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PART ONE

**New Perspectives on
Adolescence**

CHAPTER 1

Adolescence in Historical Perspective

Glen H. Elder, Jr.

Adolescence is intimately linked to matters historical: the evolution of social age categories, the emergence of youth-related institutions, the impact of social change in lives. The developmental foci of all these involve the relationship between historical variation and life patterns. Adolescent experience may be shaped directly by historical events, as in the 1960s, and indirectly through the life histories that young people bring to this stage. After years of neglect, this perspective is beginning to appear not only on the agenda of those involved in developmental research¹, but also in the promising outline of a life-course framework that relates history and social structure in the human biography. Fruitful applications of this framework are seen in the notable growth since the 1960s of genuine archival studies on youth in history, a scope of inquiry that extends from the preindustrial age to the present. This chapter examines these developments in terms of their contribution to an analytical perspective that locates adolescence and young people in historical time, in the social order, and in the life span.

These developments began to crystallize in the troubled decade of the 1960s; and reflect the intellectual currents and problematic issues of these years. In combination, they represent a line of demarcation between the atemporal theme of postwar research on youth and an expanding recognition of the interdependence between social history and life history. Though historical change has long been noted as a determinant of life patterns (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918–1920; Kuhlen, 1940), this observation left no enduring imprint on research until the 1960s. At this point, we see thoughtful efforts across disciplines that suggest ways of viewing social change in lives. Warner Schaie (1965) proposed a methodology for assessing the effect of historical change on development; Norman Ryder (1965), in social demography, outlined a cohort historical perspective on

¹Two developments in psychology warrant special notice: (1) the increasing emphasis on developmental studies that investigate transactions between the growing human organism and its changing environment, as expressed by the writings of Urie Bronfenbrenner in particular (1977); and (2) the evolution of a life-span developmental psychology that is focused on the assessment of antecedent-consequent relations in behavioral development from birth to death (Baltes & Schaie, 1973). Though both developments have much in common, including a life-span orientation, they represent outgrowths of issues and problem foci that are located at opposite ends of the life-span continuum — childhood in the case of Bronfenbrenner and the adult years or old age in the case of Baltes and Schaie. Greater sociological interest in historical and social influences on human development is associated with the emergence of a life-course perspective from the study of age (see Riley, Johnson, and Foner, 1972; Elder, 1975).

social change in the life course; and historians (see Thernstrom, 1965) specified the potential interpretative errors in research that ignores historical facts. Intergenerational tensions also posed questions that could only be answered from an understanding of the diverse historical origins of parents and offspring, a problem identified many years ago by Kingsley Davis (1940).

Though path-breaking in many respects, these analytic ventures toward history have only recently made a difference in the actual study of adolescence and youth (Nesselroade & Baltes, 1974; Elder, 1974; Gillis, 1974). By and large, the contemporary literature on adolescence is distinguished by the absence of historical facts and considerations. Adolescents are seldom viewed within the life course and historical context; longitudinal studies pay little attention to the implications of social change (Elder, 1975a). These deficiencies stand out among contemporary textbooks on adolescence. For example, Muus's *Theories of Adolescence* (1975) includes only one section that bears on adolescence as a socially defined age division, and it makes no reference to analytical developments that place this stage within the life course and historical time. However rudimentary, these developments raise questions of critical importance for any study of human development. In what sense can we presume to understand the psychosocial development of youth without systematic knowledge of their life course and collective experience in specific historical times?

As a point of departure, I begin the chapter with a brief overview of its two central themes: (1) the life course as an emergent perspective that incorporates the historical dimension and (2) the burgeoning field of historical research on youth. With this as background, I turn to various age-based concepts of adolescence and their distinctive features. These concepts and the problem foci of historical periods have shaped the study of American adolescence and young people since the 1920s. This development is portrayed in terms of key studies, their strengths and limitations, and three age concepts (developmental, social, and historical) in the life-course framework. I conclude by reviewing selected themes in historical research, findings, and analytical contributions. The objective is not to provide a survey of research and knowledge on youth in history, which is available in other sources (Gillis, 1974; Kett, 1977), but to suggest something of the possibilities of an analytical perspective on the life course that brings historical considerations to the study of adolescence.

THE LIFE COURSE AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH

The life-course perspective represents developments over the past decade in understanding the bond between age and time (Riley, Johnson, and Foner, 1972; Elder, 1975b). Three temporal modalities have been identified:

1. The lifetime of the individual — chronological or developmental age as a rudimentary index of stage in the aging process.
2. Social time in the age-patterning of events and roles throughout life (e.g., entry into formal schooling, departure from home, first job, and marriage) — a pattern structured by age criteria in norms, roles, and institutions.
3. Historical time in the process of social change — birth-year, or entry into the system, as an index of historical location and membership in a specific cohort.

