from that other perspective. The problem is that this other perspective may actually be other than we imagine; it may not even be a soda-can from this other perspective but a tree stump. Only through collaboration with the teen are we able to gain a picture that is much closer to the object's (or embodied experience's) pure essence and its being-in-the-world, the Dasein.

Thus, as adults and parents, it is our habitual nature and our natural stance to view the world through adult eyes filtered through our own cultures, histories, and life experiences. How often do we really stop to consider other vantage points of mundane, everyday moments of living, especially when our own emotions run high? As parents, we can benefit from setting aside our own perspective momentarily and collaborate with the teen to see his or her vantage point in these moments. It is always much easier to assume we know the other side, know why an argument started, and rationalize its cause from that stance. It can also be easier to blame the dispute on the insolence of the teen or hormones. What is much more difficult, takes practice, and has a greater potential for

long-term benefits is to open ourselves to that other perspective and become more sensitive to that experience. Do we really know the truth of this experience as teens live it? It is this aspect with which we need to connect; we need to try and understand their truth without judgment or condemnation.

“No, you don’t understand!” In this, we can hear *you don’t know what I’m going through*. Adults have stress as do children and teens. Do we take time to consider the stress and impact everyday pressures exert on the teen?

- Teen It’s just “me” time and I don’t get a lot of that now with school and everything ‘cause, I don’t know why, but this year’s been really busy and packed.
- Teen You’re right in the middle of doing this really hard piece of homework, and you’re getting into it and then... “Can you come up here and turn off the light!”
- Teen I mean, if I have time for that, sure I’ll do it. But, you know, I just don’t have time for that a lot of the time.

From this, we can feel that sense of time and pressure, of being pulled in so many directions at once that it feels as if we will burst. But we also hear the teen frustration with parents “not getting it!”

If we, as parents, could take more time to look below the surface and to understand the stress our teen is under, it may help us to develop that empathy and to appreciate the external and internal struggles that lend themselves to the flash-point of an argument. What pushed the teen over the edge, why did this conversation reach a flash-point, or how can we use this understanding to guide our words and actions and be more respectfully responsive? Stress and everyday pressures can have a cumulative effect leading to “the last straw that breaks the camel’s back.” The teen may be overwhelmed, which in turn can lead to either feeling oppressed and shutting down or becoming

irritated and being fired to action (or argument). It may not be what we say that is the ultimate cause of an argument, but it certainly can be the catalyst, that last straw so to speak. Sensitivity is stepping back for a moment to consider what is below the surface.

From this, we can identify two strategies a parent might consider to help prevent or quell an argument. Using phrases and body language that say, “I’m listening, and I’m genuinely interested in hearing your perspective. Tell me what that’s like for you”—the excavation, if you will. We can work collaboratively to create an environment where frank and open communication can take place without repercussions. We can take time to consciously stop our potentially defensive reactions, breathe deeply, clear our mind as much as possible, and open ourselves to their experience and life in this moment. In doing so, we are also modeling stress reducing life skills. We have an opportunity for teens to show us their side of the soda-can.

Another strategy is to stop to consider that they might be doing something that is more important or valuable to their well-being than our simple task. As adults, we need to take a moment to investigate, see, and hear what a teen is doing before making a request. It is about being mutually respectful of one another. We can look for and practice ways to phrase requests so they convey respect while achieving family goals and not becoming overindulgent:

- You seem busy. Are you working on something important? I need help folding the laundry, would you be able to do that now or in 30 minutes?
- I need you to rake the leaves. When would be a good time for you to do that today?
- I know you’ve had a really rough day today. I’ll do the dishes tonight; you can do them tomorrow night. Take some time to relax and meditate. It will help relieve the stress, and you can have a fresh start in the morning.

Phrasing such questions and statements in a genuine, heart-felt way is more likely to garner cooperation and side-step an argument than would asking the questions with a tone of condescension, derision, or disrespect, “Oh sure! While I’m busy washing your dishes and your laundry, you just sit there ‘playing’ on the computer” (as the teen tries to finish typing his term paper on social networking and is browsing the internet for facts and data). Sensitivity is being aware of another possible interpretation of the same moment.

What we interpret as playing may actually be something other than what is immediately given to us in our initial perception of that moment. Respect is discovering that other perspective before jumping to conclusions. And the right words can help bring out that perspective. The right words open the door for negotiation and collaboration and help pave the way for respectful interaction. Our goal, in some respects, is to help teens learn the skills necessary to handle and overcome the burden and stress of everyday living in healthy ways while also not adding to the burden ourselves either through our words or actions. We need to be the respectful detective of the family.

I Have Something to Teach

As is our nature, adults can become stuck in doing or seeing things a certain way; we become rigid in our habitualness. As we think back on the voice of the teen, this comes through when it seems there is only one right way to accomplish something.

Teen “My opinion is the right one, I’m always right, your opinion is not the most correct,” as she’s put it sometimes. And I’m like, “Well, that’s just another way of making you say that I’m wrong.”

Teen If I’m not doing it right, they’ll try and tell me how to do it and that’ll just get us both annoyed.... Why do they have to tell me this, I think I’m doing it good. Why can’t it just be acceptable?

What would the consequences be to parents who let their teens try completing tasks in their own way? Is it life-threatening? When do we *have* to intervene? These are things to consider. Teens might not get something as clean as a parent would, the edges may be slightly rough, and other people may judge us, as parents, for not having it perfect. But are these things really all that vital; do they endanger our lives? If we also consider the consequences for teens who are given the chance to try something their own way, we can see their pride in completed tasks, acknowledgement and recognition of their growing abilities, and their increased self-confidence and self-esteem. Which set of consequences has the greatest long-term benefit—a clean house, neatness, and order or a self-confident and empowered son or daughter? How we respond to and interact with our teen can make or break a relationship, and we have an opportunity to make something grand.

If we listen to the voice of the teen, the consequences of seeing only one right way to do something is discouragement (“why can’t it just be acceptable”), feelings of worthlessness (“that’s just another way of making you say that I’m wrong”), and an overall sense of fatalism (why bother, this is my lot in life). When we, as adults, gate-keep even the most mundane things of everyday life such as the “proper” way to wash the dishes, the “right” method for vacuuming, the “best” technique for mowing the lawn, or making the “appropriate” decision, we can add to the weight of the world bearing down on the teen and diminish him or her.

Teen I, you know, stood up, I said what I needed to, and she’s like, ‘Well, no, that’s not really right.’ So it’s kinda being put back down. And then I feel smaller and it’s just not the greatest feeling, I guess.

The teen may have been squashed, and the house is clean. But is it worth it? Are we being responsive? How can we find balance?

Other important questions we might consider: Is learning a one-way endeavor from master to pupil, or is learning bidirectional? Can our teens learn from us while we also learn from them? What lessons can they teach us? We, perhaps, forget that there may be other ways for achieving something that are just as effective or even more effective than our own ways. We may even learn more effective techniques if we take the time to let a teen show us his or her way. I know they definitely have more technological skill than do many parents when it comes to electronics and gadgetry. Imagine if we were more open to sharing our knowledge with each other. And even if we perceive a teen's way as not the most efficient method of achieving a goal, it is her method, she owns it, and she can feel a sense of accomplishment in doing it her way and teaching her processes to someone she respects. There is great pride in being able to teach someone we look up to and give back for all they have given us. We can benefit greatly from understanding this moment from their perspective and how our actions will impact them and their developing identity, how it will affect their heart and soul.

How teens' parents talk to them about things can have a major impact on how they perceive themselves and those moments. In one way, we can come across as petty, vindictive, and nagging; in another way, we can sound more respectful and considerate.

Chris So it doesn't sound like they're willing to change in those circumstances.

Teen Well, 'cause we know they're right, that's the problem. [chuckle]

Chris So you're frustrated with the fact that they're right.

- Teen Yes. Frustrated at the fact that they're right and that they can't just fix it themselves and say you know, "next time can you turn off your light if you can remember." But it's the "come upstairs and turn off your light."
- Chris So you would prefer if they would have said something to you rather than have you come up there.
- Teen Yeah. Or like if someone doesn't put something away in the bathroom or whatever, it's like, I personally make a point of putting it away and then going to the person when I've calmed down about it and then saying "you know, just next time could you please try and remember to put the comb away." You know what I mean?
- Chris Why do you do it that way versus the way your parents have you do it?
- Teen 'Cause that way everybody doesn't get anywhere, I mean, 'cause you're still gonna forget. But if you go to them in a calm manner and just say "can you try and remember that next time." It's almost like the more heartfelt way so that maybe they can understand it better.

When a teen is treated like a puppy getting his nose rubbed in the wet spot on the floor, it feels demeaning, petty, and inane. However, a teen who feels respected is more likely to engage in heartfelt discussions and is more likely to develop a mutual understanding, and there may be a greater likelihood of cooperation from both sides, parents and teens.

It is this connection to the heart that becomes important to us. When teens feel respected and can engage in rational discussion, they seem more likely to connect with what parents are feeling and saying; they seem more likely to see eye-to-eye. Listening to the voice of teens, we get a sense that parents' modeling a respectful dialogue approach can also encourage teens to be more responsible, empathetic, and, especially, self-motivated to do things without being asked. If we are respectful of them, they are more likely to be respectful of us and realize their actions and decisions impact others.

Feeling Listened to and Feeling Heard

“Can you at least take two minutes of my time and just listen to what I’m saying?” Are we really listening and hearing what our teen is saying? It is easy to fall back on our assumptions and think, “Here we go again!” (rolling of eyes). Even we are prone to the rolling-of-the-eyes moments, which ultimately close down our ability to hear what is being said. Teens are able to perceive this, and they know when we aren’t really listening. As adults, we can learn not to fall into this pattern; we’ve had more life experience. By employing active listening techniques that allow us to hear through the superficial, face-value aspect of what the teen is saying, we can get at the heart of the issue more easily. We have to be careful that we don’t leap into a defensive stance and close down our ability to listen clearly—a defensive stance comes easily when emotions run high. Because of this, it is important that we know what stimuli can launch us into a defensive stance. Awareness is a first step to overcoming such defensiveness.

