

# Janet Belsky's Experiencing the Lifespan, 2e

## Chapter 9 Cognitive and Socioemotional Development



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## Adolescence: Setting the Context

- Term "adolescence" first described by G. Stanley Hall in 1904
- Stage of life defined as "storm and stress"
  - intense moodiness, emotional sensitivity, and risk-taking tendencies
- Became a distinct stage of life in twentieth century when going to high school was routine.

## History of adolescence

- Approximately 100 years ago, most children left school after 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> grade to find jobs.
- Great Depression limited jobs leaving young people with no direction.
- Roosevelt administration implemented a program to encourage young people to attend school.
- 1935 – 75% of all U.S. teens were attending high school.

## Stage characteristics of adolescence developed

- Due to increase high school attendance, intellectual skills of adolescences increased.
  - Caused gap with mostly less-educated, immigrant parents
  - Adolescents begin spending less time with parents and more time as a group
- With recognition of teens as a lucrative market, businesses began targeting the group, thus helping to develop the adolescent culture.
  - Music, dress, language affected
- 1960s and 70s led to a more bonded baby-boomer teens, who rejected conventional rules.
  - This transformed views of marriage, gender roles and basic ways of life.

## The Mysterious Teenage Mind

- 3 classic theories to help understand teenage thinking
  - Piaget's formal operational stage
  - Kohlberg's Stages of moral judgment
  - Elkind's Adolescent Egocentrism

## Piaget's formal operational stage

- Final stage of cognitive growth (age 12)
  - Can think logically about concepts and hypothetical *possibilities*
  - Can think abstractly about ideas
  - Can reason like "real scientists"
  - Reaching this stages allows the teen to "act" like an adult

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## Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

- Preconventional level (no internal moral sense)
  - Responses focused on personal punishments and rewards
- Conventional level (most adults are here)
  - Responses focused on obeying society's rules and norms
- Postconventional level (rarely achieved at any age)
  - Responses focus on inner moral guidelines apart from society

## Kohlberg's famous problem: the Heinz dilemma

❖ A woman is near death from cancer. One drug might save her. The druggist was charging... ten times what the drug cost him to make. The... husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together half of what it cost. [He] asked... druggist to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said NO! Heinz broke into the man's store to steal the drug... Should he have done that? Why?

- Preconventional Response – "Heinz should not take the drug because he will be punished and have to go to jail."
- Conventional response – "Although human life is important, Heinz must follow the rules."
- Postconventional response – "Heinz did the right thing because nothing is more important than life."

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## Issues with theories

- Piaget
  - Formal operational thinking is rare even among adults.
- Kohlberg
  - Does how one talks about abstract moral situations really relate to how one acts morally in the real world?
- Conclusions to be drawn
  - Take these ideas loosely, but understand that teen's thinking does become more logic-focused, more future-oriented, and sometimes much more attuned to social injustices.

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## Elkind's Adolescent Egocentrism

- Developed from Piaget's formal operations
- Attempt to help make sense of teen's emotional states
- Adolescents become aware of the flaws of others
- Thus becoming obsessed with what other's think about their own personal flaws

## Adolescent Egocentrism - Defining characteristics

- Think their own actions are the center of everyone else's thoughts
- Are hypersensitive to what others think
- Believe they are unique in the world

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## Adolescent egocentrism - two facets

- Imaginary Audience
  - Teens feel as if they are "on stage."
  - Everyone is looking at me and judging me
- Personal Fable
  - Teens feel as if they are unique and special
  - Nothing can hurt me
  - May lead to risky behavior, particularly in males

## Adolescent stereotypes: Aspects of "Storm and Stress"

- Are adolescents more socially sensitive? Yes!
  - Research indicates that in emotionally charged situations, teens become more vulnerable to negative peer pressure.
  - There is a tendency for immediate gratification over future rewards.

## Adolescent stereotypes: Aspects of "Storm and Stress"

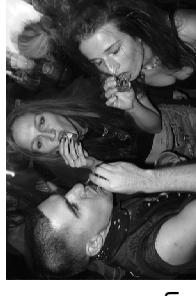
- Are adolescents risk takers? Yes!
  - Research indicates that most U.S. high school seniors report having sampled alcohol.
  - 2 in 10 report binge drinking (5 or more drinks at one time).
  - Research indicates that a large majority of teens described their in risky behavior on social networking sites.

## Adolescent stereotypes: Aspects of "Storm and Stress"

- Are adolescents more emotional, more emotionally disturbed or both? No!
  - Research indicates that adolescents are typically confident, zestful, and hopeful about the future.
  - While most teens are flourishing, about 6% reported feeling overwhelmed by life.
    - This can lead to risky behaviors such as self-mutilation or substance abuse to deal with the stress.

## Identifying At-risk teens

- Most "at risk" teens tend to have:
  - Emotional problems earlier in life-externalizing problems (e.g., aggressive behavior)
  - Poor relationships with family members (e.g., disconnect from parents)
  - Deviant behavior that begins in middle school (e.g., drinking, taking drugs, truancy)
  - Lack of passionate interests (e.g., life is just about having fun)



## At-risk teens or successful adults?

- It is important to distinguish between:
  - Adolescence-limited turmoil – antisocial behavior during the teenage years
  - Life-course difficulties – antisocial behaviors that continue into adult life
- Some at-risk teens find success as adults.