The lifetime perspective focuses on the inevitable and irreversible process of aging; social time, on age differentiation in the sequence and arrangement of life events and roles; and

historical time, on cohort membership, differentiation, and succession, with their implications for life patterns. We derive the meaning of each temporal dimension from correlated variables; in the case of historical time, from knowledge of events, circumstances, and mentalities of the period.

Each temporal perspective is associated with a distinctive tradition of research and theory:

1. Lifetime — John Dollard's (1949, p. 3) use of life histories to assess the growth of a person in a cultural setting; Charlotte Bühler's (1935) concept of the biological cycle of life; and the general field of life-span development (Goulet & Baltes, 1970).
2. Social time — analyses of age strata and hierarchies by Ralph Linton (1942) and Talcott Parsons (1942), as well as S. N. Eisenstadt's (1956) pioneering synthesis of ethnographic materials on age-based differentiation and youth groups.
3. Historical time — most notably Karl Mannheim's (1928/1952) influential essay on the emergent mentalities of generations (age cohorts in conventional terminology) and generation units or subgroups.

Important continuities within the framework of social time are illustrated by assessments of the "traditions of youth," from Willard Waller's (1932/1965) insightful essay on age-graded student traditions to David Matza's (1964) thoughtful essay on American youth and John Gillis's (1974) historical exploration of European age relations. Life transitions constitute another prominent theme across time, from Leonard Cottrell's (1942) propositional inventory on age-status adjustments to Modell, Furstenberg, and Hershberg's (1976) study of social change in the transition to adult roles. On historical time, a number of Mannheim's conceptual distinctions ("fresh contact with social change," stratification of experience, and the psychology of subgroups) influenced theoretical approaches in studies of student unrest and movements in the 1960s (Bengtson & Laufer, 1974; Braungart, 1975, pp. 255–289).

More than ever before, the life span defines the analytic scope of these areas of inquiry. Socialization, behavioral adaptation, and development are represented as lifelong processes that relate life stages in the human biography, from childhood to old age. Thus in the study of aging, life-span theoretical interests have fostered studies that extend beyond such age categories as adolescence (Baltes & Schaie, 1973; Baltes, 1977; Huston-Stein & Baltes, 1976). According to programmatic statements, the objective of these studies is to describe and explain age-related behavior change from birth to death as well as to specify temporal linkages through the identification of antecedent-consequent relations. For the most part, this explanatory aim remains an ideal. It has not been implemented by research on diverse life paths through the dependency years and their psychological effects.

Life-span issues in the sociocultural tradition (social time) are expressed in the literature on careers and by studies of orientations toward adult careers — marriage, parenthood, work — in the field of adolescence. But only in the past decade have career orientations and paths been viewed in terms of temporal distinctions from an articulation of social age (Clausen, 1972), the timing of events and their synchronization across multiple careers, and the role of age standards in self-assessments of career progress. Norman Ryder (1965) and Riley, Johnson, and Foner (1972) have linked historical change to the life course, a connection not developed in Mannheim's essay, "The Problem of Generations." The current trend is toward a more inclusive perspective on the life course, one that builds on all three temporal foci; locates individuals in age cohorts and thus, according to historical

time, depicts their age-differentiated life pattern in relation to historical context; and represents the interplay between life paths and development. Evidence of this development is seen in the establishment in October 1977 of an Social Science Research Council Committee on the Life Course.

According to this perspective, adolescence (or the broader category of youth) can be fully understood only when viewed within the life course and its historical setting. Each generalized stage, or age category, is constructed from norms and institutional constraints that establish a basis for identity and specify appropriate behavior, roles, and timetables. Cultural norms that differentiate age categories also structure modes of interdependence among them; one's rights implies another's obligations in cross-age (e.g., children vs. adolescents) and intergenerational relationships. The interlocking careers of parents and offspring relate young-adult status and childhood, middle age and adolescence, old age and maturity. The experience of adolescence is shaped by what one has been and by what is foreseen, by the problems of middle-aged parents and by those of the very young. Cross-age linkages are basic elements of an evolving life course.

A normative model of the life course includes event schedules that serve as guidelines for the life course, alerting individuals or cohorts to the appropriate timing and sequencing of social transitions. In theory, these schedules define appropriate times for school entry and departure; for leaving home and establishing an independent domicile; for economic independence, marriage, and parenthood. An informal system of rewards and negative sanctions ensures, for example, consciousness of the relationships between age and status or the consequences associated with being early, on time, or late in role performance and accomplishments. Referring to preindustrial Europe, Gillis (1974, p. 4) notes that despite the apparent disarray of age norms "premature entry into the marriage market was bound to provoke public censure, while remaining unmarried past a certain age made 'old maids' of girls and confirmed bachelors of boys." During the 1960s in midwestern America, Neugarten, Moore, and Lowe (1965) observed a high level of consensus among middle-class adults on age norms (usually above 80%) across some 15 age-related characteristics, including the timing of marriage. This study and a partial replication in a Japanese city (Plath & Ikeda, 1975) show generalized agreement on the major phases of the life course and a pattern of increasing sensitivity to age norms from early adulthood to old age. However, age norms and perceptions of age status constitute an undeveloped field of inquiry. Normative assertions are frequently made without adequate empirical evidence.