“Even though they might not reach the same conclusion as I do when I present my arguments, I feel like sometimes they don’t even listen to them.” Engaging in open communication and active listening lets a teen know he or she being heard. We may not always agree with one another, but acknowledging what is said and verifying what we understand helps to minimize a teen’s shutting down or closing off. Consider when we, as an adult, feel listened to. How do we know when we have been heard? How do we feel when it seems that someone is ignoring us? And, finally, how can we help our teen to feel heard? Understanding how we are impacted by not being heard and our own experience of these moments can help us relate to teens’ experiences and the message we are sending them.

“It makes me feel like I’m not... that I’m not important.” Not being heard can be damaging to teens’ self-esteem and feelings of worth. It suggests that, “I’m not important enough for you to take the time to hear what I am saying.” As was prevalent in Section II, teens have a much more difficult time finding the right words to express what they are trying to say when they are under stress or duress. If pressure becomes too much, teens are likely to close down and give up; they become defeatist. Our staying calm and taking time to listen can help alleviate some of the stress teens experience in these moments and help them to feel important, respected, and worthwhile. When teens don’t feel respected or worthy, they can become frustrated and irritated and, therefore, more likely to argue.

“All I want to do is get my point out. So. And it just kinda feels like, you know, just no sense, nobody listening.” There is a need to be heard. Even when we may not agree, we can benefit from purposefully listening to and hearing the teen perspective. We can be patient and help teens find the words to express what they are experiencing and thinking. Being courteous and respectful may be taking time to reflect and think about what we have heard before reacting irrationally—”No!” “Because!” Having a rational response and taking time to consider teens’ words demonstrates how much we value them as people, and it encourages more open communication. And feeling worthwhile is an important aspect of the teen experience and feeling successful.

Being Devalued and Made to Feel Small

“I am nothing in the eyes of my father.” Being devalued and feeling worthless hurts and can ultimately damage self-esteem and identity formation. Teens frequently voiced feeling devalued and small and feeling worthless during the argument experience. It is important for us to consider how our actions and words might devalue teens and

make them feel small or unimportant. We have all heard parents complain about teens seeming distant or just not opening up to them. However, if we stop to think about how it feels to be unimportant and devalued as an individual, we may better understand why some teens close down, become distant, and are just not willing to engage in open communication. “If I’m not important to you, why bother? It won’t make any difference.” There is a sense of hopelessness.

“You’re too young to understand”—a simple phrase in which we, knowingly or unknowingly, devalue teens. It is easy for us to view teens as they were just a few years ago, and we forget that they are growing and developing and that they are able to understand and cope with more and more things in life. Because it is easy for us to become stuck in our own viewpoint, we need to be careful not to underestimate teens’ abilities—they are no longer 8 years old; they are almost 18. Teens recognize the dichotomous nature of adolescence. They are old enough to die for our country at 18 while operating a million dollar military vehicle, but they aren’t old enough or responsible enough to rent a car. They are old enough to vote in elections at 18, but they aren’t old enough to drink alcohol. In some states, they are old enough to drive at 14, but they can’t pump their own gas until they are 16. If we are willing to entrust a teen with operating a motor vehicle, why don’t we think they can use a simple gas pump? As parents, we can avoid falling into these traps as well by realizing that teens are older and that they can often understand much more than we give them credit for. Why do we think they are too young to understand? Is it a valid reason?

I remember when I was about 20 and my parents told me that they gave the family dog to a farmer and his wife. I saw through their deception and said, “You put Gretel to

sleep, didn't you?" They looked at each other, looked down in shame, and said, "Yes." I knew it! When I asked why they couldn't just tell me the truth, their answer was they didn't think I could handle it and they didn't want to burden me. I was 20 years old and in college! Why couldn't I handle the death of a family pet? I know we are reluctant to "burden" our children with such news, but not valuing our child enough to be truthful eventually comes back to bite us. For me, I questioned the other times family pets were "given to a farm." What else weren't they telling me? It shakes teens' trust and makes them question the reality of the past.

To illustrate this further, my story continues. After I discovered what really happened, I advised my parents to reveal the truth to my older sister (2½ years older) and younger sister (10 years younger). A couple years later, I was on an airplane with my older sister and brother-in-law on our way to visit my parents. Somehow we got on the subject of Gretel, and I had said, "I was just so mad that mom and dad couldn't just tell you that they put her to sleep." My older sister broke down in tears because she didn't know—my parents never told her! I felt like a schmuck, and my brother-in-law had this look on his face that spoke volumes. When we arrived, I confronted my parents again and advised them that they had better tell my younger sister, who was now a teen. I didn't want to get caught in their web of deceit again.

Unfortunately, a few years later, my sisters, my partner, and I went camping together. During a rain storm, we sat inside the camper playing cards, and the topic of Gretel came up. My older sister and I both said how frustrated we were that they couldn't tell us the truth about putting her to sleep. It was a moment of *déjà-vu*. This time my younger sister broke down in tears—once more, my parents never told the truth.

By holding onto the idea that a teen is too young to understand, we are likely to get caught in situations like this when the truth is withheld. It can weigh on teens' self-esteem to find out their parents didn't value them enough to speak the truth or to confide in them. There is a risk of weakening the parent-teen relationship. So we need to ask ourselves if a teen is truly too young to understand and how we will measure their readiness. Is it worth risking their trust in us?

"There's very little worse than walking around at your normal height, but feeling about 2 inches big." Feeling small can be the result of outside forces or from within. Self-humiliation can often times feel twice as bad as humiliation from outside. Many of us are susceptible to being overly self-critical, and we can all fall into this trap from time to time. When teens are experiencing moments of feeling small, they may become hypersensitive to what others say, especially their parents. Hypersensitivity allows irritation to aggravate our bodily system and bring about the flash-point of argument more quickly. We are more aware of the little things that wouldn't normally bother us.

As parents, we can benefit from this information by reading teens' cues and knowing when teens are experiencing excessive self-criticism or are feeling really small. We can be supportive and allow teens space to work through the moment. Sometimes teens just want to be listened to and heard rather than hearing what they should have or could have done differently, especially if a teen already knows what he or she could have done differently and feel about two inches tall because of it. To try and give advice at this moment or tell teens they are not quite right in their thinking can make teens feel worse—"So it's kinda being put back down. And then I feel smaller and it's just not the

greatest feeling.” Every moment doesn’t need to be a teaching moment; sometimes a person just needs to be in that moment and work through it with support.

Feeling Oppressed

When feeling small and devalued becomes oppressive, teens are likely to reach a point where they feel a need to revolt against the oppression. It is similar to a cornered animal that reaches a point where it lashes out. By understanding how and why teens might feel oppressed and what we can do to reduce this, parents can help teens move from feeling oppressed to feeling empowered. An oppressed person seems more likely to stagnate and shut down; an empowered person seems more apt to thrive and open himself or herself to the world.

If we look closely at teens who feel trapped and oppressed, we are likely to find teens who live in states of greater tension. Oppressed teens tend to feel a greater need to escape and find freedom and tend to bump up against their parents’ ideals more readily. One way we may do this is by painting a narrow picture of what our teen can become. “They expect me to go to college, so I mean, it’s like, I gotta go to college but for what? They also expect me to go in the Navy. It’s like, ‘Navy?!’” When teens are boxed in to a particular life path, many feel trapped and oppressed and may rebel. As parents, we can keep ourselves more open to the possibilities life has to offer our teens. Sometimes it is okay to make mistakes.

Teens may not choose to become the doctor, teacher, or CEO of the family company like we had hoped. If we can be more supportive of the paths teens choose and help them find ways to be successful in their chosen paths, we can promote more open, strong, and trusting long-term relationships between parents and teens. We are also more

likely to encourage teens to open up to us. The key is to empower teens with the ability and opportunity to make strong choices rather than oppress them into submitting to our will, thus running the risk of becoming less capable of making their own decisions.

Needing Rational Answers

How often do we reply to teens without thinking things through? In many circumstances, we can hear ourselves automatically saying “No!” or “Because!” as an immediate answer to many questions without having a logical or rational reason why we are saying this. Afterward, when we think about our answer, we realize how irrational that answer may have been. An immediate answer given without pausing to think can place us in a difficult position—now we’re stuck. Why did we say no? It’s not so much saying no that is the problem; it is our not knowing why we said no in the first place. As we heard in the text, teens need logical and rational answers that help them to understand why, the actual reasons:

Teen Well, there’s a proper way to use because and the improper way. The proper way is because of this, this, and that. You know. Actual reasons. And there’s because with no point following it. There’s nothing after it. You can’t just use because and then end.

Taking the time, to think through our answers before simply blurting them out, could save both of us, teen and parent, a great deal of aggravation.

We can be respectful of ourselves and teens by saying, “I need some time to think about this.” Being honest and truthful seems more likely to garner support and cooperation from teens:

Teen I mean, I honestly don’t know why he thinks it matters. And so maybe if I heard why I’d be more likely to consider, but when it’s just presented as a black and white, “You will! This is the rule.” You know?

So it can be helpful to explain why. Why is this the rule, or why did we make that decision? However, as parents, sometimes we don't have the words to immediately express our reasons. Taking that time to think can show thoughtfulness, that we have listened and heard our teens, and that we value teens enough to really think about our answer. Teens seem much more likely to accept our decisions when backed up with rational and logical responses.

When teens hear, "Because I said so!" it feels dismissive and tears down teens' self-confidence and feelings of worth. It suggests to them that we don't value teens enough to take our time to consider their words or their perspective:

Teen You want to feel like you have a sense of your own voice and being able to put it out there without people, or especially your parents, not trying to push you back down. But when that happens, I don't know what to do, I just kinda sit there and stay quiet just knowing that maybe she'll just end the conversation and I can just build up back to where I was before.

Teen So it's kinda being put back down. And then I feel smaller and it's just not the greatest feeling, I guess.

As we understand teens' experience of argument more and more, we find that teens are much more liable to become insolent and defiant in the face of petty, irrational, and illogical answers, and they are more apt to ignore our "No!" or "Because!" if it lacks the why. "But they pick so many little issues that I don't think matter, that I am just more tempted to do whatever I can to just be insolent about everything." Teens tend to think more in facts and reason, the rational versus the irrational. They tend to be more challenged with the fuzzy grey areas or the inexplicable, "That doesn't make sense!" And making sense—sense of the world, sense of the words they hear, sense of the

relationships they have, sense of what went wrong—is clearly an important objective for teens.

