

## **Adolescent Social Development**

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Views about the manner and nature of human development have changed across time (Psyking.net 2016). Some of these views have been religious (e.g., creationism) and some of these views have been more biological (e.g., preformationism). Regardless of the focus of the view, how we believe human beings develop has a profound effect on our expectations for those beings. One early view of human development from a biological perspective was **Preformationism**. This is explained as, “A notion that was widespread among pioneer biologists in the 18th century was that the fetus, and hence the adult organism that develops from it, is preformed in the sex cells. Some early microscopists even imagined that they saw a tiny homunculus, a diminutive human figure, encased in the human spermatozoon” (Brittanica.com 2016). If this is the notion we hold about human development, then we would be unlikely to consider development to occur in phases or stages and assume, instead, that development is simply a maturation process – eat food and grow bigger and stronger.

On the opposite side of the preformationism view is the concept of **Epigenesis**. Considered, “The antithesis of the early preformation theories was theories of epigenesis, which claimed that the sex cells were structureless jelly and contained nothing at all in the way of rudiments of future organisms” (Brittanica.com 2016). If human development is viewed epigenetically, the assumption is that the human being will grow and change in potentially dramatic ways across time. Additionally, if this is assumed, one would expect that situational variables (such as poverty, child-rearing practices or educational opportunities) could have a profound impact on how the individual develops. Lastly, it would be reasonable to assume with this approach that human development is not just about getting older and getting bigger but that phases and stages of life could be, in some ways, fundamentally different from each other (e.g., Erikson 1968).

The first use of the term “Adolescence” was by then APA President, G. Stanley Hall. He suggested a new phase of human development brought about by social changes at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Since Hall’s efforts to draw attention to this phase of development, and the first study on adolescence that he conducted, much attention has been paid to this time period in human development. A primary focus of this attention has been the social and emotional changes that take place during this phase (Hall 1904). Indeed, it was Hall who first suggested that adolescence could be considered a time of “sturm and drang” (storm and stress). Hall perceived adolescence as a turbulent time and one in which the young person vacillates back and forth between contradictory moods, tendencies, emotions, and the like (see Hall 1916). So, for what appears to be the first time when considering human development, we have a thinker who truly recognizes adolescence as a fundamentally different phase of the human lifespan with a strong emphasis on the social and emotional changes that are likely to take place during that time.

Perhaps the most important element of Hall’s view of adolescence, was his view of the turbulence brought about by vacillating thoughts and feelings. Hall felt this was inevitable, perhaps because the young person has one foot still planted in childhood (and the selfishness associated with that phase) and is placing one foot in adulthood (and the responsibilities and expectations for caring for others that can be a hallmark of that phase). This straddling of phases (between childhood and adulthood), of course, would lead to contradictory moods, feelings and social goals (Hall 1916). Another important element of Hall’s views for any discussion of adolescent social development was his emphasis on the importance of peers. Surely, no parent nor adolescent fails to notice the importance placed on peers. But Hall incorporated the importance of these individuals into his view of adolescent development. Because one is feeling such contradictory feelings, it is understandable to believe that “no one knows what I’m going through.” Because the adolescent is leaving childhood behind, children cannot understand who they are becoming. Because they are not yet an adult, adults cannot understand who they are becoming. That leaves peers as the only individuals the young person might believe “gets it” (Hall 1904; 1916). So, the importance of adolescent social development – not understood at all before Hall’s time – is now front and center in the study of adolescence.

Before discussing major areas in which adolescent social development is taking place (e.g., peer relationships, family, etc.), it would be wise to consider one over-arching aspect of adolescent social development that may underscore all the others – the development of a personal identity (Osborne 2017). In other words, before discussing the outward manifestations of adolescent social development, it is of fundamental importance to understand what is happening inside the adolescent in terms of social development (primarily personal identity development and self-centered attitudes).

### **Personal Identity & Ethnic Identity**

One of the most important aspects of personal identity is the quest to figure out both how one is similar to others (who are the “in-groups” to which I belong) and how am I different (those would be the “out-groups”). Individuals appear to have both a “personal identity” and a “social identity.” Identity development, in fact, has long been considered one of the fundamental tasks of adolescence (Erikson 1968). In an earlier work on Social Comparison (Osborne 2017), the author outlined the importance of developing a personal and social identity. Personal identity includes a sense of one’s attributes (e.g., I am trustworthy, I am a son, I am a friend) and where one belongs – often associated with membership in groups that define who we believe ourselves to be (e.g., I am a baseball player, I am a Muslim, I am a member of the Science Club).

Hogg (2006), summarized the work on Social Identity Theory. Shonnelle may think of herself as a “Christian” (a social identity) and as “honest” (a personal identity). The point is, these personal and social identities are fundamental to who we believe ourselves to be. Because they are developing primarily in adolescence – the time in which Erikson (1968) believed it was most important for us to ask the “Who am I?” question, an understanding of the development of and implications of these aspects of our identity is fundamental to truly understanding the significance of social development in adolescence.

Social Identity, then, has powerful implications for how we interact with others. These implications, would include: (1) who we choose to interact with, (2) who we might choose to avoid in terms of interactions, (3) how we process information about those others – likely favorably if they are part

of our “in-group” and less favorably if they are part of an “out-group”, and (4) what we expect from those “others” in future interactions (e.g., Turner 1985).