Beyond generalized age categories, the life course reflects the degree of social differentiation in complex societies, their plural age structures, timetables, and constraints across institutional domains — family, education, workplace, military. Status passage over the life course entails the assumption of concurrent multiple roles — from those of son or daughter, age-mate, and student during years of dependency to adult lines of activity in major institutional sectors. One's life course thus takes the form of interlocking career lines, each defined by a particular event sequence and timetable, for example, the temporal pattern of events and transitions in schooling and its relation to the timetable of family life and to the anticipated claims of military service, marriage, and work. Problems of life management arise in large measure from the competing demands of multiple careers.

Relevant to this point is Goode's observation that an individual's set of obligations is "unique and overdemanding" (1960). Since all demands cannot be met within the same time frame, a manageable course requires strategies that minimize conflicts and strain, for

example, the selection of compatible lines of action, the scheduling and deferring of obligations, or appeals to shared values or authorities to rationalize priorities. The pressures of these demands, most notable when youth are entering lines of adult activity, bring to mind Erikson's observations on role confusion. This psychic state becomes most acute, according to Erikson (1959), when the adolescent is exposed to a "combination of experiences which demand his simultaneous commitment to *physical intimacy* (not by any means overtly sexual), to decisive *occupational choice*, to energetic *competition*, and to *psychosocial self-definition*" (p. 123).

With a multi-dimensional concept of the life course, we are able to represent the diverse pathways that link childhood to the adult years and explore developmental problems and processes that arise from their interdependence. This concept parallels the organismic concept of "developmental lines," such as intellectual, moral, and sexual, "each of which may be in or out of phase with the others" (Keniston, 1970, p. 636; see also 1971). Variations in the timing and sequencing of events and decisions during late adolescence acquire psychological significance through investigation of their implications for coherent or discordant patterns of development. Completion of education, marriage, and economic independence are commonly viewed as indications of the lower boundary of adulthood, yet the timing of these events spans a wide age range, up to 10 years or more. Leaving school, departing from home, marriage, and economic independence come early for some young people and relatively late for others (Modell, Furstenberg, & Hershberg, 1976). The order and spacing of these events also vary widely. Marriage may occur before the completion of formal education, especially when schooling is prolonged, whereas early teen-age pregnancy typically precedes marriage and economic independence. For the individual, such variations pose important implications for social identity, personal integration, and life chances. The full meaning of a transition is derived from knowledge of this life course and related situational change.

Historical placement of adolescence and young people inevitably generates questions regarding the social and cultural milieu of time and place. What are the historical events and forces that have relevance for life chances and psychosocial development? How were generalized trends in demographic, economic, and cultural change expressed in this setting, giving form and substance to the biographies of youth, their life stage, collective experience, and future? The birth-year of youth directs inquiry toward their historical origins and experiences as they move through time in an age cohort. At points of rapid change, the historical experience of successive cohorts varies through exposure to different events (such as wartime mobilization for persons born before and after World War II) and by exposure to the same event at different points in the life course.

Cohort differences in life stage at times of drastic change suggest variations in adaptive options relative to the event, in resulting experience, and thus in the process by which the event is expressed in life patterns. World War II entailed military obligations for American males who were born in the early 1920s and experienced adolescence in the depressed 1930s. By contrast, younger men, who were born at the end of the 1920s, experienced this war as adolescents on the home front, following a childhood shaped by the Great Depression. We derive the psychosocial meaning of cohort membership and of particular cohort attributes from knowledge of this differential experience. Cohort attributes (e.g., relative size and composition) are themselves a product of historical change, business cycles, institutional change, mass migration.

From this vantage point, youth cohorts represent a connection between social change and life-course patterns, historical time and lifetime. Within each cohort, processes of

socialization and role allocation (via schools, etc.) serve as linkages between the young and social options — the labor requirements of industry, citizenship obligations in war and peace. Social change threatens the fragile character of these linkages as disparities emerge between youth characteristics and available options, for example, large cohorts who have come of age in a period of declining opportunities. Some analysts, for example, have viewed the rise of National Socialism in terms of the large German youth cohorts that encountered depressed opportunities in the 1930s after a history of wartime deprivations (Loewenberg, 1972; cf. Merkl, 1975). Likewise, a mood of fear (Scully, 1977) has been noted among the large postwar cohorts of university students in Europe who face declining opportunities for commensurate employment. American student unrest and protests in the 1960s, a decade of extraordinary growth of the youth population, generally support Herbert Moller's historical assessment (1968) over three centuries — that periods of social and revolutionary change are characterized by youth cohorts of ascending size. The historical dialectic between successive cohort flows and the social order tells us much about the socialization, opportunities, and actions of young people in concrete situations. It is this interplay that underscores the inadequacy of approaches that have focused on the age structure without attention to demographic factors or that have theorized about adolescent development in an historical vacuum.