Experiencing Hypocrisy and Being Defiant

- Teen A lot of the fights that I have with them are about it being hypocritical and about it being kind of a double standard.
- Teen I catch them doing almost the same things they yell at me for doing and they're completely okay with it.
- Teen I want things to be consistent, and it's like, "if you tell me something is wrong, it's wrong for me and it's wrong for you and it's wrong for everyone."

As we see, the hypocrisy decried by teens ties into their wanting facts or reason—either it is or it isn't. The recognition of hypocrisy also shows how important it is for us to model our own rules (i.e., live by the same rules we expect of other family members). If we say something is wrong and then we in turn do it anyway, what message are we sending? This is confusing for teens and generates a great deal of frustration and irritation about such double-standards.

The teen brain is developing into an adult brain, and teens are typically able to recognize the inconsistencies between what we say and what we do. If we expect teens to keep their rooms (i.e., their private spaces) clean, wouldn't our modeling that expectation create a greater sense of equity among family members (i.e., we're all in the same boat, and we all have to work together)? Modeling in this way helps teens to feel respected and tells them the rules are consistent across the board. It levels the playing field and creates an environment that feels less oppressive.

When teens receive mixed messages about what the rules are, they become frustrated. When the rules seem irrational and without reason, teens become irritated. If

we expect higher standards of cleanliness in private spaces of our house (e.g., each person's bedroom) than in the public spaces, it sends teens a mixed message. Wouldn't it seem rational that shared public spaces would have a higher expectation of cleanliness because of the fact that it is shared?

Teen Like for instance, this messy desk over here, my room looks like this a lot, and I always get yelled at about it even though neither one of them ever have to come in my room for anything. And this [family computer room] is a family space and this is all messy, and nobody gets yelled at about that.

If we, as parents, are okay with a trashed family office (i.e., a public space) but expect teens to have their rooms cleaned when no one else goes in there, that is a confusing message and seems irrational and illogical. Why do we have this expectation? It seems like a double-standard, it feels petty when teens are the only ones using their space, and they see this as hypocrisy.

We can avoid some feelings of hypocrisy and pettiness by evaluating our family rules and making those rules ones that we, as parents, can follow ourselves. If we are making rules we can't follow, then we must reevaluate the purpose and rationale for that rule and its appropriateness to our family. Teens are almost hyperaware of hypocrisy and double-standards and the inherent injustice. They can see through the "do as I say, not as I do" mentality, and such a mentality can undermine the parent-teen relationship and lead to more arguments.

Wanting Freedom and Autonomy

As mentioned earlier, when teens near adulthood, they have a greater need and desire to become autonomous and free. They yearn to prove to themselves and the world that they are capable and successful beings. They are discovering their own identity apart

from the family, and they need the freedom and space in which to do this. It isn't about them turning their backs on us; it is about them finding out who they are on their own terms. As parents, we hope we have given teens the tools they will need to make good decisions, to solve their own problems, and to be successful. Our values should be at the core of their being, and we can pat ourselves on the back for that. But adolescence is a time for self-discovery that helps them stabilize that base of core values we have instilled. Teens need to have room to spread their wings and freedom to practice using those values before venturing out into the world on their own.

We can start by giving teens this opportunity to practice the skills by working *with* them to find answers and solutions to problems as they happen. How can we work toward collaboration rather than control? Can we negotiate and compromise in ways that work for both parents and teens? Can we trust teens enough to let them try their skills at solving their own problems and learning about life's consequences?

It isn't easy for parents to watch teens struggle when we believe we know an "easier" way to solve a problem. The challenge with solving problems for teens is that it takes away the ownership that teens can have by working out solutions on their own. By having ownership of their problems, learning to solve them on their own, and discovering the consequences of their decisions, they seem much more likely to absorb this learning than if we were to tell them how to fix it. It becomes real and internally important to them when they are able to live the process.

Teens need freedom of ownership and autonomy from parents. They need room within the family to flex their muscles and to develop their skills. Allowing teens this room, while still a part of the family, helps to minimize the sense of needing to escape to

find those skills. We can create a safe haven within the family that teens can feel comfortable turning to in times of difficulty. By keeping this understanding of freedom and autonomy in the backs of our minds, we stand a greater chance of keeping the parent-teen relationship open and trusting.

Needing Space to Process

Part of teens' need for freedom and autonomy is a need for ownership, especially a space they can call their own. While it is true that humans need social interaction to thrive, they also need time and space to be alone, to reflect on life, and to decompress after a long, stressful day. Teens are no different. The problem is that we own (or rent) the house. In this sense, teens technically do not own any of the space within this structure even though they have the need for such ownership. It seems that the less teens feel ownership of space within the home the greater they may feel a need to escape to find solace and space. As parents, it is important for us to recognize this.

- Teen Just being out of this house, you know... this house kinda just reminds me of like a cage, you know.
- Teen I think about what could, you know, happen in the future or like what else I could have been doing right now if I wasn't stuck in the house. You know, like people I could go see, you know.
- Teen It's like a safety zone or something 'cause it's mine. And like I just like to be alone so I can just like think.

We can use this information to help guide us and to become purposeful in finding and identifying a space within our home that teens can call their own. Teens need to learn how to manage and use that space in ways that fit their needs. They may need to decide how clean they like their space, and they need to experience the consequences of their decisions about that space. Certainly we can have rules that protect the rest of the

house from pests, rodents, and offensive odors. After all, these same expectations exist in multiple unit dwellings (e.g., apartment building, fourplex, duplex, etc.) that adults own and occupy. Officials would intervene if neighboring units detected a problem with our unit. If we strive for a rational explanation for rules, and we follow them ourselves, teens' sense of ownership should feel more intact and preserved. We are creating an opportunity for teens to practice, within the relative safety of the family, the skills they will need to survive on their own.

Finally, as parents, we can benefit from understanding that when teens retreat to their safe space it is often not to withdraw from the family but to take time to process what they have just experienced. Teens need to have a safe zone in which they know they will not be disturbed. It is a secure space that allows them to process their emotions, to decompress and let go of the frustration and irritation they may be feeling, and to evaluate what just happened. Our premature intrusion on that space can disrupt the flow of their process and can feel violating. Such intrusions seem likely to extend the argument and potentially alienate teens. Think of it as teens taking time to meditate and practice skills for reducing stress. After all, in our fast-paced society, who couldn't use a moment for meditation every day? It certainly explains why adults sometimes go to retreats for vacation. It's an opportunity for us to escape from the daily grind and to decompress. Teens need the same.

Beginning Anew

Teen Like once I talked about it I'm kinda like I don't want to talk about it again.... But it's kinda like I just don't really want to have to deal with it anymore than I already have.... Because that makes me feel bad, I guess. I don't like to think about it if I don't have to, and it kinda makes it like heaviness on my heart, I guess, 'cause I feel bad about it.

Teen 'Cause if I wanted to sit and argue and scream, I wouldn't be in my room.

Teen I know that instead of just writing and blaming people and blaming the world and sounding like an angsty teen, I can just realize that that's what I was feeling at the time and move on.

This morning I came to tell my mother sorry for the horrible things I did the day before.... I told her it's not just that night, and its from so many years of me feeling pressured and having this constant "gloom and doom" feeling over my shoulder because of their pressure. She wouldn't take any of it, and said that if I'm unwilling to say sorry sincerely, then there's no point in saying it. (Yahoo! Answers, 2009, ¶6)

Another key piece of the puzzle we can take to heart is beginning anew and letting go. If, after an argument, we try to leave the past in the past and move forward, then we give a chance for both of us to start over with a new and fresh perspective. It's like the idea of the Mulligan in a game, when a player gets a second chance to perform a certain move or action—a do over, so to speak. Starting fresh and leaving the past behind sends the message to teens that this issue wasn't a big deal and that we are still okay (i.e., our relationship is secure). By trying to revisit the argument or hold it over our teens, we only aggravate them and cause greater irritation and frustration, potentially leading to a new argument. We need to hit the reset button and start anew.

After spending time in their safe space contemplating the argument we just had, often times teens emerge from that respite with the knowledge and understanding that (a) we, the parent, were right, (b) it just wasn't that big of an issue to begin with, or (c) they just want to move beyond this issue and leave it in the past. Teens who worry their parents will dredge up an issue again are more likely to remain distant and may even outright lie to the parent simply to avoid having another argument about this issue.

Teen I mean, it's just kinda silly because it's like I can go up to my dad and tell him anything. But it's like, I have to check what I say before I say

it with my mother. I mean, think about it, kids are doing this all across America, they're blatant lying to their parents in front of their faces, and parents are always saying oh, you can tell me anything. No you can't.... Because then you get in trouble and you get forbidden to do things. Kids know this, we're not stupid.

This is why it is important, as much as possible, for parents to start things on a fresh step after an argument—teens will recognize an environment that encourages more open communication.

Summary

As we have seen, implications of this study for teens are: (a) greater sensitivity and responsiveness to their own needs, (b) empowerment through helping them find their voice and teaching others, (c) community and solidarity in knowing they are not alone, and (d) hope and confidence by knowing they have been heard and understood. The text can speak directly to teens.

Other pieces we have seen throughout this chapter are the challenging aspects of being a parent in letting go or relinquishing control and recognizing a job well-done. We have invested so much of our time, energy, and love into this child; how can we possibly let go? Are they ready? Are we ready? They are still too young! And we think, “How can my baby be almost an adult?” We have been in control of so many aspects of their life up to this point, that, when they start bumping up against our control, we may interpret it as insolence, disrespect, or being out of control when it could merely be teens trying to become individuals and adults.

Perhaps, if we began practicing to let go while our children are very young, it will be easier and feel more natural to actually let go when children become responsible teens. Letting go involves finding ways to let our children be themselves and by empathizing

with them and seeing the world through their eyes. It involves practicing and modeling active listening skills early on so that it becomes second nature by the time our kids are teens.