Turner and others (e.g., McLeod 2008; Tajfel & Turner 1979; 1986; Turner 1985) assessed the impact of social identity theory on the assumptions individuals make about others. The foundation of Social Identification Theory suggests human beings: (1) categorize, (2) identify, and (3) compare. We categorize people into social categories because this aids in our understanding of the world and our desire to be able to understand others and predict what they will do (or not do). We identify with groups with which we belong – and, as a part of this identification process, we come to align our identities (shift them to better fit) those groups. As a result, we gain a strong sense of our identity and feelings of self-worth from those identifications. Lastly, we compare – we make judgments about ourselves (and therefore gain or lose feelings of self-worth), in part, by comparing ourselves to others – both those who are in the same groups we are (in-groups) and those who are in different groups (out-groups).

Brewer and Gardner (1996) outline three levels of self. These levels, they argue, differ by the degree to which one’s individuality or uniqueness is stressed: (1) the superordinate level, (2) social identity, and (3) personal identity. These are, of course, related to the categorizations already outlined from social identity theory. At the superordinate level, the focus is on similarity instead of difference. We are all more alike, for example, as human beings, than different. It is not uncommon to hear an adolescent exclaim surprise that adults cannot see the “humanness” in others who are different. At the social identity level, however, self begins to be categorized based on in-group membership and out-group difference. This, as already outlined, is an important part of the adolescent quest to develop an identity and answer the “who am I?” question (e.g., Erikson 1968) but clearly can lead to negative interactions with those others defined as part of out-groups. Lastly, at the personal identity level there is a need to be unique in comparison to others – even those who are part of the in-group.

In terms of this personal identity, Marilyn Brewer (2003), suggests that individuals (starting in childhood and clearly becoming more important during the social development of adolescence) seek a balance between uniqueness and fitting in. Brewer referred to this balance as “Optimal Distinctiveness”.

If an adolescent has achieved this balance – this optimal distinctiveness – she or he will have a sense of belonging from being a part of in-groups, but also will feel unique and valuable because self is not “exactly” like everyone else. In other words, we all want to be different...but not too different! This is especially, it seems, pertinent to discussions of adolescent social development (e.g., Abrams 2009).

Social Identity comparisons, however, don't just have implications for how we feel about ourselves – they also impact how we feel about those in our in-groups and those in out-groups (e.g., Turner 1985). Part of social development during this time (again, beginning in childhood but becoming particularly important during adolescence), involves viewing the groups with which we identify as positive and, therefore, gaining positive self-worth as a result. In this sense, the groups with which an individual identifies (in-groups) come to be viewed more positively than out-groups and, as a result, self can be viewed more positively as well. There is a “cost” to this assessment, however. If the groups to which we identify are to be viewed positively, it is often accomplished by viewing the out-groups less favorably. In this manner, the adolescent comes to view similar others as better and more valued compared to those who are different. This is not done purposefully or even consciously (Brown 2012).

This tendency has been termed the “better than average effect” (e.g., Alicke 1985). The assignment of positive value to in-groups, is most likely maximized by also assigning negative value to out-groups. Brown and Kobayashi (2002) suggest that this “better-than-average effect” tendency encompasses members of our extended self – the groups to which we identify and compare. As a result, our friends, our families, our soccer teams, our colleagues in the same school, are (by and large) considered better than average, too.

Of course, no discussion on identity should be considered complete without some discussion of ethnic identity. Clearly how one would define successful identity development can differ from culture to culture and various ethnic groups place different emphases on what elements of identity are considered more important than others. Regardless of those differences, the overall message is quite clear, the extent to which the adolescent effectively integrates ethnic identity into overall identity has positive implications for the overall “health” of one's identity. One of the most heavily referenced and researched models of

ethnic identity is that of Phinney (e.g., Phinney and Ong 2007). Phinney defines ethnic identity as “a sense of personal investment to one’s ethnic group”. It would be much easier, it seems, to be “invested” in one’s ethnic group if one is surrounded by others of that same group. The adolescent, however, who has an ethnic identity that differs from the dominant culture in which she or he is living, might experience difficulty in enculturating that identity within the broader culture (e.g., Kim and Abreu 2001).

Social Identity Theory (outlined earlier) connects with ethnic identity to the extent that belief in the superiority of one’s in-group is an important contributor to self-esteem (e.g. Tajfel and Forgas 2000). So, again, the degree to which one enculturates ethnic identity into one’s overall identity has been associated with positive self-esteem, a strong sense of social identity and positive adjustment (Fuligni, Witkow and Garcia 2005). Keeping the importance of identity in mind as we venture further into adolescent social development, the remainder of this chapter will take a brief look at: (1) Self-Centered Attitudes, (2) Peer Relationships and Friendship, (3) Parent-child relationships, (4) Romantic relationships, (5) Sexual behavior, (6) Sexual orientation, (7) School, (8) Work, and (9) Community.