A cohort is said to be distinctively marked by the life stage it occupies when historical events impinge on it (Ryder, 1965), but exposure to an event is not likely to be uniform among its members. For example, father-absence represents an important connection between World War II and the lives of young people; military service altered the socialization of children by removing fathers from the family over a two-to three-year period. However, deferments of one kind or another kept some fathers at home throughout this conflict. With such variation, the war's impact on a cohort of youth can be assessed by comparing psychological development under conditions of father-absence and father-presence (see Carlsmith, 1973). The hypothesis of life-stage variation (change has differential consequences for persons of unlike age) cautions against generalization from this comparison to other groups and favors a comparative design in which the developmental effects of war-caused father-absence are assessed in successive cohorts, for example, birthdates of 1930–1933, 1934–1937, 1938–1941.

This intracohort approach permits direct analysis of historical factors and explication of the process by which they are expressed in the lives of youth. The process is shaped in part by what families and offspring bring to events, their cultural heritage and expectations, their material resources and social position. Class, ethnic, and residential variations may identify subgroups that differ in how they “work up” historically relevant experience. Thus middle- and working-class families brought different resources to the Great Depression, resources that shaped both their response to economic misfortunes and the effect of the Depression on their children (Elder, 1974). Likewise, father-absence in World War II occurred in contexts (defined by marital harmony or conflict, financial security or strain) that influenced the meaning of the event and its impact on the welfare of family members (Hill, 1949). More recent examples include differences between college and noncollege youth of the 1960s in attitudes and actions relative to the Vietnam War (Braungart, 1975). As stressed by Mannheim's essay (1928/1952), historical differentiation within cohorts may stem from three sources of variation: exposure to events, interpretations of them, and subsequent modes of response.

Up to this point, we have emphasized historical facts that differentiate and explain the experience of youth cohorts or subgroups. Instead of asking whether there are behavioral

variations across successive cohorts, investigation is guided by the rationale that expects such variation in the first place. Given known variations among and within cohorts, the research problem concerns their relevance for life experience. Developmental questions are posed by an understanding of historical realities and their plausible life-course effects, proximal and enduring. This approach is not synonymous with cohort studies and a large number bear only superficial resemblance to historical analysis — to the assessment of historical facts that give explicit meaning to the life experience of youth cohorts (for a review, see Bengtson & Starr, 1975). Estimates of developmental variation across cohorts point to the influence of social change (Baltes, Cornelius, & Nesselroade, 1977), but global reference to change leaves unspecified what aspects of change produced this outcome and the processes involved.

Without any doubt, the most notable advance on knowledge of social change in youth experience has come from the work of social historians, especially those of the new generation who have applied the procedures and techniques of social science to studies of the “inarticulate” — the ordinary folk who left no personal record of their lives, for example, letters, diaries, genealogies, and so on. Archival data for this research is largely based on institutional records — government censuses, welfare and property lists, marriage certificates, parish registers, school censuses, employment rolls. From Newark, New Jersey of the mid-nineteenth century (Bloomberg, 1974) to Manchester, New Hampshire of 1900–1930 (Hareven, 1975), the studies of historians show an attention to historical facts that warrants emulation if historical time is to acquire substantive and theoretical meaning in research on youth.

A major turning point toward historical research on youth occurred with the publication of Philippe Ariès's impressionistic history of childhood and youth in France (*Centuries of Childhood*, 1965) and Bernard Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society* (1960). Due to research limitations at the time, both volumes could offer only tentative characterizations of institutional, ideological, and demographic changes in life stages, timetables, and pathways from birth to adult status. Among other issues Ariès's dating of male adolescence in the late eighteenth century, according to military conscription and advanced schooling, has been challenged by more recent work (see N. Z. Davis, 1975, pp. 97–123). Nonetheless, his path-breaking study and the research agenda outlined by Bailyn identified questions and unknowns that have influenced the course of subsequent inquiry, for example, on the emergence of mass schooling or the interaction of family, educational, and industrial change. Since the early 1960s the historical literature on youth has grown exponentially, with a scope that extends from the colonial era (Demos, 1970; Greven, 1970; Smith, 1973) into the twentieth century (Modell, Furstenberg, & Hershberg, 1976). Robert Bremner's multivolume anthology (1970–1974) of documents on American children and youth also spans this time frame. Two synthetic works on youth in history provide extensive bibliographies of American and European research: (1) Joseph Kett's survey (1977) of American youth, which is based largely on the social commentaries of upper-class adults; (2) John Gillis's (1974) analytical study of historical change in the position and traditions of youth in England and Germany.