Letting go means empowering children and teens and supporting them in such a way that they can be successful and able to face any challenge that comes their way. It means being thoughtful and purposeful as a parent by thinking through our answers and knowing why we say what we do. It is giving children and teens room within the family to be free and autonomous from time to time and to increase their levels of freedom as they grow older. It is allowing every family member to identify and own space within the home, space that each can call one's own, a safe haven in which each person can just be. And finally, letting go is not about holding grudges but leaving the past in the past; it is about starting fresh with the dawn of a new day. Letting go takes practice and ties into all aspects of being a teen. One day our teens will be adults, and they will also need to learn the skills of letting go. These are skills that parents and teens can practice together.

Chapter 10: Implications for Parent Education

In the previous chapter, we explored implications for parent-teen relationships and how this research could be used to enhance that relationship. In parent education, it is important to look at how this research can inform our work with parents. How does our insight into the parent-teen relationship and the embodied teen experience of argument within that relationship translate into the parent education classroom? Here we will extend the previous chapter by looking specifically at which topics are most beneficial for parents to learn and how parent educators can support that learning by focusing on specific concepts that can enhance a parent's understanding of the parent-teen relationship.

Teaching Empathy and Authenticity

We started the previous chapter talking about *being in my shoes*. As stated, one of the clear messages that came through in much of the text was contained in the underlying questions, “Why can't they ever see things my way?” “Why doesn't she get it?!” It touches on empathy and understanding. Although parents themselves were once teens, as adults, their brains have developed significantly, and they have had a great deal of life experience guiding them and giving them perspective in the world. What is significant to an adult can differ from what teens may consider significant, and it can be more challenging for adults to put themselves in a teen's mindset and perspective—adults can forget what it is like to be young. However, helping parents to take time to relive and reconnect with that embodied youth experience can provide a better opportunity to build strong and healthy relationships with teens.

As a parent educator, I am often left wondering how to help families in new and unique ways—how can I challenge parents as well as myself? From the research, we are reminded of the need to consider strategies that will allow parents to recognize, and perhaps reconnect with, the teen embodied experience of an argument, especially as it relates to today's society and its challenges. As became more and more clear through living this research personally, it seems strategies that offer more real and living experiences are more likely to touch our hearts as adults and allow us to better understand this embodied teen experience of arguing as well as the overall teen perspective of the lifeworld. By starting from an empathetic base in an educational strategy, parent educators can build from that core emotional connection that helps us to understand and respect how teens live these moments. A tactic is finding key questions we can ask to begin drawing the experience and understanding from parents themselves:

When you were a teen, what were the barriers you ran up against in your family that kept you from developing as strong a relationship with your parents as you may have liked? What could your parents have done differently?

Were there things you felt you could never do right in their eyes?

Part of developing an empathetic connection to the teen experience is becoming aware of parental gate-keeping and control. Parent educators have a unique opportunity to help parents understand this concept and then help them recognize when they are gate-keeping with their teens. It can be difficult to know how our actions and words are interpreted by others, and we are often not aware of our gate-keeping tendencies without the help of fresh eyes. The questions above begin to connect us to our own teen years and to help us think about our own parents' actions and words that may have been considered gate-keeping or overly controlling. Other questions can help us pull out the

meaning of gate-keeping and move us toward thinking about our own relationships with teens:

How does it feel to never do things “right” in the eyes of your parents and others you look up to?

Did you ever think, “Why bother?! It’s not even worth it anymore”?

Now thinking as parents of your immediate family, are there things you do that might give your teens the impression they can never do things right and why bother (and be honest—is there only one right way to fold bath towels, is there only one right way to wash dishes, is there only one right way to mow the lawn, are there only a couple right career paths)? Why do we do this? Will the world end if something is done differently? And what can we change in our own actions and words?

By drawing out everyday moments of parent-teen interaction where gate-keeping may occur, the parent educator can present parents a chance to (a) connect with and see a reflection of their own parents in themselves and (b) connect with the teen embodied experience. Without the educator having to come across as judgmental by saying, “This is what you are doing,” by discussing these questions, parents may discover and think, “Oh my gosh, I do that! I’ve become the parts of my father I didn’t want to be!” Parents need opportunities to (a) gain personal ownership of knowledge, (b) connect at a core level with implications of gate-keeping, and, in the process, (c) become more aware of their own gate-keeping tendencies in their daily lives. This awareness becomes even more important when, later in this chapter, we discuss the topic of letting go.

So *being in my shoes* entails developing empathy for another’s experience—we need to see through our teen’s eyes. As rang through in the research, we also need to recognize the unique stresses in today’s teen world, especially the increasing demands on teens’ time in this over-scheduled society in which we live.

I've put a lot of work, time, passion and effort to do things that didn't turn out 100%. I tried very hard, but all my effort resulted in negatives. I was crushed, but had to tough it out. I've heard negatives every day this week, and have felt really small. (Garland, 2009, ¶2)

Teen 'Cause I don't think it's important to go around the house and pick up pencils. [chuckle] You know, everywhere pencils are and just put them away. I mean, if I have time for that, sure I'll do it. But, you know, I just don't have time for that a lot of the time.

Teen No, other than it's just "me" time and I don't get a lot of that now with school and everything 'cause, I don't know why, but this year's been really busy and packed.

With advances in technology, especially, come greater expectations for what teens need to know in order to be successful in adult life. Granted, technological advances happen in every generation; each generation experiences unique challenges that differentiate it from previous ones. There are more and more expectations for teens to be proficient in the use of social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.), the use of computer technologies and handheld devices (e.g., iPad, iPhone, text messaging, webpage design, and html encoding.), and the ability to multitask on all levels. In addition, teens find themselves involved in more and more activities creating greater demands on their time; they feel pulled in several directions but feel judged as unsuccessful if they are not involved in activities. The passing of time itself seems stressful—family, homework, activities, friends, relaxation, employment, and so on.

A parent education curriculum that underscores the unique stresses of today's society will help parents to recognize how stressful the world can be for teens. Although the challenges and stresses of the teen world may not seem as significant to us as those in the adult world, they are nonetheless stressors and have similar impacts that adult stressors have on parents. The important point for us isn't about who has the most stress

or whose stress is greater; it is that stress in any form has an impact whether you are an adult or a teen. Helping families better understand stress will nurture stronger familial relationships by opening them to the repercussion stress has on these relationships and overall development of the family. The empathetic, being in my shoes, aspect is about understanding how stress impacts *all* members of the family and how each member deals with that stress uniquely.

It is likely that, by developing an empathetic connection to teens' experience, parents may be more heartfelt and genuine in their interactions. And being heartfelt and genuine came through in the research as important for teens to feel heard, respected, and valued as family members. Being able to see these moments through teens' eyes may allow parents to go below the surface of the argument and get at the heart of the matter more easily. But what does it feel or sound like when someone is genuine or heartfelt, and how do we help parents experience it from a teen's perspective?

How do you know when someone is being heartfelt and genuine in his or her interaction with you? How do you know when someone is being fake, superficial, and/or dismissive?

What does it feel like when someone speaks to you this way?

Now, how might your teen feel if you don't take the time to truly listen, to hear, and to not be dismissive (e.g., rolling your eyes, saying, "Whatever!" or saying, "not now; I'm busy!")?

Exploring how they, as parents, experience heartfelt and genuine conversations or fake, superficial, and/or dismissive conversations provides an opportunity for them to connect their own experiences with those of their teens.

You dismiss my every thought as a stupid eighteen-year-old flight of fancy. My dreams, my hopes, my needing to write are all just immature things that I have to get out of the way before my real life can begin. *How can you know me?* I

scream in my mind. *How can you even look me in the eye and say that you know me? You've never tried!* (Constant, 2001, p. 21)

The parent education classroom also offers a chance to practice being genuine and heartfelt through the use of role-playing and by thinking about the words we use in our parenting interactions.

What does it sound like when someone is being dismissive? What does it sound like when someone isn't listening to you? Show us an example of what these would look like in an everyday moment.

Now consider what it sounds like when someone is heartfelt and genuine and when someone is truly listening. Show us an example of how this would look in everyday life.

Talk about moments in your immediate family where you may have been performing in the first role—dismissive parent who doesn't listen. And then talk about moments where you may have been performing in the second role—heartfelt, genuine, and listening. How does your teen react to each of your roles? Does each help or hinder your relationship?

Being heartfelt or genuine is about knowing how parents sound when talking to a teen. Does it sound nagging and disrespectful, or does it sound cooperative and respectful? As teens clearly told us, parents need to have respect for teens in order to be respected by teens. It is a reciprocal relationship that requires mutual respect to be successful. Parents can model this respect by using empathy to guide their interactions and their words, and the parent educator can facilitate a rich discussion about the dialogical aspects inherent in genuine respectful relationships. By performing the roles above, parents can bring their own moments into the discussion and work together to tweeze them apart.

For parent educators, a main goal is empowering parents to teach their children about respect and to model respectful interactions in their daily lives. This will not only benefit the parent-teen relationship, but also it will contribute in a positive way to the

many other relationships a teen will have in his or her lifetime. It seems that empathy is a major component to helping a society bond together more tightly, and developing empathy within families would likely help it to extend beyond the boundaries of family itself and to improve the larger community.

Teaching Active Listening

Tied very much to empathy is the need for active listening skills, and parent educators can help parents hone these techniques. Active listening allows a parent to better understand and identify with their teen, it gives them a greater chance of reading the cues and interpreting more closely what their teen is experiencing, and this, in turn, may allow them to evaluate and engage in the conversation more openly. In addition, by using active listening skills, parents have the potential to minimize conflicts between parents and teens since this research suggests that, when parents are more heartfelt and genuine, teens are more likely to listen and engage with their parents. Implementing active listening is likely to strengthen family relationships and encourage cooperation.

While listening and living teens' experience, a major component that rang through the research was a call for parents to remain calm in parent-teen interactions.

Teen Oh, it's just, I mean, pretty much... you know, they get the angry face on, and they're already yelling before that, obviously, because they don't just start yelling. And then it's, you know, "NO!" that just very set, they're gonna say that.... By then it's just like, let it out, I'm gonna do it anyways, you know, I'm not gonna say anything anymore. "Fine!"

