Development and Psychopathology, **14** (2002), 139–157
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Parent alcoholism and the leaving home transition

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Abstract
Although they have received little empirical attention, departures from the parental home play a significant role in demarcating the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. The current study examined the extent to which various features of young adults' experiences of leaving home differed for children of alcoholic (COAs) versus nonalcoholic parents, what adolescent precursors might account for noted differences and what indicators of young adult adjustment are related to the leaving home experience. A total of 227 young adults drawn from a high-risk, community sample of COAs and matched controls were interviewed at ages 18–23 years regarding their prior leaving home experiences. COAs showed greater difficulties in negotiating this transition, fewer positive feelings about the transition, and different reasons for leaving home as compared to participants without an alcoholic parent. Moreover, adolescent risk behaviors, family conflict, and family disorganization (assessed prior to this transition) each partly accounted for COAs' risk for difficulty in the leaving home transition. Although certain aspects of the leaving home transition were uniquely related to young adult adjustment, future research is still needed to more comprehensively understand the implications for young adult development associated with such individual differences in the leaving home transition.

The transition from adolescence to young adulthood is marked by many changes, but one of the least studied of these is the process of leaving home. Both parents and young adults expect that this normative transition will occur around age 18 years, though notable variability has been found in the actual timing of home leaving (Cooney & Mortimer, 1999; Settersten, 1998). Although previous research indicates that the process of leaving home is typically a positive experience (Flanagan, Schulenberg, & Fuligni, 1993), difficulties within this transition predict more problematic adjustment in young adulthood (O'Connor, Allen, Bell, & Hauser, 1996). However, few studies have examined individual differences in the leaving home transition and whether preceding adolescent experiences and known risk factors may explain variability in how this transition is experienced. To address these issues, the current study examined individual differences in the leaving home experience within a high-risk sample—namely, children of alcoholic parents (COAs).

The authors would like to thank Ken Leonard for organizing a symposium presentation at the 1999 Annual Conference for the Research Society on Alcoholism in which preliminary findings contributing to this manuscript were first presented. The study was supported by Grant DA0527 from the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

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Parent Alcoholism and the Leaving Home Transition

Despite indications that the leaving home transition is largely a positive experience among young adults and their families (Flanagan et al., 1993), clinical studies indicate that families vary tremendously in how they respond to and negotiate such periods of change (Mederer & Hill, 1983). Among indicators of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579402001086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

risk for adjustment difficulties, parent alcoholism has emerged as a consistent predictor of early problem behavior as well as developmental challenge across a variety of outcomes spanning the adolescent and young adult years (Chassin, Curran, Hussong, & Colder, 1996; Chassin, Pitts, DeLucia, & Todd, 1999; Chassin, Rogosch, & Barrera, 1991; Sher, 1991). During adolescence, COAs manifest greater internalizing and externalizing symptoms, as well as earlier, more frequent, and heavier use of alcohol and drugs as compared to their peers (Chassin et al., 1991, 1996). These adolescent adjustment problems predict developmental deficits upon entry into young adulthood, including lower autonomy, less involvement in positive activities, and diminished competence within activities of interest (Chassin, Pitts, & DeLucia, 1999).

These findings suggest that parent alcoholism may raise risk not only for greater problem behavior but also for diminished positive outcomes associated with adolescence. These developmental difficulties and delays may in turn create problems within such transitions as leaving home. Parent alcoholism may also raise risk for difficulties within the leaving home transition as a result of parental impairment. Some adolescent COAs may feel that they cannot leave home due to their responsibilities for taking care of an alcoholic parent. Others may feel that their alcoholic parents are unavailable to them and that they are unable to receive the parental support needed in planning to leave home. In either instance, impairments due to parental alcoholism undermine the young adults' healthy negotiation of leaving home. Alternatively, adolescent COAs may feel an urgency to escape the pressures and conflict they experience at home, potentially resulting in more premature or problematic leaving home transitions. Thus, parent alcoholism may raise risk for difficulties in negotiating the leaving home transition through a variety of mechanisms.

Features of the Leaving Home Transition

Departing from the family home is a process, rather than an event, that involves many different aspects of developmental transition (Anderson & Fleming, 1986; Goldscheider, 1997; White, 1994). In the current study, differences between COAs and their peers were examined in four specific features of the leaving home experience that have been theoretically or empirically related to subsequent adaptation in young adulthood. These features include the timing or age at which the transition occurred, the reasons reported by the young adult for leaving home, the extent to which conflict and consultation with parents characterized this departure, and the young adult's affective reactions to leaving home.

Although few studies have examined these features of the leaving home transition, the age of leaving home has received the most empirical attention. Previous studies report that those who leave home at younger ages consistently show greater risk for subsequent adjustment problems as compared to their peers (White, 1994). Early home leaving has been linked to more limited career mobility (net of educational attainment; White, 1994) as well as poorer adjustment in young adulthood (O'Connor et al., 1996). Adjustment difficulties associated with early transitions have been interpreted as resulting from a lack of financial preparation, lower maturity and developmental skills necessary for independence, and differences in the reasons for selecting to leave home (Chassin, Presson, Sherman, & Edwards, 1992; White, 1994; White & Lacy, 1997).

Of the features of leaving home, leaving home early has been most directly associated with individual differences in the reasons for leaving home. In Australian data, those leaving home for education or a job depart at a younger age than do those leaving for marriage (Young, 1974). Moreover, White and Lacy (1997) found little effect of age of leaving home on subsequent young adult outcomes after controlling for reasons for leaving home. Not surprisingly, those who left home to pursue education showed greater educational status, compared to those who left home for cohabitation or traditional marriage. As such, individual differences among young adults in their reasons for leaving home would also be expected to predict other adjustment indices across this transition.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579402001086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Both the reasons for leaving home and the age at which this transition occurs are likely related to how young adults and their parents adjust to this departure (White & Lacy, 1997). Family systems theorists define the events around a child's physical departure from the home as a stressful stage of family transition, requiring a redefining of family roles and rituals (Mederer & Hill, 1983). Although some theorists have indicated that this transition is necessarily filled with conflict and disagreement, empirical studies generally show positive changes associated with leaving home such that those who transition to college report increased affection, improved communication, and decreased conflict with their parents (Anderson, 1990). Leaving home transitions that are especially conflict ridden and filled with discontent likely signal problems in leaving home that will impact subsequent adjustment in young adulthood.

The lack of research concerning the experiences of young adults and their parents in negotiating this transition has also left untested popular notions of the "empty nest syndrome" in which parents feel abandoned by the young adult's leaving home. As noted earlier, alcoholic parents who experience impaired functioning may be particularly prone to feelings of abandonment. In fact, little is known about not only parents' but also young adults' feelings of abandonment following the leaving home transition. Moreover, due to the increased difficulties posited earlier for COAs within the process of leaving home, less positive feelings about this experience among COAs as compared to their peers may well be expected.