In historical settings, the life experience of American youth has been depicted through assessments of family and kinship (Hareven, 1978), the most rapidly expanding field in social history; by studies of educational change and reform in the nineteenth century and their interplay with family patterns, demographic and economic change, and ideologies (Tyack, 1975; Kaestle & Vinovskis, 1976); and by studies of “child-saving” ideology and institutional realities (the juvenile court) through the progressive era (Platt, 1969;

Schlossman, 1977). With skillful use of archival data and methodologies, historians have moved beyond social concepts of youth and age vocabulary to the actual structure and content of the transition from childhood to full adult status. Their studies have enlarged our perspective on adolescence and its emergence as a concept in late nineteenth-century America by stressing the variable properties of the stage of youth across time and place, a view consistent with Eisenstadt's (1956) observation that a period of youth between childhood and adulthood exists to some extent in all known societies and historical periods. Its variation reflects the degree to which roles are assigned on the basis of age criteria, the prevalence of groups based on age, and the exigencies of demographic/economic conditions.

As in sociology, intensive study of age by historians has led to conceptual distinctions that are part of a life-course framework — the social timetable of events and roles, multiple career lines and transitions, the relation between age cohorts and age strata. Research themes include the changing normative and demographic properties of childhood and youth from the preindustrial age to the twentieth century (Gillis, 1974); nineteenth-century institutional change in life-course differentiation and the extension of age-graded schooling (Meyer et al., 1977); strain arising from change toward a broader social base in the composition of student cohorts among early nineteenth-century colleges (Allmendinger, 1975); change since 1860 in the timing of marriage and its life-course implications (Modell, Furstenberg, and Strong, 1978); and age patterns in the life course and psychological development in Plymouth Colony (Demos, 1970). Examples of this historical research will be discussed in a later section of the chapter.

Since the writings of G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence* (1904), concepts of adolescence and its study have reflected the various lines of inquiry that come together on the life course — developmental, social-structural, historical. As a life stage, adolescence has been defined in terms of observed or attributed characteristics of the developing organism — the physical and physiological changes during puberty, the stage of formal operations in cognitive development and moral judgment. Hall used late nineteenth-century knowledge of man's evolution in formulating his developmental concept of adolescence and life stages generally — law of recapitulation, saltatory rather than continuous development (Grinder, 1969; Ross, 1972); Harold Jones (1939), Director of the well-known Oakland Growth Study of Adolescents, emphasized the biological parameters of adolescence; and, more recently, Jerome Kagan (1971) has argued that developmental knowledge warrants postulation of a psychological stage called "early adolescence," a stage defined by the emergence of a new cognitive competence among 12-year-olds in the ability to "examine the logic and consistency of existing beliefs" (p. 998).

Historically, developmental concepts of life stages have provided rationales for corresponding social timetables and mechanisms of socialization (Demos & Demos, 1969; Skolnick, 1975; Lüscher, 1975). But the problematic record of their social expression — for example, from the Judge Lindsay doctrine of love-oriented treatment to the punitive realities of the juvenile court (Schlossman, 1977) — offers a valuable reminder of the distance between a concept and its implementation. In this regard, Rothman (1971) correctly warns that just because the concept of adolescence as a developmental stage "was invented only at the end of the nineteenth century is no indication that the *actual* experience of the young had changed" (p. 367).

Developmental variations and social attributes on the individual level may generate different status classifications as to life stage. Thus Keniston's (1970) observations on an emerging category of youth in postwar America refer to a psychological stage that

“cannot be equated with a particular age-range.” The developmental themes of this stage (e.g., vacillating moods of estrangement and power, ambivalence toward self and social institutions) identify young people who do not “necessarily join together in identifiable groups, nor do they share a common social position” (pp. 648–649). By making explicit the distinction between youth as a developmental age and a social age, Keniston’s essay leads beyond aspects of each domain to problems involving their relationship, to the social and developmental implications of inconsistent placement on psychological and social criteria, for example, the “youthful” person who is socially defined as an adult. Problems of this sort have been explored by Erikson (1964) and by Berger (1971) in a study of life styles.

The literature on adolescence over the past half century is distinguished by relatively separate lines of research on the developmental and social properties of adolescence. The former typically viewed adolescent experience in terms of ontogenetic development with minimal attention to sociocultural influences, whereas sociological research neglected developmental facts in the study of age categories, subcultures, generational relations, and youth movements. Despite the separation, there has always been a degree of interchange and debate between proponents of each perspective. Thus the presumed turmoil and conflicts of adolescence in the developmental perspective of G. Stanley Hall were challenged: (1) by evidence of cross-cultural variation through the anthropological studies of Margaret Mead (1928) and (2) by historical specification in Kingsley Davis’s (1940) analysis of rapid change in generational conflict. Some lessons from this interplay are manifested in the life-course approach of the 1960s and 1970s. Social conditions and issues at the time gave visibility to the historical dimension of lives, institutions, and their temporal interdependence. In addition to its developmental and social features, the study of adolescence slowly acquired an historical feature, one shaped by matters of time, place, and by the life histories of its members.