### **Self-Centered Attitudes**

As early as the 1950’s, researchers began to recognize that one important element of adolescence is a strong focus on self (e.g., Piaget 1951) as one attempts to make sense of self in relation to the rest of the world (Coleman and Hendry 1990). Indeed, Piaget believed that this egocentrism of childhood should begin to give way to a more sociocentric view of the world during the period of adolescence (Piaget 1951) but other researchers believed that egocentrism is still strong during adolescence (Elkind 1967). Regardless of whether egocentrism is more a hallmark of childhood or adolescence, the researchers seem to agree that shifting from egocentrism to more sociocentric views (seeing self in relation to others in a social world) is a primary task of adolescence (Coleman and Hendry, 1990). But, what factors promote or inhibit this shift from egocentric to sociocentric thinking?

Jean Piaget (Piaget 1951; Piaget and Inhelder 1969) did much to illuminate our understanding of the thought processes associated with various stages of human development. For Piaget (1951; 1972; 1990) human cognitive development (which, we will see, relates to social development especially in

terms of egocentric thinking) occurs in four stages. These are sensorimotor (typically associated with children in infancy), preoperational (associated with toddlers and children in early childhood), concrete operations (elementary school-aged children and early adolescence) and formal operations (adolescence to adulthood). For the purposes of this chapter, our attention is focused on those children who are either in the concrete operations stage (those early adolescents) or formal operations (those later adolescents). Piaget considered concrete operational thinking to be characterized by an increasing ability to manipulate symbols (such as mathematic computations) related to concrete objects (non-abstract). Additionally, the young person is becoming less egocentric (more able to take on the perspective of others). In the formal operations stage, thinking becomes even less egocentric and the individual becomes increasingly able to think abstractly (thinking about such abstract ideas, for example, as justice, fairness or peace). As a result of this ability to think in more abstract terms, the young person also becomes significantly less egocentric because she or he is better able to take on the perspective of others and recognize that others might see the world differently (Piaget 1990).

So, the developing adolescent is becoming both more self-focused (e.g., “who am I?”, “what is my purpose in life?”) and other-focused and able to think in more abstract terms about concepts (such as justice) that incorporate both self and other. It would not be unusual during this phase (any phase of life, likely, but perhaps stronger during this phase) for the young person to grapple with optimal distinctiveness (Brewer 2003). As already discussed earlier, the concept of “optimal distinctiveness” relates to the human need to be both unique (distinctive) and belong (not be too different). To the extent that this balance can be achieved, the individual has both a sense of purpose (I know who I am and what I want to do) and a sense of belonging (I fit in and people care about me) that allows one to approach social situations with less fear of the unknown (Granic, Dishion and Hollenstein, 2003). There would likely be, then, a direct parallel between both of the concepts discussed in this section – egocentrism and optimal distinctiveness) and peer relationships.

### **The Manifestations of Adolescent Social Development**

According to the website, [oureverydaylife.com](http://oureverydaylife.com) (2016), adolescence is characterized by changes in five primary areas – several of which are pertinent to a discussion of social development. These five areas are: (1) labile emotions, (2) personal identity, (3) independent and testing boundaries, (4) self-centered attitudes, and (5) peer relationships. The American Psychological Association (2002) published a major report on adolescent development. In this report, adolescent social development was discussed in five areas: (1) Peer Relationships (including dating and sexual behavior), (2) Family Relationships, (3) School, (4) Work, and (5) Community (APA 2002, 3). Given the priority both of these resources place on these categories of adolescent social development, it will help our understanding of that social development in adolescence to take a look at each of these (and a few others!) in more depth.

### **Peer Relationships (Friendships)**

Peer relationships clearly take on increasing importance during adolescence. Part of the reason for this has already been outlined – the need for personal identity. As such, the adolescent needs to separate self from family and find out where she or he belongs. Although peer relationships in adolescence start out primarily same-sex (especially in the early adolescent years of 9-13), they quickly become gender-mixed (ages 14-16) and (especially during ages 17-19) intimate (APA 2002). As already mentioned, Granville Stanley Hall (1904; 1916) was the first psychologist to focus attention on the phase of adolescence, in general, and on the social development aspects of it, in particular. Because the adolescent has a foot in both the childhood and adults worlds, it is understandable that peers (those going through the same things) would become increasingly important – predominantly because the adolescent might view peers as the only ones to truly understand what they are going through (e.g., [Psyking.net](http://Psyking.net)).

It might seem, from the discussion thus far, that adolescent social development is chaotic and unpredictable. In some sense, that might be true. Though no one can know, ahead of time anyway, how much storm and stress - or “*sturm und drang*” to borrow Hall’s original terms - an adolescent will experience, it is clear that social development will both foster some of that storm and stress but also play a role in calming the storm (Hall 1904; 1916). In other words, though the storm and stress may be inevitable or even necessary elements of the adolescent transition, they need not be debilitating nor leave



permanent scars! Indeed, Erik Erikson claimed that the crisis of developing ego-identity is the primary task of adolescence and, though the crisis is inevitable, the healthy resolution of that crisis is what allows the adolescent to make the appropriate transition to adulthood (Erikson 1968).