Within the current study, these features of the leaving home transition were examined both individually and as related aspects of this developmental process. We expected that the age of this transition, the reasons for leaving home, the extent to which conflict and consultation between parents and young adults characterized this departure, and the parents' and young adults' reactions to leaving home would collectively represent dimensions of this experience that may be potentially problematic for COAs. Moreover, we expected that the timing and reasons for leaving home would predict the experience of and affective reaction to leaving home among these young adults. These experiences were, in turn, expected to predict adjustment in young adulthood. Although adjustment problems resulting from troublesome leaving home transitions may manifest themselves differently across individuals, the two broad domains of internalizing and externalizing symptoms are likely to capture many of these difficulties. Internalizing symptoms may reflect continued negative feelings about the self or families of origin resulting from difficult leaving home transitions, including a greater sense of depression and low self-appraisal, anxiety and apprehension, as well as frustration or anger. Externalizing symptoms may reflect a behavioral response to unpleasant leaving home transitions, whereby the young adult engages in deviant acts to bolster a sense of independence, rebelliousness, or a false sense of maturity. As such, both internalizing and externalizing symptoms in young adulthood may be a consequence of difficulties within the leaving home transition.

Adolescent Risk Behavior and Family Context as Mediators

The extent to which the leaving home transition is problematic for young adults may well depend on the preceding experiences of adolescence that reflect developmental competencies and eagerness to gain adult status, as well as the context within which the negotiation of home leaving will take place. Although few studies have examined predictors of the leaving home transition, girls' early transitions out of the parental home have been associated with a history of behavioral problems, lowered school achievement, and greater substance use (O'Connor et al., 1996; Stattin & Magnusson, 1996). Jessor and Jessor (1977) have referred to such risk behaviors during adolescence as reflecting a general tendency toward deviance likely to result in a variety of problem behaviors. According to Newcomb and Bentler (1988), such problem behaviors may result from pseudomaturity among adolescents or a drive to engage in behaviors that demonstrate adult status prior to actually

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579402001086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

achieving this status. Once adult status is actually attained, such problem behaviors often subside as they are no longer needed to communicate maturity to others. Consistent with this hypothesis, previous studies show that passage through other transitions into adulthood, such as entry into parenthood, marriage, and full-time employment, are associated with reductions in such risk behaviors as heavy drinking (e.g., Gotham, Sher, & Wood, 1997; Schulenberg, O'Malley, Bachman, Wadsworth, & Johnston, 1996). However, little is known about the effects of adolescent risk behaviors on the actual negotiation of such transitions. Moreover, problem behaviors such as heavy alcohol use and externalizing symptomatology are elevated among adolescent COAs (Chassin et al., 1991) and thus may serve to mediate their risk for difficulty in negotiating transitions into adulthood, such as that of leaving home.

Difficulties within the leaving home transition have also been associated with a history of family disruption and problematic parent–adolescent relationships (Cooney & Mortimer, 1999; O'Connor et al., 1996; Stattin & Magnusson, 1996). Earlier home leaving found among young adults living in single- rather than two-parent households has similarly been attributed to greater family conflict and lower family cohesion within the single parent family (Cooney & Mortimer, 1999; Goldscheider, 1997; White, 1994). Previous studies show that COAs receive less monitoring and experience greater family conflict than do their peers (Chassin et al., 1996; Molina & Chassin, 1996). Such decrements in the quality of the family environment may also serve to mediate COAs' risk for greater difficulties in negotiating the leaving home transition.

The Current Study

The current study examined the leaving home transition and addressed new questions concerning the relation between parent alcoholism and the experience of this transition. Specifically, we tested three hypotheses using a community based, longitudinal, high-risk sample of children of alcoholic parents and matched controls. First, COAs were expected to experience greater problems in all aspects of the leaving home transition as compared to their peers, as indicated by an earlier age of departure, less normative reasons for leaving home (e.g., because of unhappiness at home rather than for college or a job), greater conflict and less consultation with parents, and fewer positive feelings about the transition. Second, adolescent risk behavior and disruptive family environments were expected to mediate COAs' risk for these same problems during the leaving home transition. Finally, these problems in the leaving home transition were expected to predict greater adjustment problems (as evidenced by internalizing and externalizing symptoms) in young adulthood.

Method

Sample and procedure

Participants were selected from a community sample of adolescents and their parents who completed three annual interviews (1988–1990; adolescents ages 11–15, 12–16, and 13–18 years across waves) and a fourth interview 5 years later (ages 18–23; initial $N = 454$). Alcoholic parents were identified through court records, HMO wellness questionnaires, and telephone surveys. Inclusion criteria for COA families were living with a biological child aged 11–15 years, non-Hispanic Caucasian or Hispanic ethnicity, speaking English, and a biological and custodial parent who met lifetime criteria for alcohol abuse or dependence according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, third edition (DSM-III; American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Control families were matched to these COA families on the basis of ethnicity, family structure, socioeconomic status, and the adolescent's age and sex. Attrition biases were minimal, with 97% subject retention over the first three waves of assessment and 90% retention of the initial Wave 1 participants at the young adult follow-up (see Chassin, Barrera, et al., 1992, and Chassin, Pitts, DeLucia, & Todd, 1999, for details).

Relying on previous literature to define who among these young adults had attempted the leaving home transition, we focused on the first physical departure from the home to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579402001086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

define home leaving. Our focus on physical departure is consistent with previous studies finding that the establishment of a separate residence is the most consistent and strongest predictor of adjustment to leaving home (e.g., ego identity development, college adjustment, and difficulties in leaving home; Anderson & Fleming, 1986; Moore, 1984). However, trends in recent years indicate that nearly half of all young adults who leave the home initially are likely to return again, while others leave for relatively short periods of time or to residences that vary in the independence they offer (Goldscheider, 1997; White, 1994). To control for such variability, we defined as a physical departure only those that involved moving away for more than a summer job or vacation into a residence alone or with others beyond that young adult's parents and adult relatives. Young adults who reported having completed such a departure were considered to have attempted a leaving home transition.[1]

Specifically, identification of the leaving home transition was based on the young adult's self-report such that those who were classified as transitioners (a) did not currently live only with parents or with other adult relatives or (b) did currently live only with parents or other adult relatives but had at one time lived separately from them. Of the 407 young adults who completed interviews at Wave 4, 227 had left home at least once. Within this sample (49% male, ages 18–23), 148 were away from their parents or adult caretakers at the time of the Wave 4 interview (109 for the first time, 39 for at least the second time) and 79 had transitioned previously but were residing at home. Compared to those who had not yet left home, those who had left home were somewhat older ($t = 7.54$, $p < .001$) and showed greater risk behaviors during adolescence ($t = 2.00$, $p < .05$). However, no differences were found in gender, χ^2 (1) = .80, $p = ns$, family conflict ($t = -0.86$, $p = ns$), and disorganization ($t = 0.72$, $p = ns$) during adolescence and in internalizing ($t = 1.32$, $p = ns$) and externalizing ($t = -1.67$, $p = ns$) symptomatology in young adulthood.