One way to view this development is through an examination of studies that reveal the strengths and limitations of a single concept of adolescence, whether developmental, social, or historical. We begin with a brief consideration of historical times in research themes from the 1920s to the 1970s and pursue this topic in greater depth from the vantage point of concepts of adolescence and their problem foci. Then we cover developmental and social themes through the 1940s, the 1950s’ perspective on adolescence in the course of societal development, and the introduction of historical questions to the study of adolescence and youth in the 1960s. This brings us to specific examples of life-course analysis in historical research on youth.

HISTORICAL TIMES AND THE STUDY OF ADOLESCENCE: 1920S TO THE 1970S

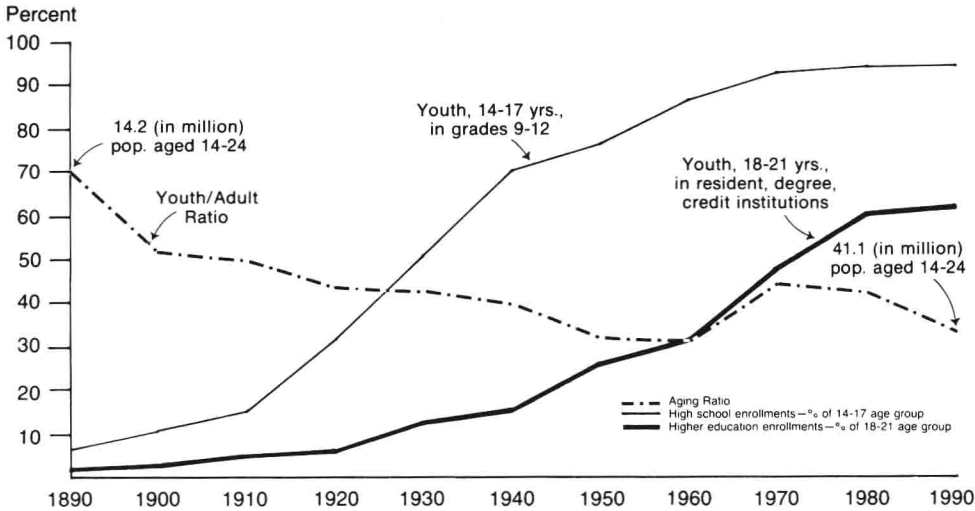
Child development emerged as a scientific field of inquiry in the United States during the 1920s, and we see a pale shadow of this beginning in the accumulation of studies of adolescents by the 1930s (Hollingsworth, 1928). Social needs or concerns were prominent in the development of research on children (Sears, 1975, p. 4) and in the study of adolescents, especially among sociologists. In the 1920s, rapid change through urbanization and immigration focused attention on the costs of social disorganization; the sociological research of Clifford Shaw and his colleagues depicted the juvenile delinquent as disaffiliated, lacking social bonds, supports, and controls (Finestone, 1976). Problems

of employment and family disorganization gained prominence in the 1930s (Elder, 1974) in addition to questions regarding the impact of movie attendance and the radio on young people. Between the Depression and the 1970s, research on families and youth continued to reflect public issues of the times (Elder, 1978), from social change in World War II (rural to urban migration, absent fathers, employed mothers) to massive population and institutional growth in the postwar era and the civil strife of the 1960s.

Educational developments since the turn of the century stand out in the evolution of adolescence and its extension to a category of older youth: the rapidly expanding enrollment of young people (ages 14 to 17) in the high-school grades up to 1940 and a pronounced increase during the postwar era in the proportion of youth (ages 18 to 21) enrolled in higher education (Figure 1). Only one-third of American youth, ages 14 to 17, were attending high school by 1920, but this figure is six times the rate of 1890. In the city of Middletown, the Lynds' (1929) found that the high school had become the locus of youth activity and peer association: "The high school, with its athletics, clubs, sororities and fraternities, dances and parties, and other 'extracurricular' activities, is a fairly complete social cosmos in itself — a city within a city" (p. 211). The first major assessment of the social world of high school was authored by Willard Waller (1932/1965) in the 1930s,² followed some 10 years later by another classic, August Hollingshead's (1949) empirical investigation of high-school youth in Elmtown. With the proportion of youth in high school climbing above 80% in the 1950s, it is not surprising that the literature of the decade includes major studies of adolescent subcultures and peer influence, such as James Coleman's *The Adolescent Society* (1961).