In his stage theory of psychosocial development, Erikson outlined 8 stages of human development from birth to death. In each of these stages, a crisis must be confronted and, to the extent that healthy development will follow, successfully resolved. Carrying this logic into the conversation of the storm and stress of adolescence, then, the storm and stress crisis of identity development is not avoidable so healthy resolution of that crisis should be the goal (Erikson 1950). But what would such healthy development look like? James Marcia (1967; 1980), extended Erikson's work and clarified our understanding of both the social nature of identity development and how one can resolve the identity crisis in a healthy way. Marcia suggested that the primary task of any stage of human development (in adolescence that task being the development of an identity – or an answer to the “who am I?” question) is the crisis of development of that stage and how that question is answered becomes the commitment that is carried forward into the next stage. In adolescence, the crisis is reflected in the asking of the “who am I?” question. The commitment is reflected in whether one has an answer to that question and where that answer came from. From this, Marcia outlines four identity “statuses” (diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and achievement) that predict either healthy identity movement into the adult stages or unhealthy identity movement into those same stages.

The first status is diffusion. In diffusion (sometimes also called “confusion”), the individual has not asked the “who am I?” question. Although in childhood, not having asked this question is perfectly okay; one cannot really make a healthy and appropriate transition into adulthood without having asked and answered such a question (Marcia 1967; 1980). As such, what one does to determine an answer is a crucially important element of social development in adolescence. In the status of foreclosure, the individual has an answer to the “who am I?” question, but the answer did not come from self, it came from some outside entity (e.g., society, parents, peers). So, a crisis has not been experienced because one has a ready-made commitment to an identity, but that has simply been accepted from others. With

moratorium, the crisis of “who am I?” is ongoing and present. Although this might sound bad, both Erikson and Marcia defined crisis as a “demand for change” and not as something bad. Indeed, the healthy resolution of the identity crisis during adolescence is one of the hallmarks of healthy social development moving into adulthood (Erikson 1950, 1968; Marcia 1967; 1980).

So, healthy social development, according to these thinkers, involves carrying a firm and self-determined understanding of who one is from adolescence into adulthood. The last identity status is identity achievement. This is easy to understand. If crisis is necessary (one must ask the “who am I?” question) and a commitment is needed in order to move forward into adulthood with a firm sense of one’s self in relation to others (a hallmark, it would seem, of healthy social development), then identity achievement would be the goal. With this status, one has confronted the crisis, asked “who am I?” and resolved that crisis for him or herself. This personal commitment to an identity, then, seems important for personal commitment to adult concerns such as work or occupation, core values, intimacy and sexuality (e.g., Psyking.net). To clarify, it is useful to keep in mind that healthy identity development according to these researchers involves starting with diffusion (children are not born – nor should they be – knowing what they want to become), transitioning into moratorium (the active search process initiated by the individual and most often occurring in adolescence) and settling into identity achievement as one moves into adulthood. The identity achievement, then, involves both having pondered who one is AND arrived at one’s own answer to that question (Erikson 1950; 1968; Marcia 1967; 1980).

### **Parent-Child and Family Relationships**

As a result of changes brought on through social development, the adolescent’s relationship with parents (or caregivers) changes as well – perhaps as much, or more so, than relationships with peers (APA 2002, 3). None-the-less, the media portrayal of the apparent love-hate relationship between parents and adolescents is quite likely overstated. Indeed, in a 2000 report by the U.S. Council of Economic Advisors, research was reported showing that adolescents whose parents (caregivers) are more involved in their lives (measured quite simply by the frequency of eating meals together), have significantly fewer behavioral problems during adolescence than those with less frequent involvement with the parents.

Additionally, research has clearly shown that most youths experience a continuation of warm and affectionate relationships with parents (caregivers) throughout the adolescent phase and into adulthood (e.g., Guerney and Arthur 1984; Planned Parenthood 2016).

In a 2013 study, Elizabeth Flamm and Wendy Grolnick considered the issue of adolescent adjustment in the context of these life changes (e.g., increasing sociocentrism, increasing concerns about who one is, burgeoning sexuality, etc.). This study addressed the role of supportive parenting and adolescent self-perceptions on emotional outcomes following such events. Consistent with what has already been addressed in this chapter, the researchers found that the provision of structure by parents into the life of the adolescent was related to higher levels of self-perceived competency on the part of the adolescents and fewer behavioral problems regardless of the severity of the negative life event (Flamm and Grolnick 2013, 909).

Despite the adolescent's increasing push for independence (APA 2002), parents are encouraged to provide structure, guidance, open and honest communication, and discipline. Even if the teen seems to rail against these, research shows healthy adolescent social development (including the ability to resist negative peer pressure and a healthy sense of sexuality and comfort with one's sexual orientation) seems to result from these efforts (Cleveland Clinic 2014; Mauras, Grolnick and Friendly 2013).

Again, though the storm and stress is often considered a normal part of adolescent development and some of this storm and stress is caused by and influences family relationships, research does not support the notion that this is excessive in most youth. Indeed, one study reveals that only between 5 to 15% of adolescents are exceedingly rebellious toward adult authority and antisocial (Collins and Laursen 2004). This is good news for parents and caregivers concerned about the impact of the adolescent transition on family relationships. Additional research shows that if parents (caregivers) and teens can transition through the most turbulent time of conflict – early to mid-adolescence – the frequency of such conflicts will taper off in later adolescence. It is important to note, however, that though the frequency of such conflicts diminishes, the intensity of them does not. This reinforces the importance of how parents handle such conflicts (Laursen, Coy and Collins 1998).