Measures

Parent diagnoses. Families were classified as alcoholic if either parent met DSM-III (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) lifetime criteria for diagnoses of alcohol abuse or dependence. When possible, parents were directly interviewed using a computerized version of the Diagnostic Interview Schedule III (DIS; Robins, Helzer, Croughan, & Ratcliff, 1981) to assess diagnostic status. In cases where a biological parent was not directly interviewed (21% of fathers and 4% of mothers in the current subsample), the reporting parent was used as the informant using the Family History, Research Diagnostic Criteria (Andreasen, Endicott, Spitzer, & Winokur, 1977) to assess alcoholism. Previous studies have found a high degree of test–retest reliability using this method to diagnose alcoholism (98.8% agreement, $\kappa = .95$; Zimmerman, Coryell, Pfohl, & Stangl, 1988) and excellent specificity (92%) and sensitivity (90%) for wives reporting on their husbands' substance abuse disorders (Kosten, Anton, & Rounsaville, 1992). Participating parents also completed the DIS to determine whether they met criteria for affective disorder (major depression or dysthymia) and antisocial personality disorder. Among transitioners, 52%, 11%, and 7% of families had at least one parent who met these criteria for alcoholism, affective disorder, and antisocial personality disorder, respectively.

Parental alcohol-related consequences and dependency symptoms. At Wave 3, parents reported on how recently they had experienced each of 26 consequences and dependency symptoms related to alcohol abuse as adapted from the DIS (Robins et al., 1981), the Alcohol Health and Behavior Study (Sher, 1993), and the CAGE (Mayfield, McLeod, & Hall, 1974). A summary score for each parent totaled the number of such symptoms reported over the past year.

Adolescent risk behavior. Mothers, fathers, and adolescents each reported on externalizing

1. Parents also reported whether their young adults had left home. For all but nine of the young adults who self-identified as having left home at least once, parent and young adult reports were in agreement.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579402001086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

symptoms displayed by the adolescent at Wave 3. Sixteen items were selected from the Child Behavior Checklist (CBLC; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1981) that loaded on the externalizing factor for both boys and girls ages 12–16 years. For assessing adolescent report, the original CBCL response scale was expanded to a 5-point Likert scale to increase variability in responses. The average of these items formed a scale with strong internal reliability within reporter (α = .93, .89, and .89 for father, mother, and adolescent report, respectively; interreporter correlations of .37–.66). Because different response scales were used for parent and adolescent report items, available parent reports were averaged to form the first index (M = 0.30, SD = 0.27) and adolescent reports were retained separately to form the second index (M = 1.72, SD = 0.50) of adolescent symptomatology prior to the leaving home transition.

Also at Wave 3, adolescents reported how often they had been drunk and how often they had consumed five or more drinks in a row over the past year. The 8-point response scale ranged from 0 (*never*) to 7 (*every day*). In the current sample, 59% of adolescents reported having ever used alcohol by Wave 3 whereas 32% reported having had five or more drinks in a row in the past year and 32% reported having been drunk in the past year. A single indicator of heavy alcohol use was formed from the average of these two latter items (M = 0.98, SD = 1.60).

For subsequent analyses, a composite measure of risk behavior was formed from standardized scale scores from parent- and self-report measures of the adolescent externalizing behavior and self-reported heavy alcohol use. To reduce model complexity given the current sample size, these factors were averaged into a manifest variable assessing overall risk behavior (M = –0.04, SD = 0.52).

Family environment. Two scales assessed the extent to which conflict and disorganization characterized the family environment. For family (dis)organization, a six-item scale assessed the extent to which families stuck to a pretty regular schedule and routine, had difficulty making plans due to the interference of unexpected events, and could count on promises being kept by family members. This measure was developed by project staff drawing from research concerning family rituals (e.g., Jensen, James, Boyce, & Harnett, 1983; Steinglass, Bennett, Wolin, & Reiss, 1987; Wolin & Bennett, 1984; Wolin, Bennett, & Jacobs, 1988). Family conflict was assessed by five items from Bloom (1985) concerning the extent to which family members fought a lot, got angry and threw things, lost their tempers, hit each other, and criticized each other.

The resulting measures were administered in Wave 3 to adolescents, mothers, and fathers using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). A mean of these items, coded such that higher scores reflected less organization in the family, produced a scale of family disorganization with adequate internal consistency within reporter (α = .74, .75, and .73 for father, mother, and adolescent report, respectively; interreporter correlations of .35–.47). Similarly, adequate internal consistency was found within reporter for the family conflict scale formed by averaging these five items (α = .78, .72, and .75 for father, mother, and adolescent report, respectively; interreporter correlations of .42–.50). The final scales for the current study were formed by averaging across reporters but within scale to assess the extent of disorganization (M = 2.70, SD = 0.58) and conflict (M = 2.44, SD = 0.64) within the family.

Leaving home transition measures. Items to assess aspects of the leaving home transition were written by project staff. Young adults and parents answered items assessing whether, at what age, and to where such a transition occurred, as well as the extent of conflict and consultation between parents and young adults surrounding the transition and the affective responses of each to the transition. Young adults also reported on their reasons for leaving home. All items directed participants to consider the first time they left home in their responses and were thus retrospective in nature. Items within each scale were subjected to exploratory factor analyses prior to inclusion in the current study. Corre-

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lations among indicators of the leaving home transition are reported in Table 1.

Six items assessed the extent to which participating young adults and parents experienced conflict in negotiating the leaving home transition. The 5-point response scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Three items concerned *conflict* between the young adults and their parents about the transition (i.e., "When I first left home, there were difficulties with my leaving home," "When I first left home, I had problems leaving home," and "When I first left home, there was conflict about my leaving home"). A mean of these items based on young adult report formed the first scale (M = 2.46, SD = 1.05, α = .86) and available parent reports were averaged across these items to form a second scale assessing this construct (M = 2.23, SD = 1.05, α = .85, mother and father reports correlated, r = .51). An additional three items concerned *consultation* between the young adults and their parents about the transition (i.e., "When I first left home, it was planned in advance," "When I first left home, my parent and I agreed that it was the right time for me to move away from home," and "When I first left home, my parents and I agreed on where I was going to live"). Similarly, a mean of these items based on young adult report formed the first scale (M = 3.44, SD = 1.13, α = .84) and available parent reports were averaged across these items to form a second scale assessing this construct (M = 3.61, SD = 1.02, α = .88; mother and father reports correlated, r = .51).

Young adults reported the extent to which six emotions characterized *their affect following the leaving home transition* using a 4-point response scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*a lot*). Positive emotions (i.e., proud, excited, and happy) and negative emotions (i.e., sad, guilty, and scared) were averaged separately to form two scales reflecting the young adult's affective reactions to first leaving home (M = 3.11, SD = .82, α = .88, for positive affect; M = 1.97, SD = .74, α = .70, for negative affect).

