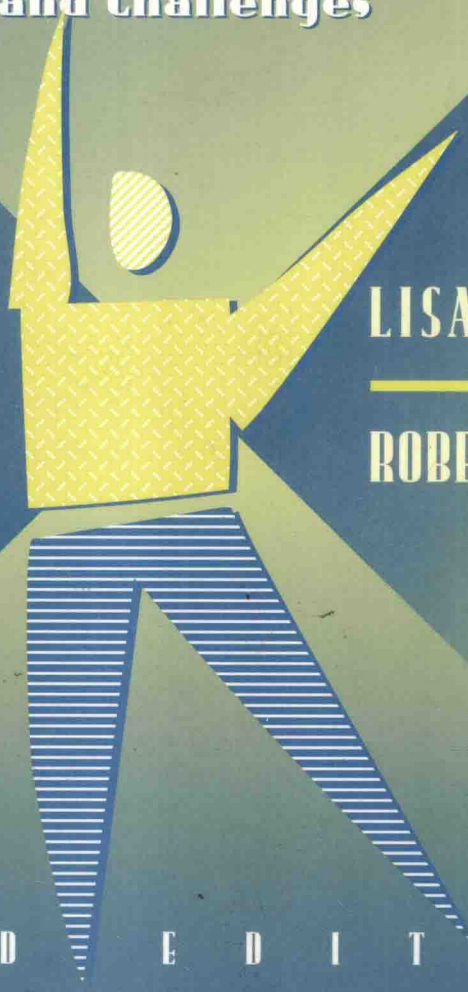
# ADOLESCENT PORTRAITS

## Identity, Relationships, and Challenges



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THIRD EDITION

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# PREFACE

This third edition of *Adolescent Portraits* includes three new cases, an expert anlysis of one of these cases, and two Reflections by earlier contributors looking back on their lives. In choosing new cases and removing others, we have considered feedback from faculty and students using the book and our own understanding of the important issues facing adolescents in the 1990s. We welcome further comments on the usefulness of particular cases and the varied ways in which you may use them in your courses. We particularly value suggestions about critical adolescent themes that are not yet addressed in our text.

This third edition is accompanied by an Instructor's Manual, which includes further suggestions for teaching strategies and assignments for using the cases. The manual also contains an expanded review of films, along with three cases from the second edition—"To Be the Best," "Forever an Awkward Adolescent," and "Turning Against Myself"—and two cases from the first edition—"Distilling My Korean American Identity" and "Guilt Was Everywhere Around Me."

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The cases in this book are the words of college students who have taken our courses, individuals who were willing to share their life experiences with many outsiders. Although we cannot thank them by name, we wish to acknowledge their personal strength as well as the time and energy they invested in this project. In addition, we want to recognize the many students who worked with us on cases that have not been included in the book; they, too, gave tremendous amounts of themselves as we worked to shape the final manuscript.

We would like to thank the following reviewers for their comments and suggestions for this edition: Roger A. Johnson, Old Dominion University; Suzanne M. Morin, Shippensburg University; and William George Scarlett, Tufts University.

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# OVERVIEW

## The Study of Adolescence

The way in which we view adolescence depends, to a large extent, on our perceptions of human nature and the relationship of the individual to society. Those who study adolescence today draw on past perceptions but also bring a new set of lenses to the field. Many have begun to realize the diversity that characterizes their individual subjects and the difficulty in generating theory that captures their experiences. Using the lenses of class, ethnicity, race, and gender, they work to describe and explain the complexity seen in adolescent thought, behavior, and relationships.

Twentieth-century understanding of adolescent development has some of its roots in earlier studies of human development (see Elder, 1980; Muuss, 1988; Sisson, Hersen, & Van Hasselt, 1987). The first consideration of adolescence as a separate stage of life is often attributed to Plato (1921) and Aristotle (1941), both of whom described the adolescent as unstable and impressionable. They suggested schooling for girls and boys that would shield them from society and help them develop the self-control and reason that characterize a mature individual. In the Middle Ages, the prevalence of Christian views of human depravity and of knowledge as external to the individual led to a less developmental perspective. Children and adolescents were seen as miniature adults who had to be socialized into acceptance of adult roles, values, and beliefs (Muuss, 1988).