Indeed, the Cleveland Clinic recommends the following for parents and caregivers in terms of facilitating healthy social development in an adolescent (Cleveland Clinic 2014): develop a close relationship, (2) help the child understand what peer pressure is; (3) strengthen family values; (4) enhance your teens self esteem and abilities; (5) teach and praise assertiveness; (6) allow breathing room; (7) listen to your child rather than telling them what to do; and (8) provide appropriate discipline.

### **Romantic relationships**

Rauer, Pettit, Lansford, Bates, and Dodge (2013) write, “Theorists have proposed that the development of early romantic relationships follows a phase-based approach, whereby adolescents begin with fairly short-term, shallow romantic connections primarily occurring in peer groups that develop into multiple shorter relationships that occur less in the group context and are defined more by emotional intimacy. In late adolescence, romantic development is thought to culminate in a single, committed intimate relationship of extended duration” (p. 2159). Clearly, a healthy progression through these phases is important for a successful transition into adult intimate relationships and will have an impact on sexual behavior, both in adolescence and into adulthood. Indeed, Conger, Cui, Bryant and Elder (2000), argue that the achievement of intimacy in a romantic relationship is a critical and fundamental task for entry into adulthood.

Contemporary views of emerging adulthood, such as Arnett (2000) suggest that adulthood is an emergent period (rather than a simple time marker such as “18 years old”) of exploration and transition. Clearly, this would have an impact on the development of romantic relationships especially of the kind that are considered fundamental to adulthood. If adulthood emerges through a combination of maturation and experience, as Arnett suggests, then romantic relationships would also emerge as a result of both biological processes (such as emerging sexuality) and experiences (perhaps through exploration) and this emergent phase (often considered to begin around 18 years old and continue until about 25 years old) would likely be characterized by exploration, instability, a gradual transition from self-focus to other-focus and, lastly, to a desire to establish a lasting connection with someone else (e.g., Arnett, 2000; Meier and Allen, 2009; Rauer, Pettit, Lansford, Bates and Dodge, 2013).

## **Sexual behavior**

Blossoming sexuality is often a point of great concern – both from the perspective of the parent and the adolescent (Balassone 1991). None-the-less, the news is, once again, not as bleak as one might think. Research shows that adolescent girls are more likely to practice safe-sex and use contraceptives when they believe their parents support such usage (Lerner and Galambos 1998). This is not to say that such adolescents would not be sexually active if the parents did not support safe-sex and contraceptive usage. Indeed, such support does not appear to encourage the sexual act but, instead, safe practices if the teen does decide to engage in sexual activity (Lerner and Galambos 1998). Additionally, peer relationships have been shown to have a profound impact on sexuality and sexual activity. Rejection by peers in the sixth grade was related to higher levels of sexual activity by girls over the following four year period. Those who experienced more peer rejection in the sixth grade were more likely to be sexually active and have more sexual partners over the next four years than those who experienced less peer rejection in the sixth grade. Perhaps, these young women perceived sexual activity as a method for achieving acceptance by their sex partners and, perhaps, by some of their female peers (Lerner and Galambos 1998, 424).

Tobin writes, “Sexuality is fundamental to who we are as human beings. Sexuality is expressed through thoughts, feelings, opinions, attitudes, and actions, and is influenced by genetics, society, and an individual’s background. A person’s sexuality is an essential feature of one’s character, and human beings are sexual beings irrespective of the level of expression” (Tobin 2017, p. 315). From this brief description, alone, we see how the topic of sexuality connects to all of the other topics outlined in this chapter. One’s sexuality is influenced by family and family views of what is appropriate or not based on one’s gender, peer and peer-relationships, community and society in general. With today’s technology and, especially, a significant increase in the use of social media outlets, it is no surprise that research suggests that social media use has a significant impact on adolescent sexuality (e.g., Brown, Keller, and Stern 2009). Indeed, research reveals four sexuality patterns that are associated with adolescent social media usage. First, are the “virgin valedictorians” who have no prior sexual experience and show the

least interest in sexual media. Opposite to these “virgins” are the “sexual sophisticates” who are very interested in sexual media and seek out and view pornography. These adolescents are most likely to have had sexual experience. The point here is **not** whether an adolescent explores sexual media. The point is that the frequency and type of sexual media explored will have an impact on the blossoming sexuality of that adolescent (Brown, Keller and Stearn 2009).

### **Sexual orientation**

According to Education.com, “A person's sexual orientation is his or her tendency to be attracted to people of the same sex (homosexual orientation), of the opposite sex (heterosexual orientation), or of both sexes (bisexual orientation). Given the tendency (at least in United States culture) to perceive the “appropriate” sexual orientation as one that is straight (e.g., Lick and Johnson 2016), a developing sexual orientation in adolescence that tends toward homosexuality or bisexuality (among other orientations) would be expected to be associated with adjustment issues, psychological health issues, bullying and even suicide (see Becker, Cortina, Tsai and Eccles 2014; Ngamake, Walch and Raveepatarakul 2016).

The question of how sexual orientation develops has been considered for generations. Research suggests that the developmental process might be somewhat different for males than it is for females (e.g., Education.com) but general consensus suggests four stages of sexual orientation development (e.g., Troiden 1988). The first stage is a stage of “sensitization” and usually occurs during puberty. In this stage, the young person begins to recognize the feeling of being different from his or her same-sex peers. Because this occurs when the predominant relationships one has are with same sex-peers (and this is likely truer for young males than young females) many opportunities arise for the young person to become aware of similarities and differences between his or her sexual feelings and those of the same-sex peers.