Young adults also reported on their perceptions of each parent's *feelings of abandonment* following the leaving home transition using a 5-point response scale to answer three items (i.e., "When I first left home, my biological mother felt deserted by me," "When I first left home, my biological mother felt I didn't care for her anymore," and "When I first left home, my biological mother felt I didn't take an interest in her anymore"). Two scales were formed based on young adult reports, each the average of three items assessing the young adults' ratings of mothers' abandonment feelings (M = 2.04, SD = 1.01, α = .89) and of father's abandonment feelings (M = 1.92, SD = 0.94, α = .92), respectively. Using similar items, each parent also reported on (a) his or her own feelings of abandonment as well as on (b) his or her perceptions of the young adult's feelings of abandonment following the leaving home transition. Items assessing the parents' own feelings of abandonment were averaged across available parents to form a single scale (M = 1.84, SD = .87, α = .88; mother and father report correlated, r = .48). Similarly, items assessing parental perceptions of the young adult's feelings of abandonment were averaged across available parents to form the final scale assessing this construct (M = 1.65, SD = .77, α = .87; mother and father report correlated, r = .30).

Finally, young adults rated the extent to which four potential *reasons for leaving home* motivated their first move away from home. Items included moving away to go to school or to take a job in another city (M = 2.76, SD = 1.85), to get married or live with a romantic partner (M = 2.15, SD = 1.65), because they were unhappy at home (M = 2.07, SD = 1.39), and to gain greater freedom or independence (M = 3.46, SD = 1.39). Participants responded to items on a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*very important*). Because items were not expected to relate to a single dimension but to survey different reasons for leaving home, Cronbach's alpha estimates were not computed. Rather, each item was examined separately in subsequent analyses.

Young adult adjustment. Young adults and their parents reported on the young adult's internalizing and externalizing symptoms over the past 3 months during the Wave 4 interview.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579402001086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579402001086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 1. *Correlations among indicators of the leaving home transition*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Young adult report of															
1. Mother's abandonment	1.00														
2. Father's abandonment	0.59	1.00													
3. Conflict	0.53	0.58	1.00												
4. Consultation	–0.50	–0.49	–0.55	1.00											
5. Positive affect	–0.35	–0.32	–0.42	0.41	1.00										
6. Negative affect	0.28	0.33	0.57	–0.27	–0.39	1.00									
7. Leaving for school/job	–0.28	–0.28	–0.25	0.51	0.25	–0.14	1.00								
8. Leaving for marriage	0.16	0.04	0.09	–0.20	–0.04	0.11	–0.33	1.00							
9. Leaving for freedom	0.51	0.47	0.41	–0.54	–0.28	0.21	–0.32	0.04	1.00						
10. Leaving because unhappy	0.12	0.14	0.08	0.00	0.30	–0.06	0.04	–0.07	0.24	1.00					
11. Age at first leaving home	–0.28	–0.30	–0.27	0.34	0.24	–0.10	0.15	0.12	–0.26	0.03	1.00				
Parent report of															
12. Conflict	0.33	0.38	0.44	–0.50	–0.32	0.30	–0.37	0.10	0.49	0.07	–0.32	1.00			
13. Consultation	–0.42	–0.42	–0.43	0.67	0.35	–0.23	0.49	–0.17	–0.49	–0.04	0.41	–0.69	1.00		
14. Young adult's abandonment	0.22	0.28	0.29	–0.38	–0.32	0.17	–0.37	–0.02	0.43	0.02	–0.16	0.64	–0.55	1.00	
15. Own abandonment	0.32	0.37	0.30	–0.44	–0.26	0.22	–0.32	0.12	0.42	0.09	–0.19	0.69	–0.68	0.63	1.00

Note: Numbers across the horizontal axis correspond to these variables similarly numbered along the vertical axis of the table. Correlations greater than $|.13|$, $|.18|$, and $|.23|$ are significant at $p < .05$, $p < .01$, and $p < .001$, respectively.

Items assessing these domains were selected from the CBCL (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1981) in order to maintain consistency with previous assessments of symptomatology throughout adolescence. Items were omitted if they were no longer age appropriate. A mean of 10 and 12 items each formed the scale for internalizing symptoms (M = 1.81, 1.33, and 1.22; SD = .66, .36, and .26; as Cronbach's α = .86, .88, and .78 for young adult, mother, and father report, respectively; interreporter correlations of .25–.42) and externalizing symptoms (M = 1.36, 1.17, and 1.16; SD = .37, .26, and .25; Cronbach's α = .76, .87, and .85 for young adult, mother, and father report, respectively; interreporter correlations of .18–.46), respectively. Because parents used a 3-point scale and young adults a 5-point response scale, scales were standardized within reporter before averaging across reporters to form the internalizing and externalizing scales used in subsequent analyses.

Results

Parent alcoholism and the leaving home transition

Chi-square analyses found no differences in whether COAs had transitioned from the home as compared with their peers, χ^2 (1, N = 407) = .13, p = *ns*. Among those young adults who had left home at least once, COAs were no more likely than their peers to have returned home following this first transition out of the home, χ^2 (1, N = 227) = 0.01, p = *ns*.

Among those young adults who had made a leaving home transition, a series of multiple regression models controlled for age at the time of interview and gender to examine whether parental alcoholism was related to the young adult's report of age at the time of transitioning, mother's and father's feelings of abandonment, conflict and consultation with parents about the transition, reasons for leaving home, and negative and positive feelings about the transition (see Table 2).[2] Parallel analyses examined whether parental alcoholism was uniquely related to available parents' reports of their own and their perceptions of the young adult's feelings of abandonment as well as to conflict and consultation about the transition. COAs differed significantly from their peers on all but two indicators of the leaving home transition. Specifically, COAs, as compared to their peers, reported being younger at the time of their first transition as well as having greater feelings of abandonment among fathers and mothers, greater conflict and less consultation with parents in negotiating the transition, and more negative and fewer positive feelings about the transition, as well as being less likely to leave home for school or a job and more likely to leave home because of being unhappy.[3]

COAs may show these difficulties in the leaving home transition due to either proximal

2. Because not all young adults in the sample have left home, analyses predicting age of leaving home involve censored data. To determine the extent to which censoring biased the results of multiple regression analyses presented here, survival analyses were conducted to determine whether parent alcoholism predicted whether and when young adults left home (after controlling for young adult age and gender). These findings replicated reported regression results. Survival analysis showed that COAs were no more likely than their peers to have left home. COAs were marginally more likely to report leaving home at earlier ages (15–16 years old, OR = 2.9–3.4) and significantly less likely to report leaving home at older ages (20 years old, OR = .37) as compared to non-COAs.
3. We tested whether parent alcoholism was a specific risk factor for these difficulties above and beyond risk associated with commonly comorbid parental affective and antisocial personality disorders. The multiple regression analyses reported in Table 2 were repeated, with the addition of predictors indicating whether at least one parent met DSM-III (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) criteria for (a) affective disorder or (b) antisocial personality disorder. The effects for parent alcoholism were largely unchanged, with three exceptions. The prediction of the young adult's negative affect following the transition (t = 1.68, p = .09) and the parents' report of family conflict surrounding the transition (t = 1.90, p < .10) both became only marginally significant and the prediction of leaving home for the reason of attending school became nonsignificant (t = −1.50, p = *ns*) in these analyses. Parent antisociality predicted an earlier age of leaving home (t = −2.42, p < .05) and greater conflict (t = 2.44, p < .05) and less consultation (t = −2.80, p < .05) with parents in the leaving home transition (by parent report). Parent affective disorder predicted leaving home because of being unhappy (t = 2.36, p < .05) and greater conflict (t = 2.29, p < .05) in the transition (by parent report).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579402001086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 2. *Effect of parental alcoholism on the leaving home transition experience*