Teen If they start yelling first, then I'm like "Well, you don't need to yell at me about it." I guess sometimes I get frustrated when they do yell at me instead of just talking to me about things because "Why do you even need to make it into such a big deal when I don't feel like it's that big of a deal in the first place?"

Yelling at teens is likely to close down conversation and distance teens from us. Active listening skills lend themselves to remaining calm and open to the moment, encouraging a continued connection.

As parent educators, we have an opportunity to create an environment in which parents can explore techniques for keeping their cool and remaining calm and in which to explore active listening methods. Such skills are likely to help parents stave off their own defensiveness when interacting with an emotional teen. Calm begets calm; provocation begets provocation. If one person within a dyad of conflict can remain calm, the other is much more likely to follow suit.

Do you remember being yelled at by your parents growing up? How did that feel? What was your typical reaction to being yelled at? What did it sound like?

Do you find yourself yelling at your teens? How does that work for you; do you feel successful during those interactions? When do you feel most successful as a parent during interactions with your teens?

What can we do to stay calm and not blow a gasket?

By reconnecting to our own teen experiences of being yelled at, we can begin to remember what those experiences were like at that age. Also, examining ourselves within our immediate families may, again, allow us to see our parents in ourselves and think about our impact on teens in our lives. The technique involves connecting parents with their past, allowing them to see themselves in the present, providing a chance to consider their future (i.e., set goals for change), and engaging in reflective dialog (Thomas, Cooke, & Scott, 2005) to venture deeper into their understandings and to consider what may happen if the parent-teen relationship remains the same.

Learning calming techniques is one part of active listening; another element is paraphrasing skills that allow parents to repeat back to their teen what they have heard in

a non-judgmental and non-confrontational way, which shows parents are indeed listening. Our goal is not to push the teen into a defensive stance; it is more about developing an intersubjective understanding about the conflict they are trying to resolve and a better appreciation of the teen's position in this argument. Parent educators can model these active listening skills within the classroom so parents can see first-hand what it looks and sounds like. There is an art to effective paraphrasing, and it takes practice to feel successful.

While the words we use are important, the body language is just as important, or perhaps even more so. Parents need to be able to recognize the messages they are sending simply in the language of their stance. Through our body language, are we conveying a sense of heartfelt and genuine listening, or are we sending a message of flippancy and condescension? It may be that, by having another neutral person such as a parent educator or spouse "read" our body language, we can gain a better awareness of when our face and body do not match our words. As parent educators, we can role model examples of body language's connection to words by showing what these examples look and sound like when body and words do not match and when they do match.

In thinking only about body language, how do you know when someone is really listening? How do you know when he or she isn't listening?

What does it look like when someone is being condescending and flippant or sarcastic (i.e., not genuine)? What does it look like when someone really cares?

What messages do you send your teen through your own body language? Do you like the messages you send? If not, how can you change those messages?

If we can somehow see our own body language in action, it may be easier to see the incongruity between our words and our bodies. The question is how do we see ourselves

outside of ourselves? Do we stand in front of a mirror during all our conversations? Can the questions above accomplish the task on their own?

As parent educators, we may want to consider techniques that give parents a concrete opportunity to see themselves from the outside. Video-recording parent-teen arguments may be a helpful technique to allow parents to see themselves during an argument and to interpret their body language in that moment outside of themselves. Under our skillful guidance as parent educators, parents can examine such videos safely and without judgment while being empowered with self-awareness and opportunities for growth.

Teen She's like, "I'm not being irrational, raaaah!" She makes that noise, too.... I'm serious. Like. I don't know, I guess, you know, it's like, I don't know, a pterodactyl swooping down on you. [laughter].... I guess that specific sound you just laugh your ass off.

Imagine the video-recording of that moment. What might this parent look like in her body language and does it also convey a sense of the irrational pterodactyl? If she could watch herself in this moment, what might she choose to change? By using a reflective dialog approach (Thomas et al., 2005), we have another opportunity to use our questions to help parents dig deeper into this moment and consider the parent-teen relationship. After all, we get a sense that teens are likely to think, "Whatever!!" in those moments, to lose some respect.

By understanding empathy in relation to active listening, parents may develop a better understanding of how it feels and what it is like to be heard. As parent educators, we can explore parents' personal experiences of when they have felt listened to and heard in their own lives and connect those moments to their own actions. What are these

moments like? How do they know when they have been heard? What does it feel like to be listened to? What are some moments when they have not felt listened to? All of these types of questions build on the experiential knowledge of parents and help them to connect emotionally and physically with the experience of being listened to and heard. From there, it may be much easier for parents to relate these experiences with how teens might feel in similar situations. We have an opportunity to help parents communicate to their teens that they are, indeed, listening and that they care.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, it is important to steer clear of judgment and scorn if parents are to be seen by teens as successful at active listening. In addition, through modeling active listening, parents will bestow on teens a skill that is important in conflict resolution and relationship building, and having the skill of active listening will enrich teens' success in their interpersonal relationships throughout life. One could argue that active listening is a foundation to open communication, which, in turn, ensures a greater bond in human relationships.

Teaching Open Communication, Trust, and Rationale

Since active listening encourages open communication with teens and that, in turn, builds strong, healthy relationships, trust may be a prerequisite for having open communication. If we look back to the research that was conducted earlier, it demonstrated that the inclination of a family toward open communication, trust, and affection seems more likely to lend itself to teens who experience positive adolescent development, positive adaptation, and positive identity formation (Berzonsky et al., 2007; Beveridge & Berg, 2007; Crockett, Brown, Russell, & Shen, 2007; Heller, Robinson, Henry, & Plunkett, 2006).

As we think about the idea of trust within a family, several key questions come to mind:

What is trust?

How does it feel to be trusted and to trust others?

And when do we know we can trust another?

These are questions that both parents and teens may benefit from answering in order to develop an intersubjective understanding and common frame of reference for the idea of trust. If our goal is open communication within parent-teen relationships, trust is one piece of the puzzle that we as parent educators can help parents to foster, and we can help them uncover strategies for building that trust.

It is important for people to feel the embodiment of trust and how to be trusted if they are to feel successful at achieving open communication. Ultimately, we can help parents think about whom they trust or trusted, what type of person they feel comfortable confiding in, and about how to develop trusting relationships with teens. By accomplishing this, we may also help parents to read the cues and understand how and why teens may or may not be open in their communication with parents.

As part of developing open communication, another huge piece that came through in the research and that was mentioned in the previous chapter is teens' need for rational and logical answers.

Teen Well, there's a proper way to use *because* and the improper way. The proper way is because of this, this, and that. You know. Actual reasons. And there's because with no point following it. There's nothing after it. You can't just use because and then end.

Parents need to avoid the absurd and highly irrational "No!" or "Because!" that feels devoid of reason and seems an almost autonomic response to teens. Teens need logic and

reason. Tying back into active listening and empathy, as parent educators, we can help parents to understand how their responses may be interpreted, especially the “No!” or “Because!” floating by itself in an amorphous, irrational cloud of uncertainty. Similarly, we can cultivate parents’ creativity in discovering alternatives to these automatic responses—alternatives that show reflection on the part of parents and a conscious effort to have clear and concise answers to support their response.

Do you remember as a teen having your parents tell you, “No!” or “Because!” and leaving it at that? How did that make you feel, and how did you respond?

Are there times when you blurt out the “No!” or “Because!” without knowing why?

When does this happen most often? And why do we do that? Does it help or hinder open communication?

What can we do or say to change this within our immediate family?

We are not saying that parents should never say “No!”; it is more that parents and parent-teen relationships may benefit from saying “No!” with a reason and logic for that specific response:

[Teen] “Can I take the car to the movies tonight?”

If you were a teen, how might you react to each of these responses?

No!

OR

No you may not take the car to the movies tonight because your father and I have a prior commitment this evening, and we will need to use the car. You are welcome to go to the movie, but is there another alternative we could agree on to solve this problem together? (Or—what is our rule about going to the movies on a weeknight? Do you remember why we have this rule?)

Which response feels more respectful to you? Why?

Parents still need to set clear limits but with rationale at the core. A response with a reasonable base is likely to feel much more respectful to teens and their needs. Will teens always accept that answer? Possibly not, but such a specific response is less likely to seem irrational and less likely to feel irritating and frustrating. This, in turn, may guard against the irritation and frustration related to the irrational that can spark and flash ordinary conversation into parent-teen argument. Through trust, open communication, and rationale, parents can help nurture a feeling of collaboration within the family.

Teaching Collaboration

Inherent in many of the conceptual areas we explore in the parent education classroom is an underlying concept of collaboration. Parents and teens need to build collaborative partnerships that strengthen and empower both parents and teens. Empathy encourages active listening, active listening builds trust and promotes open communication, and open communication allows for greater collaboration and successful conflict resolution.

So what is collaboration? What does it look like, sound like, and feel like when it happens? How do you know when collaboration is taking place?

Is collaboration among equals similar to or different from collaboration within a hierarchy?

Can collaboration be successful in either scenario? If so, how do you know successful collaboration has taken place?

When do you feel most successful at collaborating with your teen?

Collaboration involves teamwork, and collaboration can happen between equals and within a hierarchy. If we consider the parent-teen relationship, it is more like a hierarchy. As parent educators, we can help parents recognize and identify successful collaboration as it occurs in the parent-teen hierarchy.

As in any hierarchy, there remains a position of power over another, but this position of authority (e.g., chairperson, president, troop leader, facilitator, parent) has the potential to maintain a sense of collaborative teamwork that is respectful of everyone on that team. If we begin by considering our own experiences of feeling like a valued member of a hierarchical team, we can translate that experience to the parent-teen relationship. What can parents do to create a collaborative environment? Successful teams maintain open lines of communication and encourage creative brainstorming among all their members despite the power relationships inherent in those settings. When it occurs in a hierarchy, the position of power has the ultimate decision in the end, but the successful leader is one who takes all the team's information and synthesizes it into a well-informed decision in which all members feel a vested interest and to which they are all connected.