Consistent with discussions of identity development earlier in this chapter (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Marcia 1980), sexual orientation development is also characterized by identity confusion. This occurs in the second stage (usually in the middle to late teen years of adolescence) and is associated with conflict between the young person’s self-image of being just like his or her same-sex peers and the current

feelings he or she is experiencing in terms of same-sex arousal or lack of heterosexual arousal (the perceived norm). The healthy outcome to the sensitization of stage one and the identity confusion of stage two is Identity assumption. Often beginning in the early twenties, this stage is characterized by a commitment on the part of the young person to the non-heterosexual identity. The person incorporates the non-heterosexual orientation into his or her identity and associates regularly with other individuals with a similar orientation. Incorporating one's sexual orientation into one's identity (likely taken for granted by those with a heterosexual orientation) is a necessary component of developing health and lasting romantic relationships. Doing so reflects the "commitment" stage of sexual orientation. The beginning of this stage is evidenced by the young person entering a non-heterosexual emotional and sexual relationship. The sexual orientation becomes a way of life and the individual comes to view that orientation as a valid and satisfying component of her or his identity.

### **School**

School is clearly an important element of adolescent development – both in positive and negative ways (Nichols 2009). As the adolescent is making the transition from a more egocentric to more sociocentric identity (as outlined above) and continuing to ponder the "who am I?" question that is part of the development of one's personal identity, environments outside the home, especially school, will take on increasing significance in identity development (Fitch and Adams 1983). Additionally, adolescents are considered to be cognitively different from their earlier childhood selves (e.g., Selman 2003) and, as such, school experiences will play an important role in either facilitating those cognitive changes in positive or negative ways. Robert Selman considers the development of interpersonal skills to be one of the primary social skills facilitated by the adolescent's experiences at school (Selman 2003, 17). In this work linking developmental theory to classroom practice, an emphasis is placed on: (1) social awareness (including advancements in interpersonal understanding, and (2) intimacy and autonomy (including social strategies schools can use to foster a stronger interpersonal orientation. In other words, Selman believes that one

very important element of the school experience can be the strengthening of an “other orientation” – the social identity and lessening of egocentrism already discussed in this chapter.

Of course, every discussion on the impact of school on social development in adolescence should include a discussion of bullying. Bullying is not new. But national attention was clearly focused on the issue by such high profile and horrific events like the mass shootings in Columbine High School in Colorado back in 1999. Unfortunately, such events are continuing. A national survey of youth (grades 6-10) found almost 30% of students reporting being involved in bullying. Being “involved” means being the bully, being the victim or both. Students who are bullied often report being lonely, feeling depressed and have low self-esteem. Those students who report being infrequently bullied, however, report being more strongly bonded to the school and seem to have more prosocial beliefs and engage in more prosocial acts (Nansel et al. 2001). A positive outcome of the national attention such tragedies have generated is an increased effort to understand and reduce bullying. A recent issue of Education Week (October 14 2016) included ten articles on bullying and efforts to combat it. These included: (1) how school and district leaders can prevent, identify, and respond to bullying, (2) state legislation aimed at protecting students from harassment, (3) research on the impact of bullying on academic achievement and (4) understanding how to recognize and respond to cyberbullying.

The bottom line appears to be very straightforward – bullying IS a social development issue (Camera 2016). Reporting for the U.S. News and World Reports, Lauren Camera cites data from a Princeton, Rutgers and Yale Universities study on students in 56 middle schools. This report concludes that schools can be significantly more effective in reducing bullying if they take advantage of the most social youth already in those schools. In other words, to assist in reducing bullying as an element of adolescent social development, the study suggests schools employ the “popular kids”. Efforts to reduce bullying have been shown to be significantly more successful when those strategies are led by the youth themselves (a kind of bottom-up approach) than when they are employed by the school administrators and teachers in a more top-down approach. When the most social media savvy students were equipped with colorful wristbands, t-shirts and other gear denouncing bullying, those schools saw up to a 30% reduction



in bullying compared to other efforts. So, once again, we see that adolescents are more likely to believe their peers “get it” and school efforts to curb bullying would do well to take that into consideration.

In a 2002 report, the American Psychological Association summarized findings on adolescence. The comments included in this report in terms of schools and adolescent social development, though brief, are especially powerful. Rather than summarize those words and risk losing their significance, they are quoted here in their entirety: “For most adolescents, school is a prominent part of their life. It is here that they relate to and develop relationships with their peers and where they have the opportunity to develop key cognitive skills. For some youth, it is also a source of safety and stability. Some of the same qualities that characterize families of adolescents who do well—a strong sense of attachment, bonding, and belonging, and a feeling of being cared about—also characterize adolescents’ positive relationships with their teachers and their schools. One additional factor, adolescent perception of teacher fairness, has also been found to be associated with positive adolescent development. These factors, more than the size of the school, the type of school (e.g., public, private), or teacher–pupil ratio, have been found to be strongly associated with whether adolescents are successful or are involved with drugs or delinquency or drop out of school (Resnick et al., 1997). Because schools are such a critical setting for adolescents, it can be important even for professionals who work in other settings to connect with the school psychologist, counselor, or social worker of an at-risk adolescent to help create a supportive system of care.” (APA 2002, 25-26).