Two important implications emerge from the trend toward universal high-school education, and both are represented in the literature on adolescents: (1) increasing age segregation and (2) social inequality in student access to school rewards and life opportunities. From Hollingshead to Coleman and the Presidential Science Advisory Commission's report, *Youth* (1973), we see emphasis on the forms and dysfunctions of age segregation relative to the transition between childhood and adult life. Hollingshead's *Elmtown's Youth* (1949) focused on class origins in the collective experience and life chances of youth at a time when the high-school student body was still heavily weighted toward the sons and daughters of the middle class. This problem gained significance in the postwar era as successive high-school cohorts recruited even larger proportions of students from the lower strata, accentuating issues of social privilege and status deprivation in the school environment (Trow, 1961). During this era, theory viewed juvenile delinquency as an adaptation to the disparity between the "American dream" and the constraints of social position. The image of the juvenile delinquent was that of a young male who had been sold a bill of goods, but lacked the approved means of acquiring those goods; in Finestone's words, (1976) the image of a "frustrated social climber" (p. 12). Arthur Stinchcombe (1964) provides a superior example of this conceptual approach in his study, *Rebellion in a High School*.

²At the time, family sociologists were preoccupied with the evolution of the family as a more specialized unit in the social structure and with the intrafamilial consequences of this change for members. In conjunction with the 1930 White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, a survey of adolescents, (*The Adolescent in the Family*, 1934), obtained evidence (more favorable personality adjustment of urban than rural youth) that was used to support the assumption that "loss of certain economic and other functions from the home makes possible the more harmonious organization of family life upon a cultural and affectional basis" (p. 7). The data were too superficially analyzed to support confidence in this finding; the assumption itself is suggestive of the limitations that grand theory on family change has for understanding the dynamics of family life.



Enrollment statistics, by decade
Digest of Education Statistics, 1975 Edition, DHEW, Education Division, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976.
Table 30, p. 37, Table 80, p. 80. Historical Statistics of the United States, Bureau of the Census, 1975, p. 383. Projections of Education Statistics to 1984-85, National Center for Education Statistics, 1976, Table 3, p. 18, Table 5, p. 21, Table B-2, p. 154, and Table B-3, p. 155.

Aging ratio:
Ratio of population, 14-24 to population aged 25-64 from Table 2, Chapter 3 of PSAC report, 1973, Chapter 3 prepared by Norman Ryder.

Figure 1. Secular trends in population aging and enrollment rates for secondary and higher education, United States, 1890–1990.

Though far more numerous in the 1950s than at the turn of the century, American youth had become a smaller proportion of the adult population, an aging trend characteristic of modernizing societies. There were more adults per youth to serve as *socializers* in the 1950s than in 1900, thus indicating a decline in the burden of *socialization* and status placement. This trend reversed dramatically in the 1960s, owing to the postwar baby boom, and coincided with a noteworthy increase in the proportion of older youth in schools of higher learning. The size and broader composition of college cohorts in this decade implies an emerging life stage beyond traditional adolescence — a stage of youth or studentry (Parsons & Platt, 1972, pp. 236–291). Problems once identified with early adolescence and high school — age segregation and status deprivation — acquired prominence on the college campus through student mobilization and protests on civil-rights issues (Braungart, 1975). This development suggested to some (Gillis, 1974) the beginning of the end of an insular, protracted stage (adolescence?) of semidependency and social disability. Youth problems among older adolescents and college students in the 1960s focused attention on the transition to adulthood³ (PSAC, 1973; Heyneman, 1976),

³Symptomatic of the concern over problems in the transition to adult status is the formation of the National Commission on Resources for Youth. The commission was established in 1967 by a small group of professionals who had “long been concerned with the well-being of youth. The decision to form a small organization was made as they discussed the difficulties young people face in making a constructive transition to adult life” (Ralph Tyler in “Foreword,” *New Roles for Youth in the School and Community*, National Commission on Resources for Youth, 1974, p. viii). The role of schooling in this transition has been appraised by several independent reports, including that of the Presidential Science Advisory Commission (PSAC, 1973). In *Youth Policy in Transition* (1976), Michael Timpane and associates provide a thoughtful assessment of policy recommendations from the above reports in terms of available social science evidence, its knowledge base, limitations, and unknowns.

placing early adolescence in the shadows. Joan Lipsitz (1977) aptly refers to younger adolescents in the 1970s as “growing up forgotten,” a theme also stressed by a recent National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Conference on Early Adolescence, (May 1976).

Despite the imprint of historical conditions on research foci over the past decades, these conditions seldom became variables in the study of adolescence and youth. Indeed, by far the largest share of research through the 1940s centered on the developmental perspective of adolescence and paid little attention to the social and historical contexts of young people. Critiques of this literature by sociologists and anthropologists offered correctives by stressing the social character of life stages, but they often did so without regard for developmental variations, their interaction with the social environment, and historical forces. In retrospect, one gains some appreciation of these conceptual limitations from the incompleteness of the work and thus of analytical distinctions that are now part of a life-course perspective on adolescence. We shall illustrate this point by reference to *Adolescence* (1944) the 43rd Yearbook of the NSSE — National Society for the Study of Education — (see also Dennis, 1946, pp. 633–666); Hollingshead’s Elmtown study (1949); and prominent social views of adolescence in the 1950s.