## Which teens are successful?

- Qualities that promote thriving
  - Close family relationships
  - Prosocial friends
  - Academic success
  - Strong schools and communities rich in nurturing activities
  - Developing a passion or having a special talent (e.g., music)
  - A strong religious faith and commitment
- Thriving depends on nature and nurture—personal qualities (nature) and a nurturing outside world (environment)

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## Interventions: What can society do to help teens?

- Don't legally punish adolescents as if they were adults
  - focus on rehabilitation
- Limit adolescents access to dangerous activities
  - raising age of obtaining driver's license, focus on controlling underage drinking)
- Capitalize on adolescent strengths; their need to feel powerful in a nurturing way
  - Encourage *youth development programs* (e.g., 4H clubs, teenage church groups, high school plays)
- Change school systems to accommodate the teenage mind
  - Considering teen sleep patterns, hands-on learning environments

## Tips for parents

1. Understand strong emotions and put emotional reactions in perspective. "I hate myself" or "I hate you" may not mean as much as you think. These negative comments don't mean the teens doesn't love you.
2. Do worry if your adolescent becomes withdrawn, angry or depressed over time; the teen may be in trouble.
3. Keep the lines of communication open; know when to get involved and when to give space.
4. Parents should avoid harsh criticism of teen; avoid too much pressure to succeed.
5. Try to get the teen connected with a passion or activity.

## Important facts regarding Adolescent-Parent Relationships

- Teens experience positive feelings during interactions with parents such as sharing a meal, joking with parents, although these moments are few.
- Teens feel most upbeat with friends.
- While teens' most uplifting moments are with their families, negative emotions outweigh positives 10 to 1.
- Most conflicts between teens and parents are based on rules (such as curfew, doing homework, cleaning room), not basic societal issues such as the state of the world.

## Important facts regarding Adolescent-Parent Relationships

- Conflicts are often at their peak during puberty, and then relationships get better as teenagers push for autonomy and construct a more equal relationship with their parents as adults.
- As teens get more freedom (e.g., driving) they spend less time with their parents but have more quality time "as adults."
- There is a cultural dimension—with ethnic minority groups not feeling the same intense pressure to separate at a young age.
- One myth is that parents tend to find the adolescent years difficult and challenging. Many parents find these years with their adolescent very rewarding.

## Peer Relationships: Groups

- Connecting in groups to get to romance:
  - Cliques— intimate groups of approximately 6 members
  - Crowds— less intimate larger groups (composed of girls and boys)
  - Unisex cliques → mixed sex crowds → mixed sex cliques → romance (a process that takes from middle school well thru the high school years!)



## Understanding Crowds

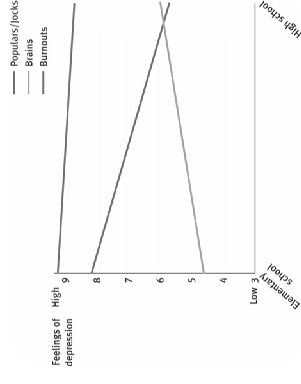
- Teens gravitate toward the crowds that fit their interests and disengage from a crowd when its interests diverge from their own.
- Distinctive crowds ("Goths" or "brains") may be a vehicle for helping teens find their own kind in large anonymous high schools.
- Crowd types in the developed world have amazing similarities.

## Types of crowds

- Academics— brains, nerds, grinds, eggheads
- Jocks— athletes
- Popular kids— hotshots, preppies, elites, princesses
- Deviants— burnouts, dirties, freaks, drugies, potheads,
- Residual type— Goths, alternatives, grubs, loners, caters, independents

## Different Emotional Pathways Traveled by Specific High School Crowds

- Kids who end up in different high school crowds move in interesting emotional direction.
- Jocks and popular became more confident.
- Brains become less confident than in elementary school.
- Deviants usually remain consistently depressed, from elementary to middle school, leading to gravitating toward bad crowds.



## Bad Crowds

- **Basic principle: Kids who are having trouble getting along with their teachers, parents, and peers gravitate to "bad crowds." Being in a bad crowd encourages more antisocial acts**
  - The leader is the most antisocial member—and the others get more antisocial by modeling this person.
  - Therefore, there is a competition to who can be "the worst"—and so the group gets into wilder, more dangerous antisocial acts.
  - Deviancy training— by videotaping boys talking, researchers show how young teens at risk for trouble bond by reinforcing one another with conversations related to being "bad"... and therefore cement the tendency to act in anti-social ways.

## Understanding gangs

- Gangs defined – a close knit delinquent peer group
- Provide members with status, protection, and income (through criminal activities). Have the potential to turn time-limited adolescent turmoil into life-course criminal careers
- More prevalent in communities where life is dangerous and there are few options for a successful adult life
- Changing the environment may not be the solution.
- One study moved inner city children to middle-class communities and found that those children actually did worse. Teens experienced more isolation as "those scary kids from the city."

## Understanding adolescence worldwide

- In some improvised nations, adolescence does not exist.
- According to the United Nations Children's Fund, 1 million children enter the sex trade every year.
- Others are forced to become soldiers (as young as 8 to 10 years old).
- Ultimately, adolescence doesn't exist, as well as a reasonable adult life.