## **Work**

Though many teens may seek employment principally for the financial benefits and freedoms such employment might bring, work (for those teens who secure employment) is considered by experts to be as influential on adolescent social development as peer relationships, school and family relationships (Mortimer 2010; Perry 2000; Westmaas, Gil-Rivas and Cohen 2007). Citing data from the Youth Development Study (a long-term, longitudinal study of youth development in the United States), Mortimer (2010) suggests that employment during adolescence assists the teen in developing “agency” and to build “human capital” as a part of adolescent social development. A sense of “agency,” of course,

relates back to the section on the development of a personal identity during adolescence and is also related to how the adolescent interacts with family and peers during this phase. So, though adolescent social development is thought of as occurring in the arenas most relevant to the adolescent's life (peer, family, school, work and community), social development interacts amongst these arenas as well (Flamm and Grolnick 2013; Osborne 2017). This is NOT to say that an adolescent who does not work will be deficient in these areas, just that employment can foster growth in these areas in the youth who work.

Several important terms were raised in this previous paragraph – namely “agency” and “human capital”. Though “agency” can be defined in many ways, Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “agency” as “the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power (merriam-webster.com 2016). This sense that one has both the capacity to act and that in doing so one can accomplish (power), clearly would relate to the developing adolescent. Indeed, this relates quite clearly to the concept of “self-efficacy” which has been an important concept in the psychology literature since first articulated by Albert Bandura (1997). Bandura defined self-efficacy based on one's belief in the ability to succeed in specific situations and to accomplish certain tasks. Clearly, feelings of self-efficacy would be related to feelings of self-worth and agency (Bandura 1997).

Based on the discussion already outlined in this chapter, then, it also seems clear that self-efficacy would both be influenced by and have an influence on peer relationships and family. But where does this sense of efficacy come from? Social Psychological researchers have discussed this in terms of social learning theory – learning in social situations and from others, especially those with importance to us (Bandura 1963) and attribution theory (the processes by which individuals explain the causes of events – Kelley 1967) among other factors. Social learning theory suggests that learning need not occur only by means of direct reinforcement and punishment. In other words, individuals can learn not only by engaging in action and learning from the consequences of those actions, but also by observing the actions of others and learning from those consequences (Bandura 2001, 9). Clearly, then, peer relationships and watching what happens to one's peers when they take action is an important element of both “self-efficacy” or “agency” and social learning. Again, it is easy to see how these factors would be both

influenced by peer and family relationships and also have an influence on those relationships and the approach one takes to work, school and community.

The American Psychological Association (2002) report has been mentioned numerous times throughout this chapter. The reason is quite simple; it nicely summarizes the literature on adolescent development and makes recommendations in all five areas discussed in this chapter (peers, family relationships, school, work and community). One of the most significant findings reported is that adolescent work can have positive effects (a sense of autonomy, self-esteem, etc.) but that the number of hours the adolescent works can quickly offset those positive benefits with negative ones. Adolescents who worked 20+ hours per week, for example, were significantly at higher risk for job-related injuries, lower levels of educational attainment, poor sleep and substance abuse. Clearly, these are not the kind of outcomes one would want in exchange for a sense of autonomy, self-esteem and the ability to make one's own purchases.

Researchers reported the outcomes from a 16-year longitudinal study assessing the relationships between social and academic adjustment and work and career uncertainties among more than 200 Italian youths (Blumenthal, Silbereisen, Pastorelli and Castellani 2015). In this study, youth who were either employed or unemployed were assessed for career uncertainty and this was related to existing academic and social adjustment ratings. According to the findings, young persons who were employed perceived a lower load of work-related uncertainties (concerns over establishing one's self in a career, future employment prospects, etc.) than the youth who were unemployed. Additionally, the findings revealed an important moderator relationship between employment status and adjustment. Indeed, employment status appeared to moderate the associations between earlier adjustment and perceived work-related uncertainties in adulthood. A higher level of academic adjustment was significantly related to a lower level of perceived uncertainties – but only for the unemployed group. So, academic and social adjustment appears to have an effect on employment uncertainties (clearly a mark of transitioning into adulthood) for those youth who are currently unemployed. The findings, of course, are not causal so it is not clear if

adjustment issues lead to unemployment and employment uncertainties but the causal relationships are clearly worth exploring (Blumenthal, et al. 2015, 166).

As can be seen from this very brief summary of the impact of work on the social development of the adolescent, the news is mixed. Though the sense of self-efficacy or “agency” that can derive from the adolescent joining the workforce can have very positive effects on the adolescent transition into adulthood (Bandura 2001), much of the impact work can have on that transition depends on academic and social adjustment prior to entering the workplace (e.g., Blumenthal, et al. 2015) and the number of hours the adolescent works (APA 2002). Additionally, it seems likely that research needs to be done addressing the reasons the adolescent works and how those motivations mediate the impact that work has on adolescent social development. It is one thing, it seems, to earn money to buy wanted things and quite another to have to work because the family needs the income.