Teen Because there's just very little you can do about it, I mean, 'cause they're still in a power position. And so no matter what happens, what they say has to go. And that's frustrating because it... I mean, it does leave you with no choice.... It's so dictator-like. It just... it bothers me because I feel like I'm at an age right now where I do have logical reasons for the things that I do. And even though they might not reach the same conclusion as I do when I present my arguments, I feel like sometimes they don't even listen to them, they just are so set in what they think is right and what they know is what needs to happen.

Teen Maybe I would sit down and talk about why having the lights off matters to him because the fact that I know it matters isn't enough. I mean, I honestly don't know why he thinks it matters. And so maybe if I heard why I'd be more likely to consider, but when it's just presented as a black and white, "You will! This is the rule." You know?

With collaboration comes the art of negotiation and compromise. As parent educators, we can teach parents to facilitate open discussions, to encourage creativity,

and to compromise when appropriate. Allowing flexibility and being willing to compromise is not about abdicating one's position of authority. Flexibility and compromise on the smaller, less weighty points of contention are more likely to encourage team members (i.e., teens) to feel successful and supported in their work and daily lives.

Teen They pick out the tiniest little thing that's wrong and then make a big deal about it.

Teen And so, I feel like my parents don't pick their battles, because if they only picked a few issues to be really strict on and kinda let loose on other ones, I'd be so much more likely to follow their strict guidelines. But they pick so many little issues that I don't think matter, that I am just more tempted to do whatever I can to just be insolent about everything.

A team on which members feel ignored, disrespected, or devalued is likely to have low morale and less cooperation. Also, there has to be a sense of growth potential lest team members feel trapped and stagnant in their position. This translates to the parent-teen relationship, and parent educators need to help parents understand how to successfully navigate their positions of power while also supporting teen development and growth in a way that is reflective of respectful collaboration.

If we think about this growth potential, an aspect of successful collaboration in parent-teen relationships will be teens' increasing sense of responsibility and ownership within their families.

Teen It's like a safety zone or something 'cause it's mine.

Teen Other than the fact that there's a door. [laughter] I mean, there's a door on a lot of rooms in our house, but it's just.... Kind of like.... If I close myself off in there it's just my place.

How do we foster a sense of responsibility and ownership in teens? As parent educators, we can begin working with parents when children are very young to find developmentally appropriate responsibilities that can be given to their children. These responsibilities could be chores within the home, maintaining a space (e.g., bedroom), managing money, and so on.

By beginning very early in a child's life, handing over responsibility and ownership will feel more second-nature for parents by the time their children are teens. Similarly, teens will have had the opportunity to build the skills of ownership and responsibility, thus better preparing them for adult life. Teams on which one has a greater sense of ownership and stock in that team are likely to feel a greater connection to the whole. Similarly, teens are apt to feel more connected to their families and parents when they are presented with greater and greater levels of responsibility, authority, and ownership within the family unit.

Teaching Identity Formation

While a collaborative environment is important for an individual's growth, another area that would be beneficial for us to explore in the parent education classroom is teen identity formation itself and the role of parents in that process. As discussed earlier, an aspect of teens feeling small or devalued is ultimately feeling unimportant. During the process of identity formation, teens tend to be more successful when they have a higher self-esteem and feelings of self-worth. Parents can be the key to providing a supportive environment in which teens can thrive and develop their identity.

We should consider helping parents understand the impact that feeling judged and worthless can have on this identity formation. When coming up against parents' ridicule,

scorn, or negative judgment, teens become devalued, disrespected, and eventually dejected. Such teens may shut down and become distant and removed in the face of such treatment. As we discussed with the ideas of body language and tone of communication, helping parents to recognize when they are being judgmental or when they may come across as ridiculing will contribute to parents' ability to maintain open communication and trusting relationships with their teens. And it is within such trusting relationships and family environments that teens are most successful in forming their unique identity apart from their parents.

In addition, we may need to discuss implications of treating teens as young children rather than as blossoming young adults. When teens feel they are being patronized, it is condescending and often humiliating. Talking down to teens as if they were six-year-old children feels much like belittling and demeaning women in the work place in the days before sexual harassment regulations and equal opportunity laws came into play. Such condescension and disrespect can be very damaging to the psyche, and it does nothing to endear parents to teens:

I wonder... If someone said to you, "Hey babe, run along and grab me a cup of coffee. That's a good girl (or boy)" while smacking your butt, how might you feel? What message does this send? How does it impact your sense of self-worth?

Do you remember a time from your own teen years when you felt treated like a little kid? What was that like?

What messages do we send our teens that may sound equally demeaning and belittling? What can we do to change this?

When we say "You're just a kid" to teens it will likely come across as, "You're not smart enough to understand 'grown-up' stuff; you need to leave that for the big boys who know how to handle it." It feels degrading to teens.

Teen The “you’re a little kid” button.... I’m just like okay, I’m 16 years old; I’m perfectly capable of making my own lunch and driving myself, and like, she’ll be like, “Oh, honey, you know, you’re too young to drive a couple hours to go see your friend.” And I’m just like, “No, I’m not.... I’m perfectly capable of driving two hours on a highway. I’ve done that since I was 15 years old.” [chuckle] I have my own car, I drive everywhere.

Parents who can identify with the experience of being devalued or demeaned may also begin to recognize the damage it could inflict on individual family members and parent-teen relationships. As parent educators, we can create a supportive environment for parents, nurture their self-confidence, and highlight the value and assets they bring to their families. By doing so, we may kindle parents’ ability to do the same for teens. In other words, we have the opportunity to model a supportive environment and to facilitate its translation into the home environment. Empowering parents so that they can empower their teens will likely encourage positive self-esteem and self-worth in both parents and teens.

As we have discussed, the identity formation process is about teens finding or discovering themselves and who they are. Part of this identity formation process entails the support of parents, but other aspects of this process can only be accomplished by a teen on his or her own. This research suggests that teens need safe space in which to explore what it means to be an individual and have an identity, to process life. Teens need to be able to process and reflect on their own without interruption or other intrusions on those times of reflection.

By helping parents better understand this need for space, we can also help them to find ways to be conscious and purposeful in providing such space for teens but also for all family members. As parent educators, we have an opportunity to talk about the

importance of safe space for each member of the family and how that space should be identified, used, and treated. Helping families to establish rules of conduct regarding each family member's designated safe space will create a much more trusting and supportive environment for the entire family's development. Everyone needs a sanctuary to which they can get away from time to time, including children and teens. It is within such spaces that we can regroup and relax, allowing us to move onward in life.

Finally, we can look at various parenting styles and how those are felt by teens, how they influence identity formation, and how these styles help or hinder the parent-teen relationship and related arguments. From teens' perspective, I would argue that authoritative, balanced, or diplomatic parenting styles, as compared to authoritarian, permissive, or neglectful parenting styles, are likely to create more nurturing environments, which, in turn, provide room and flexibility for parents to guide teens toward greater self-sufficiency, aptitude for problem-solving, and ability to make decisions on one's own. Such a diplomatic approach seems more likely to allow room for dialog, listening, and collaboration in the parent-teen relationship.

Teens living in homes that are typified by authoritarian, demanding, and restricting parenting styles seem to experience more closed communication patterns in the parent-teen relationship that may lead to teens closing off and shutting down. Heavily punitive methods that compel teens to follow directions without question, perhaps suppressing teens' abilities to problem solve and to make decisions on their own, and responses that are often devoid of reason or logic seem to further push teens away and create a greater potential for argument and conflict within the family. And, as we discussed earlier, teens who do not feel heard or listened to seem more likely to look

outside the home for guidance and direction whether from their peers or from other adult role models. Punitive and authoritarian parenting styles seem less likely to provide room for teens to feel listened to and heard and for them to speak their minds freely and openly. How one parents is inexorably connected to how a teen perceives the parent-teen relationship.

Teaching to Let Go

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the most challenging aspects of being a parent is letting go. The process of letting go begins at birth when the womb must release the infant. In this moment, the unknown child becomes known. Most parents have a preconception of what they might expect their child to look like before it is born, and, at birth, they must reconcile their mental image with the reality of the child before them. It is at this point that parents begin the process of letting go.

We, as parent educators, can foster parents' understanding of the letting go process while children are very young or even prenatally. Parents who start to recognize and understand the process early on in their children's lives seem more likely to be comfortable with that process and have it feel second-nature by the time children become teens. The process won't necessarily be easy, but it will feel more familiar if parents have been practicing the skills since the birth of their children.

Teens feel the need for independence fairly early in adolescent development but even more so as they reach the upper teen years. This research suggests that teens who felt more trapped and confined had greater yearning to be free and to escape from that confinement. Parents who have difficulty letting go may inadvertently create

environments that are felt as confining, entrapping, and claustrophobic for teens. The more that presses in on teens, the more likely they are to lash out against that weight.

I feel trapped, I feel as though I can do nothing, I am always losing and there is no way out for me. If I try and say sorry, it comes back in my face, if I control myself they keep going, if I fight back they fight back harder. I'm stuck. (Yahoo! Answers, 2009, ¶8)

One of the more difficult aspects of letting go is realizing that each time one must go through a grief process before accepting the reality. There are significant moments in a parent's life that letting go is most poignant—the child's birth, first day of daycare (or parents going back to work), starting kindergarten and/or riding the bus, high school graduation, and leaving home (i.e., the empty nest syndrome). Parents have to let go of the image of what their child was in place of the image of what their child is or will be, and these can be challenging and emotional times. As parent educators, we can facilitate the sharing of these moments and help parents to discuss the inherent grief and joy that these transitions can bring. By allowing parents to develop their understanding of this process, we afford them a greater likelihood that they will be able to employ what they have shared in the classroom to the parent-teen relationship as well as other family relationships. Some key questions that may help us to unpack the issue of letting go are:

What is one of the hardest parts of your children growing older?

When your children go in a different direction than you had planned, do you ever feel regret, guilt, or frustration? Why or why not?

How many of you want to keep your teens from having to deal with the challenges you did as a teen and are constantly trying to tell them what will happen if they go down that path? How does that work for you? Why might it not work so well? Did you ever think, "I told you so!" later on? How many say it out loud to your teens? What is their reaction?