John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau helped to restore society's belief in the qualitative difference between children and adults. Rousseau, in particular, emphasized a process of development during which innate knowledge and character unfold throughout childhood and youth. In *Émile,* Rousseau presented his view of this process and the role of society in nurturing and schooling young people as they develop into responsible citizens. Rousseau attributed different natural characteristics and social roles to males and females and suggested that, while the process of development is similar for both, schooling toward the end product differs as a result of their divergent natures and responsibilities.

In the nineteenth century, several social and intellectual movements influenced perceptions of human nature and adolescence. Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* included humans as a part of the natural world, providing a more biological and evolutionary view of human development and growth. The Industrial Revolution led to a gradual deemphasis of the family's role in socialization for work and relationships and a discontinuity in an individual's experience of home and work. Accompanying movements such as child labor laws and compulsory schooling contributed to society's perception of a phase of development between childhood and the assumption of an adult role in society, a phase that G. Stanley Hall named "adolescence" in 1904 (Bakan, 1972).

Hall (1904) described adolescence as a key stage of life in the evolution of the mature individual. Drawing on Darwin's work, he postulated a scientific theory of recapitulation in which the individual develops through stages that parallel those of human civilization. Like Rousseau, he saw development as a natural, largely innate process that could be guided and supported by society. Hall characterized preadolescence as the "savage" stage in the life of the individual. Adolescence followed, a transitional period to adulthood filled with contradictory emotions and behaviors: selfishness and altruism, sensitivity and cruelty, radicalism and conservatism. Through the struggle of adolescence, the individual is reborn; a new self is created, ready to assume a role in modern society.

Hall's work has influenced the study of adolescence throughout the twentieth century, but it has also been modified and challenged over the years. While Freud and those whose ideas developed from his work (e.g., Blos, 1962; Erikson, 1968; A. Freud, 1946) continued to focus on biological imperatives and their influence on the individual's psyche in the process of development, others began to take a more sociological perspective on adolescence. The work of Margaret Mead (1958) and Ruth Benedict (1950) suggested that society determines the behaviors, roles, and values of its adolescents. Others focused on the effects of social disorganization, social class, and social institutions on the life of the adolescent, documenting the role of environment in the shaping of experience (e.g., Havighurst, Bosman, Liddle, Mathews, & Pierce, 1962; Hollingshead, 1949). In the 1950s, studies of adolescence tended to emphasize the role of the peer group and the uniqueness of the adolescent experience; adolescence was seen as discontinuous with both childhood and adulthood. Adolescents had their own culture, comprised of a unique language, patterns of interaction, and beliefs.

While events of the 1960s contributed to this perception of an adolescent subculture, they also led those who study adolescence to focus on the intersection between the life course of the individual, the age cohort, and the historical context within which the individuals act (Elder, 1980). Some researchers and theorists, following Mead's emphasis on cultural influences on adolescence, focused on the social–historical context of adolescent development. They challenged Hall's view of adolescence as necessarily stressful by examining continuity and change in adolescent behavior over time. Others began to reexamine the period of adolescence within the context of an individual's lifespan. Research in child and adult development and in ego, cognitive, and moral development led to an understanding of adolescence as one of a sequence of life stages during which the individual addresses key issues such as identity, autonomy, attachment, and separation. The emphasis in this work has been on phases or stages of development that cut across social, historical, and cultural boundaries (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1972; Piaget, 1972).

Some of the most recent work in the study of adolescence has challenged approaches that emphasize either sociocultural determinism or universal developmental theory, suggesting that understanding adolescence involves a consideration of how social categories such as race, class, and gender interact with processes

of individual development (e.g., Berry & Asamen, 1989; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1987; McAdoo & McAdoo, 1985). The historical and cultural context is important in understanding adolescent experience, but it may not be sufficient to explain an individual's behaviors, beliefs, and sense of self. Stage and phase theories of development tend to overgeneralize from small, nonrepresentative samples and often ignore key variables such as race and gender that have a profound impact on an individual's experience and identity. The study of adolescence, then, has become more inclusive in terms of who is studied, what questions are asked, and how experience is analyzed. It has also become more complex, as we take a range of variables and contexts into consideration when examining individual development.

