Correlates of Drug Abuse in Adolescents:
A Comparison of Families of Drug Abusers with Families of Nondrug Abusers

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This study was designed to compare drug-abusing adolescents and their families with nondrug-abusing adolescents and their families by (1) a comparison of the adolescents on measures of self-esteem and perceived parental behavior, (2) a comparison of the parents of drug-abusing adolescents with the parents of nondrug-abusing adolescents on child-rearing attitudes and on distortion in perceived parental behavior, and (3) an identification of the salient factors contributing to the prediction of drug-use in adolescents. The subjects in this study were 26 clinical inpatient drug-abusing adolescents and their parents and 26 nondrug-abusing adolescents and their parents. Test data consisted of the adolescent's self-esteem score on the Self Esteem Inventory (SEI), the adolescent's factor score on the Child's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory—Revised (CRPBI-R), and the parents' scale score on each of the five factors of the Parent Attitude Survey (PAS). Findings indicate that the adolescent's self-esteem and perception of parental behavior, the ability of the parents to predict the child's parental perceptions, and the professed parental attitudes toward confidence and responsibility in child rearing all combine to suggest a set of factors differentiating the drug-abusing adolescent from the nondrug-abusing adolescent.

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INTRODUCTION

Recorded history suggests that a society's youth unquestionably has been both its most valuable possession and its greatest challenge. Adolescence, especially, with its fast-paced developmental changes, has been noted as a puzzling and difficult age. Unfortunately, the rapid developmental changes occurring naturally in the adolescent are accompanied in contemporary society by rapid environmental and social changes that compound the family's problem in providing necessary stability. As the family attempts to adapt to a swiftly changing world, parents often are unsuccessful in their adaptations to contemporary family life, and too many adolescents have turned to the drug culture for a meaningful life-style. As a result, one of the most pervasive and destructive problems confronting our youth today is that of adolescent drug abuse. An understanding of the personal and social contributors which make the adolescent vulnerable to chemical abuse is an important step in solving the complex problem.

Because one of the most influential and contiguous aspects of the adolescent's environment is the family, a natural focus for research into contributing influences of drug abuse is on young abusers and their families (Crockett, 1971; Feldman, 1973; Kadushin, 1972). Previous writers have indicated a relationship between negative family perceptions and adolescent disturbances (Anolik, 1980; Conger, 1977, 1981; Croake, 1981; Van der Veen and Novak, 1974). Available research has not clearly delineated the role of the family in adolescent drug use, however, and there is a continuing need for additional research on the components of family interaction that contribute to the personality and coping mechanisms of the young drug user (National Institute of Drug Abuse, 1974). The adolescent's self-image, for example, is influenced by the family's attitudes toward the adolescent (Coopersmith, 1968; Matteson, 1974) and has been suspected as a factor in the genesis of substance abuse (Brehm and Black, 1968; Matteson, 1974; Moos et al., 1977). The parent's attitude toward the adolescent, the perception of this attitude by the adolescent, and family communication and its distortion effects comprise some major components of family interaction that have not yet been considered as interactive contributions to drug abuse behaviors.

This research explored the child-rearing attitudes of parents of drug-abusing adolescents and the parents of nondrug-abusing adolescents. In addition, a measure of distortion between the adolescent's and the parent's perception of parental behavior was assessed as a possible indicator of adequate or inadequate family communication and as an indicator of how the child believes the parent acts. Adolescent self-esteem and its possible contribution to differences in the drug-using behavior of the two groups were