Developmental and Social Themes in the Study of Adolescence

Adolescence as a “biological phenomenon” defines a primary theme of contributions to *Adolescence* (1944), a perspective that reflects research priorities at the time as well as the influence of Harold Jones (Chairman of the NSSE 43rd Yearbook Committee) and his pioneering, longitudinal study of physical growth and development at the Institute of Child Welfare (now Human Development), Berkeley, California. Half of the contributions portray the course of physical and physiological change; the development of physical, motor, and mental skills; and asynchronies across developmental lines. But even in these chapters, assumptions about age-graded expectations informed assessments of the psychosocial implications of physical growth, for example, in the case of maturation rates that depart from social expectations. Lack of time-series data ruled out consideration of one of the most important biological developments viewed in relation to the age structure: a pronounced upward trend in the height and weight of youth since at least the 1850s and a decline in the average age of menarche — approximately four months per decade over this period (Tanner, 1962, p. 152; Laslett, 1971). Nevertheless, the lag between developmental maturity and commensurate options was commonly acknowledged by analysts of the 1930s and 1940s as a prime source of adolescent emotional and social problems (K. Davis, 1944). In their classic monograph, *Frustration and Aggression* (1939), John Dollard and associates viewed this lag in terms of sources of adolescent frustration — the taboo on sexual activity, constraints on employment. The adolescent “gives every indication of being strongly instigated to perform the varied goal-responses appropriate to his new capacities, but tends to find that these responses are interfered with by adult restrictions” (pp. 96–97).

The biological theme of the yearbook exemplified a view of adolescence that August Hollingshead (1949) challenged through his investigation of adolescents in the class structure of Elmtown, a midwestern community studied in 1941–1942. After sorting through the available literature, heavily biased toward physical manifestations, Hollingshead stressed the primacy of environments that give meaning to physical facts (see also Mead, 1928). Whatever the connection of physical and physiological facts to

adolescence and behavior, Hollingshead (1949) argued that “their functional importance for the maturing individual is defined by the culture” (p. 6). In social terms, the noteworthy feature of the adolescent years is not puberty, the growth spurt, or maturational processes in general, but rather how society views the maturing individual. Adolescence represents a social stage in which the individual is regarded as neither a child nor an adult in status, roles, or functions.

A full understanding of these facts in lives entails knowledge of the culture and social structure, but the underlying assumption throughout *Elmtown's Youth* is that adolescent behavior is far more contingent on position in the social structure than upon age-related biopsychological phenomena. Just as psychologists had ignored or oversimplified the cultural environment relative to developmental processes, Hollingshead excluded physical characteristics from analysis in relation to age-expectations and class subcultures. The questions he posed on cultural variation in causal linkages between pubertal growth phenomena and adolescent behavior were not subjected to empirical test. Nevertheless, a number of implicit premises on development informed the study. As the gap between development and social options suggests, the social character of adolescence also acquires meaning from knowledge of the human organism, its developmental timetable and processes.

Elmtown's Youth offers a vivid portrait of social stratification (age, sex, and class) in the life experience and chances of young people. It documents the control functions of age and class patterns in adolescent behavior and provides a firm reminder of adolescence as a variable in social and physical space within the course of lives. Four social properties of adolescence were singled out for special attention:

- The social ambiguity and status contradictions of this life stage (“an ill-defined no man’s land”).
- Competition and conflicts among youth-training institutions.
- Age segregation as a social control mechanism.
- Class variations in the transition to adult status.

Field work in the community disclosed few widely shared concepts regarding the lower or upper boundaries of adolescence, other than the span of years encompassed by secondary school and the assumption of adult roles. Inconsistent age norms in legal codes, from employment to matrimony and criminal law, underscored the ambiguous position of young people who were neither children nor adults; a “contrast” category defined by what it is not. Expressions of general developmental trends (institutional differentiation and specialization) took the form of: (1) multiple, youth-training agencies with competing claims on the adolescent’s time and commitments and (2) an elaborate system of age segregation that sought to ensure “proper” development by isolating youth from the adult world of their parents — an isolation most typical of the middle-class student in school. On a theme that reappears in the 1950s and 1960s, Hollingshead (1949) cites the essentially negative character of a system that turned youth away from adult realities; “by trying to keep the maturing child ignorant of this world of conflict and contradictions, adults think they are keeping him ‘pure’ ” (p. 108).

Hollingshead’s study provides only a small sample of the wide variation in American youth experience at the time of World War II, but it offers a uniquely valuable picture of the institutional changes that have shaped adolescence as a social stage, in particular, the extension of schooling and its pronounced class variation among youth. As a category of dependents set apart from the adult world and childhood, adolescence had relevance