Even as researchers and teachers try to understand the multiple aspects of each individual's identity, the context within which American adolescents develop continues to change, further complicating the picture. Adolescents in the 1990s grow up in a society that takes technology and global communication as givens. On a large scale, this adolescent cohort's historical and cultural context is one in which international shifts toward democratic governments and market economies mean changing relationships between the United States and former Cold War antagonists. Increased international communication will lead to greater knowledge and understanding of other people around the world and, perhaps, to greater interdependence. Closer to home, these adolescents experience a society that is working toward greater acceptance of diversity—one, for example, in which women and minorities strive to define and work toward their goals while simultaneously trying to change society. Although they are growing up in decades of change and progress, today's adolescents also face persistent social problems: educational systems struggling with declining enrollments and shrinking resources, urban (and some suburban and rural) communities focusing on teenage drug use and the spread of AIDS, and a resurgence of racial and ethnic questioning and occasional violence. The social questions and issues that surround them demonstrate to today's adolescents that society does not have all of the answers and that it often seems to lack the direction and commitment needed to find them.

Research in the past twenty-five years has also refuted the "storm and stress" model of adolescent development that grew out of Hall's work. This approach sees adolescence as a time of severe turbulence, during which relationships disintegrate as the individual rebels against internal and external value systems (e.g., Blos, 1962; A. Freud, 1946, 1958). In contrast, more current work in the field emphasizes continuity and renegotiation as processes that characterize adolescence. "Normal" adolescent development encompasses a wide range of experiences, including a variety of family structures, sexual experimentation and orientation, and ethnic and racial exploration. Although some adolescents may experience more environmental stressors than others during these years, they occur within a meaningful personal and social context for that individual. Researchers have come to accept many variations within their definitions of normality in adolescence.

## The Case Study Approach

Those of us who teach courses in adolescent development continue to search for materials that address our students' lives and illuminate emerging approaches in the study of adolescence. Such materials help students learn what past and present theorists and current research have to say about the adolescent experience and engage students in asking questions about those theories and approaches as well as their own lives. We want our students to be thoughtful and critical participants in the study of adolescence, contributors to our growing understanding of how this phase of life relates to the larger life cycle.

The authors of this book found this kind of material in a book called *Experiencing Youth,* first published in 1970 by George W. Goethals and Dennis S. Klos. We used this book in our own study of adolescence and have since incorporated it into the courses we teach. *Experiencing Youth* is a set of first-person accounts written by undergraduate and graduate students (the latter appear primarily in the second edition) that highlight key issues in adolescent development: autonomy, identity, and intimacy. These cases demonstrate how powerful narrative can be as a way of examining individual lives within a framework of theory and research on adolescence.

By listening to the voices of individual adolescents, students and teachers of adolescent development can gain a greater understanding of the issues facing some of today's adolescents. Case studies illustrate the complexity of the individual experience and the interactions among an individual's needs, ideas, relationships, and context. Each case, taken alone, helps us begin to know one more adolescent and his or her experience; taken together, the cases provide a rich overview of the field of adolescence. Through them, students come to a greater understanding of key theorists and current research findings as they examine patterns in their lives and the lives of others. We are indebted to Goethals and Klos for helping us and our students learn the value of the case study.

Despite the strengths of *Experiencing Youth,* we felt a need for cases that reflected the experiences of today's adolescents—their social and historical context, their diversity, their concerns—and for theoretical frames that reflected more recent work in adolescent research. In this book, we build on the model provided by Goethals and Klos, bringing together the voices of students in our own classes and some key theories and approaches used in the study of adolescence. Each case in this volume was written and revised by an undergraduate or very recent graduate, most of whom have taken a course in adolescent development.

Although it is never possible to be completely representative, we chose students and cases with the goal of achieving a cross section of ethnicities, class backgrounds, and experiences. The book includes cases written by first-year college students who reflect primarily on their early adolescent experience and by students who have recently graduated from college and look back on those years as well. Case 1 was written by a first-year student; Case 15 by a sophomore; Cases 2, 3, 9, 11, 13, 14, and 16 by juniors; and Cases 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 12 by seniors. Of

the sixteen case writers, ten are white, two are African American, one is Native American, two are Asian American, and one is half-East Indian, half-white. Ten are women and six are men. Case writers come from the West, Midwest, South and East; from urban, suburban, and rural environments; from more and less privileged backgrounds; from single- and two-parent homes; from situations that have stimulated reflection and those that have allowed the writers to develop without thinking deeply about the implications and meanings of their actions and ideas. Although we have included each case under a major topic (as listed in the Contents), each case addresses a number of issues. The charts at the front of the book provide a guide to the themes present in each case, as do the abstracts at the beginning of each case. See the Instructor's Manual for further suggestions for using the cases in this book in a variety of classroom settings.