	(Predictor) Variables in each Multiple Regression Model										
	Age			Gender			Parental Alcoholism				
Dependent Variables	β	*t*	*p*	β	*t*	*p*	β	*t*	*p*	ΔR^2	*n*
Young adult report of											
Mother's abandonment feelings	**–0.14**	**–2.12**	**.04**	0.00	0.00	.99	**0.24**	**3.61**	**.00**	.06	224
Father's abandonment feelings	–0.11	–1.60	.11	0.01	0.22	.82	**0.20**	**3.10**	**.00**	.04	224
Parent–young adult conflict	**–0.14**	**–2.24**	**.03**	**0.16**	**2.54**	**.01**	**0.21**	**3.21**	**.00**	.04	227
Parent–young adult consultation	0.01	0.09	.93	–0.03	–0.42	.67	**–0.27**	**–4.24**	**.00**	.08	227
Positive feelings	0.08	1.24	.22	–0.07	–1.13	.26	**–0.17**	**–2.64**	**.01**	.04	227
Negative feelings	0.00	–0.01	.99	**0.41**	**6.85**	**.00**	**0.12**	**2.05**	**.04**	.02	227
Leaving for school or job	0.02	0.28	.78	–0.08	–1.23	.22	**–0.13**	**–1.95**	**.05**	.02	227
Leaving for marriage	–0.02	–0.29	.78	**0.20**	**3.05**	**.00**	–0.07	–0.98	.33	.00	226
Leaving because unhappy	–0.10	–1.46	.15	0.01	0.17	.87	**0.22**	**3.38**	**.00**	.05	226
Leaving for greater freedom	0.04	0.63	.53	0.05	0.68	.50	0.11	1.57	.12	.01	226
Age at first leaving home	**0.28**	**4.51**	**.00**	0.02	0.24	.81	**–0.20**	**–3.24**	**.00**	.04	227
Parents report of											
Parent–young adult conflict	–0.12	–1.69	.09	**0.14**	**1.98**	**.05**	**0.20**	**2.91**	**.00**	.04	195
Parent–young adult consultation	0.10	1.42	.16	**–0.14**	**–2.10**	**.04**	**–0.29**	**–4.30**	**.00**	.08	195
Young adult abandonment feelings	–0.02	–0.32	.75	0.03	0.36	.72	**0.21**	**3.01**	**.00**	.05	196
Parent abandonment feelings	–0.07	–1.01	.31	**0.19**	**2.79**	**.01**	**0.23**	**3.34**	**.00**	.05	195

Note: Bold values indicate statistical significance at $p < .05$. Variability in the number of cases included in each model is due to missing responses to particular items.

or distal consequences of parent alcoholism. If the parent continued to drink and show alcohol-related problems at the time of the leaving home transition, these proximal effects of parent alcoholism may disrupt the family and parent–child relationships during the transition. However, parent alcoholism is also associated with greater problems for offspring during childhood and adolescence (e.g., greater hostility, poorer academic performance). Even if the parent does not continue to show alcohol-related problems during the leaving home transition, these distal effects may accumulate over adolescence and create problems for the young adult in leaving home.

Although no measures were available to directly link the extent of parent drinking and related consequences to the exact time of the leaving home transition, measures of parental drinking problems were available in Wave 3 (prior to the leaving home transition). Subgroups were formed to differentiate those who (a) showed no lifetime parent alcoholism ($n = 112$), (b) showed lifetime parent alcoholism but no alcohol consequences or dependency symptoms at Wave 3 (i.e., "remitted"; $n = 71$), and (c) showed lifetime parent alcoholism as well as alcohol consequences or dependency symptoms in Wave 3 (i.e., "recent"; $n = 44$). A series of multiple regressions were conducted that repeated those reported in Table 2, with the parent alcoholism predictor replaced by dummy codes indicating membership in one of these three groups. Young adults whose parents were in the recovered and recent groups reported more difficulties on every leaving home indicator than did controls, with three exceptions. Young adults whose parents showed recent alcohol problems did not differ from controls in positive and negative affect following the transition, sense of self-reported parental abandonment, or leaving home for school or marriage opportunities. Young adults whose parents showed remission of alcohol problems during this time did not differ from controls only in choosing to leave home for school or a job, marriage, and greater freedom. These results suggest that both the distal and proximal ef-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579402001086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

fects of parent alcoholism may impact the leaving home transition.

Testing potential confounds

Because COAs were more likely to make an earlier transition than their peers, we tested whether the effect of parent alcoholism on the experience of the leaving home transition remained after controlling for the age of leaving home. The same regressions as reported in Table 2 were again conducted, with the addition of age of first leaving home as a predictor in the models. All effects for parent alcoholism remained consistent with those reported in Table 2, with the exception that parent alcoholism no longer significantly predicted the extent to which young adults left home for school or a job.

Mediators and correlates of COAs' risk for difficulties in the leaving home transition

To assure that proposed mediators temporally preceded the leaving home transition, seven young adults who left home prior to the Wave 3 interview (when these adolescent measures were assessed) were not included in these analyses. For mediational analyses, all measures of the leaving home transition were based only on young adult report because parents did not report on all potential mediators. Three young adults with missing data on leaving home indicators were omitted from these analyses (resulting in $n = 217$). Path analysis was used to examine (a) whether adolescent risk behavior and family experiences led COAs to leave home at an earlier age and for different reasons than their peers, (b) the impact of the timing and reasons for home leaving on the experiences and reactions of these young adults to leaving home, and (c) the unique impact of all preceding factors on adjustment in young adulthood. The resulting structural equation model was fully saturated such that the effects of the leaving home transition on young adult adjustment were examined above and beyond risk associated with adolescent risk behavior and family experiences as well as COA status. (Significant pathways are depicted in Figure 1.) Potential gender differences in these mediational pathways were tested through multiple group modeling (Byrne, 1989).

The resulting structural pathway coefficients are reported in Table 3.[4] As compared to controls, COAs showed greater adolescent risk behavior, family conflict, and family disorganization, as well as a greater likelihood of leaving home younger, because of unhappiness, and in the midst of conflict with parents. Adolescent mediators also predicted indices of the leaving home experience. Adolescent risk behavior predicted a greater likelihood of leaving home due to unhappiness and with less consultation with parents. Greater family disorganization during adolescence decreased the likelihood of leaving home to pursue college or a job. Greater family conflict during adolescence predicted less positive affect, in the leaving home transition.

The reasons for and timing of leaving home also predicted the young adults' experiences of leaving home. The increased influence of leaving home for college or a job predicted greater consultation with parents around the transition. Those who more strongly endorsed leaving home because of being unhappy showed less consultation and more conflict with parents about the transition as well as greater negative and less positive affect following the transition. However, those who were more likely to leave home to seek freedom showed more parent consultation, greater positive affect, and less negative affect in the transition.