### **Community**

Galambos and Leadbeater (2000) make the connection between adolescent social development and both the adolescent perception of community (e.g., whether they feel a part of the community, the degree to which they perceive the community as having anything to offer them, the perception of the community as non-judgmental of one’s youth, etc.) and changes in adolescent social development. These researchers suggest that school-community partnerships, for example, need to be an increasing element of research on adolescent development. Flanagan (2015) summarizes literature on adolescent involvement in the community. One common finding in this literature is that adolescent feelings of well-being are enhanced when those adolescents feel they are valued members of a community (Erikson 1968; Flanagan 2015). Putting these pieces together, then, it would seem that adolescent social development is enhanced by community involvement to the extent that the adolescent feels that his or her membership in and contributions to the community are mutually beneficial. In other words, the adolescent must perceive the community has something to offer him or her and the adolescent must feel that his or her contributions are valued.

Clarke and Cornish (1985; 2001) have long made the connection between individual feelings of choice and potential criminal behavior. Community and feelings of community appear to be an important element of this choice. As such, adolescents that do not feel connected to or valued by the more traditional “community” may seek out alternative places to “fit” (Merrin, Hong and Espelage 2015). Indeed, research assessing the protective and risk factors for gang-involved youth show that adult community support (and involvement) for youth and perceptions of community safety on the part of youth are negatively correlated with gang involvement. In other words, youth who perceive adult community support for them and perceive the community as safe for them are less likely to get involved in gangs, whereas youth that perceive less adult community support for them and perceive the community as less safe are more likely to become involved in gangs (Merrin, Hong and Espelage 2015, 531). Clearly, much needs to be learned about what variables influence an adolescent’s perception of care from adults in the community and perceptions of safety in the community, but the significance of such findings for the impact of community on adolescent social development should not be minimized.

Studies also remind us that behavior patterns of youths unfold across the lifespan and continuously change (Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith and Tobin 2003). Given this, no attempt to understand the impact of community on youth involvement in positive (e.g. volunteer work, community pride campaigns, etc.) or negative (e.g., gang involvement, vandalism, truancy, etc.) can paint a very clear picture if the data are gathered at just one point in the adolescent’s life (Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith and Tobin 2003). Contrary to perceptions many may have (perhaps, especially, parents), research by Thornberry et al. (2003) suggests that youth gang involvement starts with more distal (further away) structural variables (such as neighborhood and community) and then progress to the more proximal (close) variables such as family. This fits in line, of course, with the previously mentioned work on adolescent perceptions of the degree to which his or her contributions to the community would be valued and the extent to which he or she believes the community has something to offer (Flanagan 2015). When an adolescent feels that the adults in the community support them and would welcome their involvement in the community and those adolescents feel that the community is safe should they get involved, that

goodness of fit seems to promote successful community involvement and buffer against gang involvement (Merrin, Hong and Espelage 2015).

### **Wrapping it Up**

In just a few pages, we have taken a journey through much that is known about adolescent social development. We have explored the media popularized notion of the angst-riddled (or, as Hall 1916 put it, storm and stress) adolescent and learned that, though turmoil is normal, most teens experience adolescence as less turbulent than those media portrayals. At the same time, we have seen that a pervasive issue underlying adolescent development in all major areas (peers, family, school, work and community) is identity (Osborne 2017). Identity, we have discovered, is both personal (pondering the “who am I?” question) and social - delineating one’s in-groups and out-groups and garnishing a sense of belongingness and esteem from those in-group memberships – (Tajfel and Turner 1986). The adolescent is searching for a place to belong and this becomes increasingly difficult as she or he makes the transition from childhood to adulthood. We have described this as a kind of “foot in both worlds” feeling that would, rightly so, leave an adolescent considering “who gets me?” The children they are leaving behind are part of the past, and the adults they are trying to join are part of the future (Granic, Dishion and Hollenstein 2003). As such, it is no surprise that primary importance is placed on one’s peers and the primary environments in which one will interact with those peers (school, work and community).

But assisting the adolescent in making successful social transitions is not unattainable. We can recognize that adolescents will embark on a quest to show how different they are and, at the same time, struggle to just fit (Brewer and Gardner 1996). In this regard, we can give them space and help them balance the need to be different yet fit in. We can recognize that developing a sense of self and purpose is complicated by having multiple levels of self (Brewer and Gardner 1996) and that these levels, when resolved allow the individual to feel balanced between uniqueness and similarity. We also came to understand that the comparisons that adolescents make, though often bordering on the hateful and cruel, can also just be a manifestation of this tendency to over-value one’s “in-groups” and devalue the out-groups. As long as this does not cross over into bullying, research suggests all will settle down nicely at

the end of the adolescent social transition (Camera 2016). The work by Marcia (1967) points out the importance of going through the identity crisis process (the active search for an answer to the “who am I?” question), through diffusion and into identity achievement. Rather than perceiving this crisis as “bad”, then, we can understand that it is not only normal but healthy for the adolescent to go through this struggle provided, of course, that she or he comes out of the process with a self-determined identity.

When it comes to work and community, we can be diligent in assisting the adolescent in understanding that the adult cares about them and values what they contribute both at home and in the community. We can facilitate the feelings of agency (self-efficacy) that can come from being employed and, at the same time, be diligent to help the adolescent avoid the pitfalls of working too much (20+ hours weekly) or for the wrong reasons (to buy what everyone else is buying). All in all, adolescent social development can be perceived as an exciting time with much to be gained from having gone through the proverbial “growing pains” of figuring out who one is and where one fits in terms of peers, family, school, work and community.

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