PART ONE

# Identity

## Theoretical Overview

The seven cases in the Identity section of this book show a pattern of a struggle for meaning and a quest for wholeness. Within the categories of gender, work, values and ideology, ethnicity, and sexuality, the adolescent writers wrestle with important choices—who they want to be, how to relate to others, what values should guide them, and what their place is in various spheres of their lives. Though the content of the autobiographies may differ from case to case, the reader will see that they share common explorations and preoccupations with the self, the self in relation to the self, the self in relation to the other, and to the broader society. We offer here a framework for approaching the cases in this section.

Erik Erikson (1968), who has helped shape our understanding of identity, proposed a detailed and widely applied psychosocial theory of identity development. Convinced that the study of identity is as crucial to our time as the study of childhood sexuality was to Freud's, Erikson forged a radical rethinking among psychoanalytic theorists about ego structure and the role of culture and environment in personality development. As is inevitable, his writings have, over the last decades, been expanded (e.g., Marcia, 1967) and debated (e.g., Gilligan, 1982) by a succession of theorists, some of whom have significantly broadened his theory's applicability. Its general acceptance, however, remains widespread, and his ideas form the foundation of the psychological approach we take to the cases in this section.

When asked to describe his adolescence, one of our students recently wrote: "I don't know where it started and have no more idea if it's ended. Something inside of me tells me I'm in transition between something and something else, but I don't know what." In transition between two "somethings," this young man is not at all sure where he has come from and even less sure of his destination; he is Kurt Lewin's (1939) "marginal man," uncertain of his position and group belongingness. As an adolescent, he is in a stage of his life in which pressures, both

internal and external, to define himself become simultaneously impossible to ignore and impossible to satisfy. He is working to establish a self-concept while at the same time realizing that this concept is changing as rapidly as he can pinpoint it. Like Lewis Carroll's Alice, he may well reply to the question, "Who are you?" posed by the Caterpillar, by saying, "I, I hardly know Sir, just at present—at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I must have changed several times since then." In Erikson's terms, the adolescent has entered a psychological moratorium—a hiatus between childhood security and adult independence.

Adolescence is a critical stage in the individual's development. Adolescents are intensely aware of how they are seen by others—aware, as V. S. Pritchett (1971) observes, that "other egos with their own court of adherents invade one's privacy with theirs." It is a time in which the values and perspectives of others become clearer to the developing mind. The adolescent must first attempt to evaluate his or her different options—different ethical positions or religious beliefs, acceptance or rejection of societal norms, attitudes toward sexuality, ideological stance in relation to family and friends—before he or she can choose among them. In this sense, the search for identity is not only the process of molding an image of oneself, it is also the attempt to understand the fundamental components of the clay that will be used.

The ego of childhood, strengthened by identifications with significant others and by growing mastery of the tasks of school and family life, will no longer hold; the challenge now for the adolescent is a creative synthesis of past identifications, current skills and abilities, and future hopes—all within the context of the opportunities the society offers. This challenge is made immeasurably harder because of the technological society we live in, in which multiple roles and careers tantalize us with choice. Mead (1930) suggests it might be easier to live in a society in which roles are inherited through birth or decided by gender! Yet the autonomous creation of identity, the redefinition of one's relationships, the crystallization in various domains of a sense of who one is, what one stands for, and how one relates to the world, is the critical task of the developing adolescent.

Erikson's theory of ego identity formation focuses on the concepts of ego identity, the identity stage, and the identity crisis. He defines identity as "the capacity to see oneself as having continuity and sameness and to act accordingly. It is the consistent organization of experience." As Côté and Levine (1987, p. 275) point out, there are two dominant characteristics defining the concept of ego identity: (1) the sense of temporal–spatial continuity of the ego, a requisite indicator of ego identity (Erikson, 1964, pp. 95–96), and (2) the self-concepts (the configuration of negative identity elements) that unify individuals' experiences of themselves during interaction with the social world. "The development and maintenance of the sense of ego identity is dependent upon the quality of recognition and support the ego receives from its social environment" (Côté & Levine, 1987, p. 275). In contrast, those who have challenged psychosocial notions of identity have suggested that we should think of defining identity in terms of the individual's connections/relationships in the world and see the individual as embedded in the social context rather than outside of it.