Finally, these young adult experiences predicted adjustment in young adulthood. Specifically, young adults who experienced more family conflict during adolescence, a greater

4. When parent report of conflict and consultation replaced young adult reports of these constructs in the SEM, slight differences to the model occurred: (a) risk behavior, but not parent alcoholism, uniquely predicted conflict during the leaving home transition; (b) age of leaving home and not leaving home due to unhappiness predicted consultation during the transition; (c) conflict during the transition predicted young adult internalizing symptoms; and (d) less negative affect, but not family conflict, neither during adolescence nor age of leaving home, predicted young adult externalizing symptoms.

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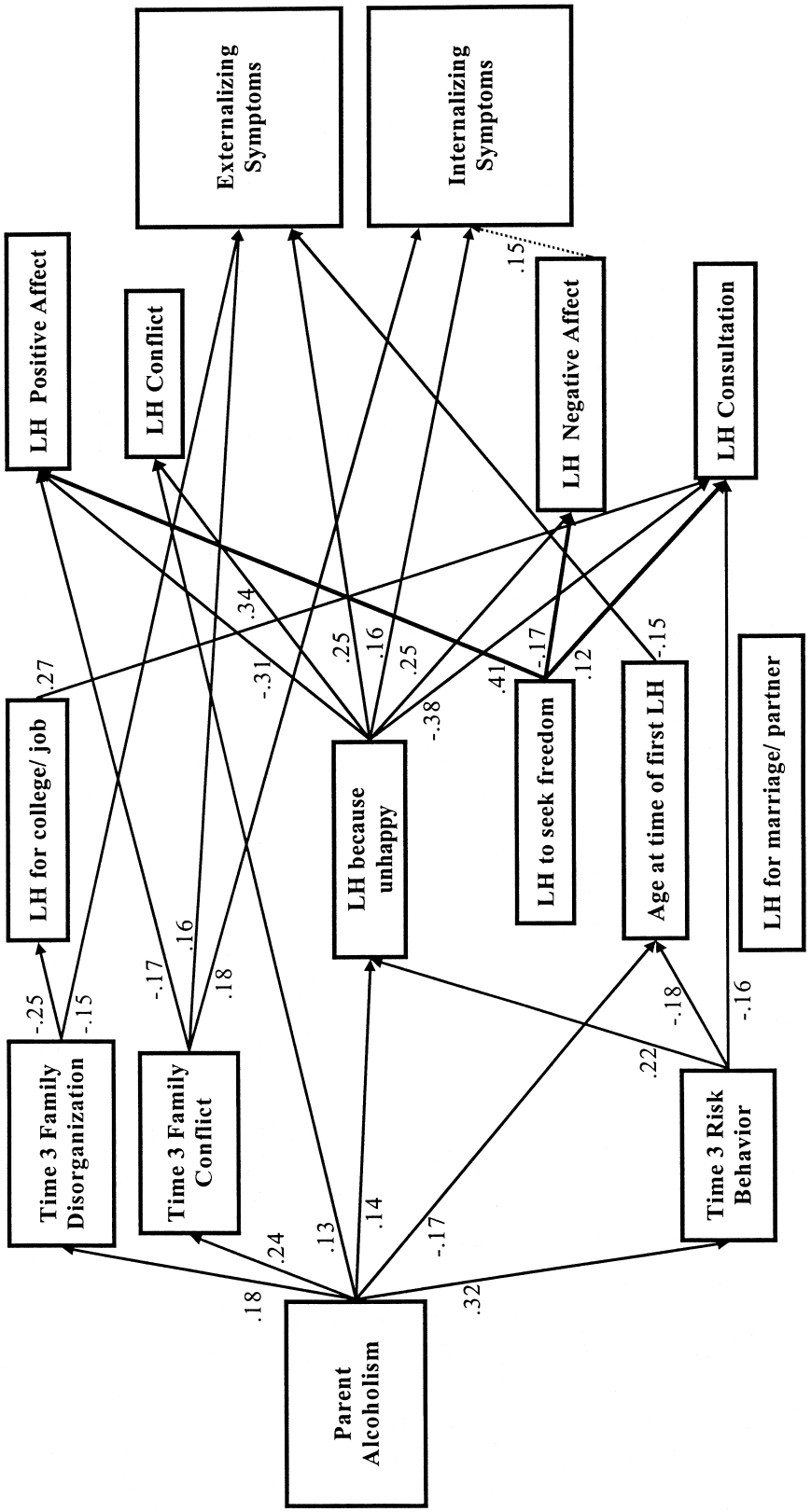


Figure 1. Mediational model of parental alcoholism effects on the leaving home transition and young adult adjustment. (Only significant pathways and marginally (dashed) significant pathways contributing to mediated effects are depicted.)

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Table 3. *Pathway coefficients from mediational structural equation model*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Total Variance Accounted For
Wave 1																
1. Parent alcoholism																
2. Adolescent age																
3. Adolescent gender																
Wave 3																
4. Risk behavior	0.32‡	0.07	–0.17†													.12
5. Family disorganization	0.18†	–0.14*	–0.04													.06
6. Family conflict	0.24‡	–0.18†	0.03													.10
Wave 4																
7. Leave for college/job	–0.03	0.00	–0.12	–0.13	–0.25**	–0.07										.15
8. Leave for marriage	–0.14	–0.03	0.21*	0.15	0.04	0.02										.07
9. Leave because unhappy	0.14†	–0.10	0.05	0.22*	0.08	0.10										.18
10. Leave to seek freedom	0.09	0.04	0.03	0.08	0.03	0.05										.04
11. Age at leaving home	–0.17*	0.37**	–0.10	–0.18†	–0.10	0.03										.26
12. Conflict about leaving	0.13†	–0.09	0.15†	0.03	–0.10	0.08	–0.07	0.03	0.34†	–0.04	–0.06					.27
13. Consult parents about leaving	–0.10	–0.06	–0.01	–0.15†	0.01	–0.08	0.27**	–0.08	–0.38**	0.12†	0.08					.50
14. Positive affect after leaving	–0.11	0.01	–0.09	0.06	0.13	–0.17†	0.10	0.05	–0.31**	0.41**	0.02					.29
15. Negative affect after leaving	0.12	0.03	0.42**	–0.05	0.03	0.00	0.03	0.02	0.25**	–0.17*	0.04					.26
16. Internalizing symptoms	–0.06	0.10	0.09	0.12	–0.01	0.18†	–0.03	–0.04	0.16†	0.02	–0.08	0.09	–0.01	–0.09	0.15	.27
17. Externalizing symptoms	0.02	–0.03	–0.06	0.14	–0.15†	0.16†	–0.08	–0.03	0.25*	0.04	–0.15†	0.07	0.01	–0.08	–0.08	.29

Note: Both significant and marginally significant pathways were retained in trimmed model analyses, whereas all others were fixed to zero.
†$p < .05$. *$p < .01$. **$p < .001$.

desire to leave home due to unhappiness, and (to some extent) more negative affect after leaving home showed greater internalizing symptoms than did their young adult peers. Similarly, young adults who experienced more family conflict, disorganization, and (to some extent) risk behavior during adolescence, as well as a greater desire to leave home due to unhappiness and younger ages of departure, showed greater externalizing symptoms than did their peers.