Did you always listen to your own parents when they gave you similar words of advice? Why not? What happened, and what did you learn?

Why do we sometimes have to let go of what we know and expect and to allow our teens to experience life as it happens?

What is the most challenging part of letting go as a parent, and where do we begin?

We need to appreciate that parents may need to understand many of the previous concepts we have discussed in this chapter before feeling successful in letting go.

Parents may need to understand the concepts of empathy and be able to see the world from teens' perspective. Letting go may hinge on parents' ability to use active listening and to remain open in their interactions with teens, especially when emotions run high. And maintaining open lines of communication while letting go and processing through the grief and joy parents may be feeling in relation to their growing teen is important so teens do not feel disregarded or dismissed and parents do not feel their teens are closing off from them or shutting down.

Letting go requires parents to know how to collaborate and negotiate respectfully in ways that are supportive for both the parent and teen while avoiding the pitfalls of belittlement, ridicule, and scorn. Parents would benefit from knowing more about the natural stages of teen identity formation and how this teen identity formation process affects parents and their emotions in this continual process of letting go. Most important of all, we would do well to help parents (a) recognize what a challenging job parenting can be, (b) congratulate themselves for doing their best, and (c) be proud of their accomplishments.

Summary

Through exploring this research, we, as parent educators, may better understand the importance of our work and how such research can inform our practice of parent

education. By connecting with the embodied teen experience of parent-teen conflict and argument, we:

- May have a more objective eye for why empathy and authenticity would enhance parent-teen relationships
- Can recognize how active listening helps teens feel listened to and heard and share this experience with parents
- May help parents uncover the roadblocks to open communication and the barriers to trust as seen by teens
- Can serve as proxy for the teen voice in parenting discussions and help them to stand in the teen world view

We are tour guides on the road of family life, pointing out those things that may be relatively hidden from everyday view. We can help parents walk the path of teen development and see the artifacts of that development in new light. If one is afraid of spiders, it can be difficult to see spiders in a positive light. An entomologist has access to a differing viewpoint that can help us see the benefits of spiders in our world. Likewise, parent educators have greater access to different perspectives of parent-teen relationships and can help parents see their relationships in new ways and to consider new possibilities.

Chapter 11: Questions for Further Research

Throughout this entire work we have explored the phenomenon of parent-teen conflict and argument from a teen's embodied experience, and we have touched on the implications this can have on teens, parent-teen relationships, and the profession of parent education. As in any research project, it is important to recognize the limitations of the study and uncover other aspects that would benefit from further exploration. It is also the mark of good research when it inspires others to think and explore even more about the interrelated concepts that appear tied to the phenomenon. In this chapter, I will share several specific areas I became curious about during the research process and about which I continue to wonder. What else do we need to know in order to better understand the entire phenomenon of conflict and argument within a family and/or within society as a whole? I hear several unanswered questions bubbling in my consciousness.

What About Parents' Embodied Experience of Parent-Teen Conflict and Argument?

The first question that comes to mind relates to the other perspective within the parent-teen conflict and argument dyad, namely that of the parents themselves. As Bogenschneider and Pallock (2008) told us in the beginning, "our understanding of parent-adolescent relationships may be incomplete if we rely on a single reporter to represent a relationship property" (p. 1025). If we rely exclusively on the teen perspective, how can we gain a richer understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. My research has explored one important aspect of this relationship and it has great value in bringing us closer to the essence of this experience; however, we may still be missing a significant aspect that will help to clarify this experience and deepen our understanding.

It would be prudent for research to continue this exploration and to think about the parents' embodied experience of parent-teen conflict and argument. I would surmise that there are many similarities between these experiences as well as many significant differences, and the differences may be the most illuminating aspect that additional research can uncover. By having both the parent's and the teen's experience of this phenomenon, there would be an opportunity to bring such information back to the parents and teens themselves and to bridge the gaps that can arise between parents and teens. I would argue that, just as parents can benefit from better understanding how teens live this moment, teens who have a better understanding of how their parents live these moments are likely to have a better chance of empathizing with their parents and being open to other interpretations of this moment. It may allow a greater possibility for open communication and an easier time establishing a trusting, supportive environment.

What About Sibling Arguments?

While the parent-teen argument is a basic part of family life, sibling arguments can also be significant. As I conclude my research, I am left wondering about the embodied experience of sibling arguments. How might they be similar to or different from the parent-teen argument? What differentiates this experience from that of the parent-teen argument, and what are the essences of this experience that are essential for it to be considered a *sibling* argument?

In the process of better understanding sibling arguments, new aspects of the overarching concept of family conflict may be revealed. There are many nuances within the family dynamic that presumably contribute to family conflict. Without taking the time to consider these nuances, we are likely to have an incomplete picture of family

conflict as a whole. How does the sibling argument spill over into the parent-teen argument? Each nuance that researchers explore provides a larger piece of the puzzle and creates a clearer picture of what it means to live in a conflicted environment.

What About Arguments Between Peers?

While a conflicted environment can exist within the family, it can also exist in the larger community. One facet that I continue to question is argument between peers. This could be friends, neighbors, coworkers, and so on. If we are to develop a greater understanding of conflict in general, we need to explore those conflicts and arguments that happen outside of the home. Further, we should consider the residual effect peer conflicts and arguments have on families and the greater community. Similarly, if violence in society is a concern, expanding our awareness of peer conflict may reveal new insight into those argumentative flash-points that can escalate into greater violence such as assault, drive-by shootings, and other types of violence plaguing many communities.

In addition, by looking specifically at how teens experience peer-to-peer conflict and argument, we may better understand the importance of peer relationships within the teen developmental process. What differentiates the teen's peer-to-peer argument from that of the parent-teen argument? And why are there such differences? This is about developing a clearer picture of conflict as it exists in our human world, and all of these pieces are small parts of that larger picture.

When Is Space Experienced as Safe or Unsafe?

While I have devoted an entire chapter to the need for safe space, it still leaves me wondering how different people identify a particular space as safe or unsafe. What is the

essence of a safe space; are there commonalities across all experiences that tell us this space is safe while this other space isn't? This question is not only relevant to the family and parent-teen relationship; it is also relevant to education and the classroom.

I would imagine that issues of racism, sexism, heterosexism, gender, and other such inequities contribute to the experience of a space as unsafe. By exploring this idea of safe space specifically in the classroom, we have the opportunity to plant the seeds of change that will ultimately lead to a safer school environment and possibly safer society. As educators, we struggle to find the path that will allow our class to overcome these oppressive inequities and to create an environment for exploring these issues. Such exploration requires communication with and about others, but open communication about controversial issues does not always come easily to a classroom unless the environment has provided room for it.

Throughout many classroom struggles, I hear echoed the image of safe spaces or safe places as necessary requirements for open dialogue to occur. What is a safe space within the context of the classroom, especially one exploring oppressive inequalities? Now that I am aware of these words, safe space, I see that they are used quite freely, but discussions about what is represented by this concept of safe space are not so readily found. They are taken for granted as necessary for critical pedagogy to occur, but do we have an intersubjective understanding of what a safe space actually is and how it is lived?

It seems that safe space provides room for critical reflection, but how does this happen? Is safe space an unconflicted, welcoming environment that exudes tolerance and is free of criticism and stress? Is safe space one that is merely free of physical violence and harm? Or is it something in between? How can educators come to understand this

better and create curricula that make room for such space? How do we make an opening for critical reflection to happen in the classroom? And how does this translate to our understanding of safe space within the family? What is the embodiment of safe space?

Summary

As humans, we will always have questions about the meaning of life and the truth of the universe, and research often leads to other questions and reveals aspects of our world that may have been unknown to us. My own research has revealed much to me and, I hope, to you as the reader. Consequently, I have many more questions that I want to ask of the world. I have shared just four of those questions, but there unlimited possibilities for exploration within the concept of conflict. The onus of exploration is thus passed on to you, and I hope that you will be inspired to ask those questions I have not. Together we can build knowledge, create community, and spread peace and equality.

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APPENDIX

Recruitment E-Mail and Flyer

*E-mail Text***Looking for Study Participants****Family, Youth, and Community**

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Minnesota

Have you ever wondered why family members argue?**Is there a teenager in your immediate family?**

All families have arguments. We want to know how teens experience the moment when an ordinary conversation with their parents becomes an argument. And we want teens to tell us in their own voice.

Study participants:

- **Must** be between ages 13-19 as of July 2006
- **Must** have occasional arguments or conflict with their parents
- **Must** live in a family (e.g., family of origin, foster family, guardianship)
- **Cannot** be below age 13 or above age 19 as of July 2006
- **Cannot** have seen or be seeing a counselor or psychologist
- **Cannot** be in a drug/alcohol treatment program
- **Cannot** have known the researcher before this study

These teens will have 1-3 recorded interviews lasting 1½-2 hours each. Also, we would ask them to try and jot down their thoughts, feelings, and experiences that happen during an argument. Teens who participate will receive a \$20.00 gift card to Barnes & Noble or to AMC Movie Theaters. For more information,

Parents of teens should contact Chris Buzzetta at:

Home Ph – [number removed] • Work Ph – [number removed] • Email -
buzze001@umn.edu

Looking for Study Participants

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

FAMILY, YOUTH, AND COMMUNITY
DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION



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**Have you ever wondered why family members argue?
Is there a teenager in your immediate family?**

All families have arguments. We want to know how teens experience the moment when an ordinary conversation with their parents becomes an argument. And we want teens to tell us in their own voice.

Study participants:

- ♦ We have enough female teens. **We really need male teen participants.**
- ♦ **Must** be between ages 13-19 as of July 2006
- ♦ **Must** have occasional arguments or conflict with their parents
- ♦ **Must** live in a family (e.g., family of origin, foster family, guardianship)

Study participants:

- ♦ **Cannot** be below age 13 or above age 19 as of July 2006
- ♦ **Cannot** have seen or be seeing a counselor or psychologist
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Consent and Assent Forms

Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Family Conflict: The Adolescent Experience of Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Argument (HSC/IRB Study No. 0505P69967)

Your son/daughter is invited to be in a research study of what it's like to argue and bicker with their parents. All families argue and bicker, and it is part of everyday life. We are looking at ordinary squabbles between teens and their parents NOT abuse. Your family will not be looked down on if your teen says your family argues. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to permit your son/daughter to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Chris A. Buzzetta—a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Minnesota.