Formal tests of mediation available within EQS (Bentler, 1989) were conducted within a "trimmed model" in which nonsignificant pathways in the above model were deleted and the resulting model reestimated: trimmed model fit, χ^2 (72, N = 217) = 85.8, p = .13; (Confirmatory Fit Index, .99; Incremental Fit Index, .99). This procedure was selected to ascertain whether significant mediation was evident once the minimal contributions of nonsignificant pathways were removed from the model. Results indicated that adolescent precursors all served to partially explain COAs' risk for difficulties in leaving home. Less family organization during adolescence mediated COAs' reduced likelihood of leaving home to pursue college or a job opportunity (t = −2.35, p < .05). Greater adolescent risk behavior mediated COAs' risk for an increased likelihood of leaving home due to unhappiness (t = 2.59, p < .01) and at a younger age (t = −2.22, p < .05). Both family conflict during adolescence and leaving home due to unhappiness mediated COAs' risk for less positive affect about the leaving home experience (t = −2.89, p < .05).

Several indirect effects supported the relations among these experiences of leaving home and young adult adjustment. First, a greater likelihood of leaving home because of unhappiness mediated the impact of adolescent risk behavior on greater conflict (t = 2.95, p < .01) and less consultation with parents about leaving home (t = −3.05, p < .01) and greater externalizing symptoms in young adulthood (t = 3.27, p < .01). Second, the relation between decreased family disorganization during adolescence and decreased consultation with parents about leaving home was in turn mediated by a decreased likelihood of leaving home for college or a job (t = −3.76, p < .01). Third, leaving home because of unhappiness mediated COAs' risk for more negative affect about this transition (t = 2.33, p < .05). Finally, the experience of greater negative affect about leaving home mediated the relation between leaving home because of being unhappy and later internalizing symptoms (t = 2.84, p < .01).

A multiple group analysis tested for gender differences in these mediational pathways. All structural pathways in the trimmed model described above (omitting gender) were constrained to be equal across groups defined by gender. Because a total of 36 pathways were examined in this manner, a conservative alpha of .01 was used to identify pathways that significantly differed by gender. Only one path was found to differ by gender, χ^2 (1, N = 217) = 7.28, p < .01, such that parent alcoholism predicted less positive affect about leaving home among men (t = −2.91, p < .01) than among women (t = 0.98, p > .10).

Discussion

Departing the family home is a significant event in the passage from adolescence to young adulthood. However, young adults vary greatly in how they experience this transition. In particular, children of alcoholic parents (COAs) are more likely than their peers to experience difficulties in home leaving. The current study showed that the leaving home transitions of COAs include more conflict and less consultation with parents, greater motivation to leave home for risk-promoting reasons, fewer positive feelings about the transition, and younger ages of departure as compared to non-COAs. Earlier experiences of family disruption and adolescent risk behavior partly accounted for COAs' difficulties within this transition. Underscoring their importance, difficult leaving home transitions predicted greater adjustment problems in young adulthood.

Leaving the home of an alcoholic parent

Previous studies have found that young adults' experiences of leaving home partly depend on

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when and why they choose to leave (Cooney & Mortimer, 1999). Similarly, the current study found that the reasons why young adults left home partly accounted for greater difficulties with parents and fewer feelings of success in leaving home. These reasons for leaving home differed between COAs and their peers. COAs were less likely than their peers to leave home to pursue school or a job but more likely to do so because they were unhappy at home. These different reasons for homeleaving may reflect COAs' lower skill or commitment to school or work roles as compared to their peers (McGrath, Watson, & Chassin, 1999). Alternatively, COAs' home leaving may be more motivated by stressful home environments than by desires for new adult roles. In either case, these different reasons for leaving home suggest that COAs and their peers may enter different environments as they enter young adulthood.

In contrast, COAs were just as likely as their peers to leave home to seek greater freedom and to join a marriage or romantic partner. Both of these reasons for leaving home reflect developmentally normative transitions. With respect to the latter, nearly two thirds of young adults leave home to cohabit with a romantic partner (Arnett, 2000). However, it is unclear whether COAs continue to make more self-limiting choices than their peers in pursuing such romantic options. COAs and their peers may differ in whether they leave home to enter marriage versus cohabitation as well as in whether they experience related difficulties in the romantic relationships that they enter (i.e., marriages prompted by an unplanned pregnancy or relationships lacking commitment or stability). As Rutter (1987) has demonstrated in his high-risk sample of women reared in institutional living quarters, marriage can be a protective factor in buffering potentially negative risk factors. However, other studies suggest that certain marital contexts may also exacerbate risk for poor adjustment (e.g., if an alcoholic spouse is chosen; Wilsnack & Wilsnack, 1997).

Previous research has also suggested that the reasons why young adults leave home are related to the age at which leaving home occurs (White & Lacy, 1997; Young, 1974). Younger adults who choose to leave home may be less prepared, have more poorly developed plans, and lack the cognitive and social maturity for success within this transition relative to their older counterparts (Chassin, Presson, et al., 1992; White, 1994; White & Lacy, 1997). In the current study, earlier home leaving was associated with greater conflict between parents and young adults about the transition, a greater likelihood of leaving home to escape unhappiness rather than to pursue a job or employment, and fewer positive feelings about the transition. However, as found by White and Lacy (1997), age of leaving home did not predict other difficulties in leaving home after controlling for the reasons why the young adult left home. Leaving home due to unhappiness was uniquely related to leaving home at a younger age as well as to young adults' experiences with parents in negotiating leaving home, their reactions to leaving home, and their later adjustment. These findings suggest that young adults' motivations for, and related environments entered upon, leaving home may account for other difficulties associated with leaving home.

In sum, COAs may not only leave home younger but also choose to do so for reasons that are associated with difficulties in negotiating homeleaving and that yield less positive feelings about these departures. Greater conflict between COAs and their parents in negotiating this transition may leave these newly independent young adults vulnerable to adjustment problems as well as less likely to receive support from home to face even normative challenges. At the same time, COAs are also more likely than their peers to report negative feelings about leaving home and to see their parents as more likely to feel abandoned by their departures. Young adults whose parents are impaired and unavailable to them may be especially likely to have this reaction to leaving home.

Explaining COAs' risk for problematic transitions

Previous research indicates that COAs show greater problem behavior and experience more family disruption during adolescence

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579402001086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

than do their peers (Chassin et al., 1991; Molina & Chassin, 1996). Each of these factors has been associated in prior research with difficulties in negotiating the leaving home transition (Cooney & Mortimer, 1999; Goldscheider, 1997; O'Connor et al., 1996; Stattin & Magnusson, 1996; White, 1994). Supporting the mediational role of adolescent experiences in COAs' risk for problems in the leaving home transition, the current study found that greater adolescent risk behavior as well as elevated family conflict and disorganization at least partly explain why COAs' have more difficulties with leaving home.