Background Information:

I want to find out about what teens think about family arguing and bickering. A lot of research has been from an adult viewpoint. I want to look at a teen's viewpoint. I hope to help other people understand everyday bickering and arguing better. Also, by understanding your son/daughter's experience, we can understand better why families argue and what teens think about it.

Procedures:

If you agree to let your son/daughter to be in this study, we would want them to:

- Complete an information sheet with their name, age, address, phone number, parent(s) work number(s) in case of emergency. Answer questions about culture, language, and family structure. The contact information will be used to arrange meetings. The questions help me to understand their historical and cultural background. Knowing this helps me understand their viewpoint better.
- (If possible) Right after arguments, jot down their thoughts, feelings, and experiences that happen during the argument. Researcher will read these later.
- Talk to researcher 1 to 3 times for about 1½ to 2 hours each time. This will be recorded. We will talk about their experiences in greater detail. Some example questions are listed below:
 - Tell me about your family. — *background info*
 - How well do you get along with your parent(s)? — *how they feel about their parents*
 - Tell me about an argument you had with your parent(s) from start to finish. — *teen's viewpoint about this*
 - During these arguments with your parent(s), what's going on inside/how do you feel right at that moment. — *physical/emotional responses to conflict*
 - What do YOU really think is going through your parent(s)' minds? — *perception of parent(s)' body language/reactions*
 - Are these arguments different on different days or in different places? — *environmental effects*
 - Do most of your arguments go the same way or is each one different? — *common threads in conflicts*
 - What other sensations do you experience—strange tastes or smells—during these run-ins? — *unique physical reactions*

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study has some risk. Family arguing can be hard for teens to talk about. Your son/daughter may have feelings that make it difficult to talk about arguing. They may worry that you'll find out what they said and they'll get in trouble. Because of what we're talking about, they may remember some feelings and memories they had. The researcher will keep everything private on what we talk about, the recorded interviews, and anything we write (see Confidentiality below). The researcher will tell teens to talk to their family's doctor or their family's clinic if they need help because of any uncomfortable feelings or memories.

PLEASE NOTE: Minnesota State Law says I must report any abuse or neglect to the Child Welfare Office.

THERE ARE NO DIRECT BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS IN THIS STUDY.

Your son/daughter will receive a \$20.00 gift card to Barnes & Noble or to AMC Movie Theaters.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify your son/daughter. Research records will be kept in a locked safe; only researchers will have access to the records. Recordings will be used only by the researcher and his dissertation committee. These recordings will be used only for educational purposes in completing the research study. These recordings will be kept in a locked safe until they are type written and then the recordings will be physically destroyed. Only the researcher will have access to the locked safe.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Please keep in mind that even if you let your child be in the study, he/she can decide not to do it. Your decision won't harm your current or future dealings with the University. If your son/daughter decides to be a part of the study, he/she can stop at any time without hurting their relationship with the University.

Contacts and Questions:

Chris A. Buzzetta is the researcher doing this study, and his advisor is Dr. Jane Plihal. You can ask any questions you have now. If you have questions, get in touch with the researcher. He can be reached at [address removed], Phone: [number removed]. Dr. Plihal can be reached at [number removed].

If you have any questions or worries about this study and want to talk to someone else, contact the Research Subjects' Advocate line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware Street SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455; Phone (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the information above. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

Chris A. Buzzetta

*Assent Form***ASSENT FORM****Family Conflict: The Adolescent Experience of Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Argument
(HSC/IRB Study No. 0505P69967)**

My name is Chris Buzzetta, and I'm a graduate student at the University of Minnesota. Do you think you and your parent(s) see eye-to-eye especially when you argue or bicker? Do you feel you argue with your parents often? I want to know what this is like for you. Many people write about teens but mostly from what adults think. But we won't know what it's like for teens unless we ask them. Because you said you argue with your parents, I am asking if you want to be in this study.

We won't be mad if you don't want to be in the study. What you decide won't hurt how you are treated by the University. If you decide to participate, you can change your mind any time without us being mad at you for doing so. If you do want to be in this study, I would like you to do these things:

- Complete an information sheet with your name, age, address, phone number, etc. Answer questions about your culture, language, and family structure. The questions help me to understand your background. Knowing this helps me understand your viewpoint better.
- (If you can) Right after arguments, jot down your thoughts, feelings, and experiences that happen during the argument with your parent(s) if you can – I will read this later on as part of my research.
- Talk to researcher 1 to 3 times for about 1½ to 2 hours each time. This will be recorded. We will talk about your experiences in greater detail. Stuff we'll talk about:
 - Your family life
 - How well you get along with your parent(s)
 - What "run-ins" with your parent(s) are like
 - What you think and feel
 - What YOU think your parent(s) think and feel
 - If you think each argument is different
 - Weird sensations
 - Anything else that might be related

Family arguing can be hard for you to talk about. You might have feelings that make it hard to talk. You might worry that your parents will find out what you said and you'll get in trouble. You might remember some feelings and memories you've had. We will keep it very secret and use made-up names when telling your story so no one will know it is you. Only I and my committee will see your stuff. I will keep the recordings locked in a safe until someone can type up what's on them. Then I'll destroy the recordings.

PLEASE NOTE: Minnesota State Law says I must report any abuse or neglect to the Child Welfare Office.

•••THERE ARE NO DIRECT BENEFITS TO YOU AS PARTICIPANT IN THIS STUDY.•••

You will get a \$20.00 gift card to Barnes & Noble or to AMC Movie Theaters for being in the study.

You may ask any questions you have. If you have questions later, contact Chris at [address removed], Phone: [number removed]. Or call Chris' boss at [number removed].

Signing here means that you have read this paper or had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study. If you don't want to be in this study, don't sign. Remember, being in this study is up to you, and no one will be mad at you if you don't sign this or even if you change your mind later.

Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

Chris A. Buzzetta

Eligibility Questionnaires

Eligibility Questionnaire—Parents

ELIGIBILITY QUESTIONNAIRE - PARENTS		
Is your son/daughter currently seeing a psychologist or counselor?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If YES, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Have they ever been to a psychologist or counselor because they were sad or angry or because of the way they behaved?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If YES, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are they currently in a drug or alcohol treatment program?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If YES, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Have they ever been in a drug or alcohol treatment program?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If YES, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Did you or your son/daughter know Chris (the researcher) <u>before</u> agreeing to be a part of this study?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If YES, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Was your son/daughter 12 years old or under as of July 1, 2006?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If YES, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Was your son/daughter 20 years old or older as of July 1, 2006?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If YES, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Can you answer <u>YES</u> to any of these questions?		
If so, you are NOT eligible to participate.		
Does your family have normal everyday family conflict or arguments?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If NO, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does your son/daughter have a family?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If NO, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Were they 13-19 years old as of July 1, 2006?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If NO, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Can you answer <u>NO</u> to any of these questions?		
If so, you are NOT eligible to participate.		

Eligibility Questionnaire—Adolescents

ELIGIBILITY QUESTIONNAIRE - ADOLESCENTS		
Are you currently seeing a psychologist or counselor?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If YES, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Have you ever been to a psychologist or counselor because you were sad or angry or because of the way you behaved?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If YES, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you currently in a drug or alcohol treatment program?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If YES, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Have you ever been in a drug or alcohol treatment program?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If YES, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Did you know Chris (the researcher) <u>before</u> agreeing to be a part of this study?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If YES, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you 12 years old or under as of July 1, 2006?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If YES, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you 20 years old or older as of July 1, 2006?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If YES, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Can you answer <u>YES</u> to any of these questions?		
If so, you are NOT eligible to participate.		
Does your family have normal everyday family conflict or arguments?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If NO, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you have a family?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If NO, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you 13-19 years old as of July 1, 2006?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>If NO, stop here</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Can you answer <u>NO</u> to any of these questions?		
If so, you are NOT eligible to participate.		

Demographic Information Sheet

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEETLast Name: First Name: Middle Name: Date of Birth: Gender: Male Female*If you were born after July 1, 1993, stop here.**If you were born before July 1, 1987, stop here.*Address: City: State: Zip: Phone Number: E-Mail: **In Case of Emergency**Parent(s) Work Number(s): What grade are you in? (e.g., 6th, 7th, 8th, etc.)

What is your ethnic or cultural background? In other words, with which ethnic or cultural group do you feel most in touch? (e.g., Hispanic, Latino, African-American, Asian-American, Italian-American, Native American, etc.)

What is your native language; what language did you first start speaking? (e.g., English, French, Swahili, Urdu, etc.)

What other languages do you speak fluently?

Describe your family structure (e.g., parents divorced, 4 brothers, 2 moms, 24 cats, etc.); what does your family look like?

Anything unique about yourself that you feel is important for me to know before we talk? — OPTIONAL

THE INFORMATION CONTAINED ON THIS FORM WILL REMAIN STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.
THIS AND ALL OTHER RECORDS WILL BE KEPT IN A LOCKED SAFE WHEN NOT IN USE BY THE RESEARCHER.

IF AT ANY TIME YOU FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT CONTINUING WITH THIS STUDY, YOU
ARE VERY MUCH ENCOURAGED TO WITHDRAW FROM PARTICIPATION.

PLEASE NOTIFY THE RESEARCHER IF ANY CONCERNS SHOULD ARISE.

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation.

Other Interview Questions

- What kind of music do you like?
- What's your favorite subject in school?
- What other interests do you have?
- Tell me a little bit about yourself.
- What is X like; what do you think of when you think of X?
- What is it like to feel X?
- What is it about X that does that to you?
- What does X mean? How do you understand X?
- What did you think about that?
- When they react to it, what's going through your mind?
- That moment that you realize what you've said, how does that hit you?
- How does that make you feel? How do you feel when she does that?
- What were you doing?
- Does that work for you, or does it cause problems?
- I'm just trying to picture the moment. Say more.
- Why should you be X? Who says?
- I'm getting a sense that...
- If I understand correctly, you are saying...