Difficult family environments impacted COAs' leaving home transitions in two ways. First, greater family conflict accounted for fewer positive feelings about leaving home among COAs than among their peers. Second, more family disorganization among alcoholic families reduced the chances that COAs left home for college or job opportunities, resulting in less consultation with parents about the transition. Because arranging for college or employment opportunities often involves planning and coordination, COAs may be less likely to pursue these options because they lack or did not learn these skills within the disorganized family contexts of their adolescence. COAs may also continue to experience their families as disorganized into young adulthood, leaving them with less structure and guidance from parents who could otherwise ease this transition. Alternatively, nonalcoholic families may foster motivations and values within their children that are consistent with educational and career aspirations through a family environment that is more organized.

The effects of the family context on the leaving home transition were not as strong, however, as those of adolescent risk behavior. COAs' greater risk behavior during adolescence partly explained why these young adults were more likely to leave home at an earlier age, because they were unhappy, and with less parental consultation. Such risk behaviors are related to greater impulsivity, thrill seeking, and desires for adult status (associated with pseudomaturity; Newcomb & Bentler, 1988) that may lead COAs to leave home prematurely and to experience more difficulties in negotiating this transition. In addition, COAs' engagement in such high-risk behaviors during adolescence may increase the likelihood that they will associate with a more deviant peer group (Chassin et al., 1996). Such peers may provide encouragement for pursuing nontraditional routes out of the family home as well as more opportunities for such exits from the parental home (e.g., by moving in with older friends or sexual partners who have independent residences).

Two pathways demonstrate the implications of these mediational findings on other aspects of the leaving home transition. First, COAs experience less family organization during adolescence, which decreases the likelihood that they will choose to leave home for school or work opportunities and, in turn, decreases the extent to which young adults will consult their parents about their plans for leaving home. Through such a pathway, COAs are less likely than their peers to gain positive skills and experience upon entering young adulthood. Second, COAs show greater risk behavior during adolescence and are more motivated than are non-COAs to leave home because they are unhappy; in turn, they experience more conflict and less consultation with parents as well as more negative affect about the leaving home experience. In contrast to the first, this pathway shows that COAs may also be more likely to have negative experiences during this transition.

These pathways demonstrate that adolescent risk behavior and family context accounted for many of COAs' difficulties in the leaving home transition. However, these mediators could not account fully for COAs' greater likelihood of leaving home due to unhappiness and, to some extent, at earlier ages. Clearly, other explanations for COAs' difficulties in the leaving home transition should be further explored. Potential mechanisms include greater parental pressure for young adults with a history of problem behavior to leave the family home, COAs' wishes to escape painful experiences involving the impaired alcoholic parent, inconsistent parenting and guidance over time and across parents in preparing for the transition, a more difficult

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temperament, and the emotional or physical absence of a parent who might have otherwise guided the young adult in making a more successful transition.

Implications of the leaving home transition for young adult adjustment

The leaving home transition plays a unique, if modest, role in how adolescents adjust to young adulthood. This role is best accounted for by the timing and reasons for leaving home. Adolescents who left home because they were unhappy showed greater internalizing and externalizing symptoms in young adulthood than did their peers. This effect is the continuation of a risk pathway for COAs who are more likely to leave home due to unhappiness associated with their own risk behavior during adolescence. The leaving home transitions of these youth are clearly difficult, as this reason for leaving home also predicted more problematic interactions with parents and fewer positive feelings about leaving home. The negative effects of leaving an unhappy home environment are in contrast to what might be considered a more developmentally normative motivation for leaving home—namely, to seek greater freedom. Those who left home for freedom seeking were more likely to consult with parents as well as to report greater positive and less negative affect about leaving home. Understanding more about what made these young adults unhappy at home is a key direction for future research concerning this pathway.

Young adults who first left home at younger ages also showed greater adjustment problems than did their peers. For COAs, this was a direct pathway of risk into young adulthood. After controlling for adolescent risk behavior and family context, the age of leaving home continued to be a significant and unique mediator of COAs' externalizing symptoms. Although the current study found that young adults' reasons for leaving home largely accounted for the relation between leaving home early and negative experiences during the leaving home transition, this finding shows that early transitions hold unique implications for later young adult adjustment beyond the reasons for and experiences of the transition. Such premature exits alone may leave COAs ill-prepared for the challenges of facing what are often more difficult situations in the transition to young adulthood.

These effects of the leaving home transition may reflect either continuity in behavior over time or stagelike developmental change. Likely, both are involved. Those youth who enter the leaving home transition with more accumulated risks associated with having an alcoholic parent, a difficult family environment, and a history of problem behavior experience less success in negotiating leaving home. Problems with the leaving home transition may in turn exacerbate existing difficulties, further alienating these young adults from their families, embedding them in less optimal peer environments, and creating contexts that will present further hardships for adaptation. As these young adults mature through this transition, the developmental nature of changes associated with leaving home will become more apparent.

Caveats and conclusions

Although the current study provides consistent evidence for greater difficulties associated with the leaving home transition among COAs than their peers, a few caveats should be considered. First, differences between COAs and their peers across indicators of the leaving home transition individually represented small to moderate magnitudes of effect (ΔR^2 = .01–.09), and few aspects of the leaving home transition predicted adjustment in young adulthood. However, these effects of parent alcoholism were pervasive, impacting multiple aspects of home leaving. Second, these samples were assessed in the midst of completing this transition as a group (median age of 20 years), such that young adults who experience this transition at a later time were necessarily omitted from the current study. Future studies that permit comparisons of COAs and their peers as they move further into adulthood may indicate a second level of risk faced by COAs—namely, increased difficulty in gaining the independence, finances, or emotional distance from alcoholic parents

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579402001086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for whom they have cared in order to succeed in acquiring adult roles associated with the leaving home transition.

Third, the current study focused only on the *first attempt* at home leaving. For this reason, reports of the leaving home experience were retrospective. Different antecedents and consequences of the leaving home transition might be identified for subsequent attempts. Multiple issues in defining the leaving home transition, the important aspects of the leaving home transition for adjustment, and other potential precursors of the experience of leaving home have yet to be explored. Fourth, these aspect of leaving home were assessed concurrently (e.g., reasons for leaving home vs. familial and emotional processes of home leaving), so statements about their causal ordering cannot be directly and unambiguously determined within the current study. Fifth, the impact of the leaving home transition on young adult adjustment was assessed only with respect to internalizing and externalizing symptoms. Other indicators of young adult adjustment, such as successful role entry, may be better assessed as these young adults mature through this transition. In sum, the current findings indicate that young adults vary in how they experience the leaving home transition in a manner predictable from adolescent risk factors and, to some extent, predictive of young adult adjustment. Future research is needed to further understand the implications for young adult development associated with such individual differences in experiences of the leaving home transition.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579402001086 Published online by Cambridge University Press