

Adolescence AND Emerging Adulthood

A CULTURAL APPROACH



JEFFREY JENSEN ARNETT

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To Robin, Kelly,
Nathan, Raina,
Paris, and Miles—
so much to look
forward to!

Preface

Adolescence is a fascinating time of life, and for most instructors it is an enjoyable topic to teach. For many students taking the course, it is the time of life they have just completed or are now passing through. Learning about development during this period is a journey of self-discovery for them, in part. Students who are many years beyond this period often enjoy reflecting back on who they were then, and they come away with a new understanding of their past and present selves. What students learn from a course on adolescence often confirms their own intuitions and experiences, and sometimes contradicts or expands what they thought they knew. When it works well, a course on adolescence can change not only how students understand themselves, but also how they understand others and how they think about the world around them. For instructors, the possibility the course offers for students' growth of understanding is often stimulating. My goal in writing this textbook has been to assist instructors and students in making illuminating connections of understanding on this dynamic and complex age period.

This is a first edition textbook so it may be useful to outline the features that distinguish it from existing textbooks. I wrote this book with the intention of presenting a fresh conception of the field of adolescence—a conception reflecting what I believe to be the most promising and exciting new currents. There are four essential features of the conception that guided this book: (1) a focus on the cultural basis of development; (2) an extension of the age period covered to include “emerging adulthood” (roughly ages 18 to 25), as well as adolescence; (3) an emphasis on historical context; and (4) an interdisciplinary approach to theories and research.

The Cultural Approach

In teaching courses on adolescence, from large lecture classes to small seminars, I have always brought a considerable amount of research from other cultures into the classroom. My education as a postdoctoral student at the Committee on Human Development at the University of Chicago included a substantial focus on anthropology. Learning to take a cultural approach to development greatly expanded and deepened my own

understanding of adolescence, and I have seen the cultural approach work this way for my students as well. Through an awareness of the diversity of cultural practices, customs, and beliefs about adolescence, we expand our knowledge of the range of developmental possibilities. We also gain a greater understanding of adolescent development in our own culture by learning to see it as only one of many possible paths.

Taking a cultural approach to development means infusing discussion of every aspect of development with a cultural perspective. I present the essentials of the cultural approach in the first chapter, and it serves as a theme throughout the book. Each chapter also includes a *Cultural Focus* box in which an aspect of development in a specific culture is explored in-depth—for example, adolescents' family relationships in India, Germany's apprenticeship program, and media use among young people in Nepal.

My hope is that students will learn not only that adolescent development can be different depending on the culture, but also how to *think culturally*—that is, how to analyze all aspects of adolescent development for their cultural basis. This includes learning how to critique research for the extent to which it does or does not take the cultural basis of development into account. I provide this kind of critique at numerous points throughout the book.

Emerging Adulthood

Not only is adolescence an inherently fascinating period of life, but we are also currently in an especially interesting historical moment with respect to this period. One distinguishing feature of adolescence in our time is that it begins far earlier than it did a century ago, because puberty begins for most people in industrialized countries at a much younger age. Yet, if we measure the end of adolescence in terms of taking on adult roles such as marriage, parenthood, and stable full-time work, then adolescence also ends much later than it has in the past because many people postpone these transitions until at least the mid-twenties. My own research over the past few years has focused on development among young Americans from their late teens through their mid-twenties, including Asian Americans, African Americans, Latinos, and Whites. I have

concluded on the basis of this research that this period is neither adolescence nor adulthood, nor even “young adulthood.” In my view, the transition to adulthood has become so prolonged that it constitutes a separate period of the life course in industrialized societies lasting about as long as adolescence.

Thus, a second distinguishing feature of the conception guiding this textbook is that the age period covered includes not only adolescence but also “emerging adulthood”—the period extending from the late teens through the mid-twenties. In a recent paper in *American Psychologist* (Arnett, 2000a), I presented a theory of emerging adulthood, conceptualizing it as a period characterized by instability and by exploration of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews. I describe this theory in some detail in the first chapter of this book, and use it as the framework for discussing emerging adulthood in the chapters that follow. Since there is not nearly as much research on emerging adulthood as there is on adolescence, the balance of material in each chapter tilts quite strongly toward adolescence. However, each chapter contains material that pertains to emerging adulthood.

The Historical Context

Given the differences between adolescence now and adolescence in the past, knowledge of the historical context of development is crucial to a complete understanding of adolescent development. Students will have a richer understanding of adolescent development if they are able to contrast the lives of young people in the present with the lives of young people in other times. Toward this end, I provide historical material in each chapter. Each chapter also contains a *Historical Focus* box that focuses on young people’s development during a specific historical period—for example, adolescents’ family lives during the Great Depression, the “Roaring Twenties” and the rise of youth culture, and work among British adolescents in the 19th century.

The emphasis on the historical context of development is especially important now with the accelerating pace of cultural change that has taken place around the world in recent decades due to the influence of globalization. In economically developing countries, the pace of change in recent decades has been especially dramatic, and young people often find themselves growing up in a culture that is much different

than the one their parents experienced in their own adolescence. Globalization is a pervasive influence on the lives of young people today, in ways both promising and troubling, and for this reason I have made it one of the unifying themes of the book.

An Interdisciplinary Approach

The cultural approach and the emphasis on historical context are related to a fourth distinguishing feature of the conception offered in this book—the interdisciplinary approach to theories and research. Psychology and education are naturally represented abundantly because these are the disciplines where the most research on adolescent development takes place. However, I also integrate materials from a wide range of other fields. Much of the theory and research that is the basis for a cultural understanding of adolescence comes from anthropology, so anthropological studies are strongly represented. Students often find this material fascinating because it effectively challenges their assumptions about what they expect adolescence to be like. Interesting and important cultural material on adolescence also comes from sociology, especially with respect to European and Asian societies, and these studies find a place here. History is notably represented for providing the historical perspective discussed above. Other disciplines drawn from include psychiatry, medicine, and family studies.

The integration of materials across disciplines means drawing on a variety of research methods. The reader will find many different research methods represented here from questionnaires and interviews to ethnographic research and biological measurements. Each chapter contains a *Research Focus* box, in which the methods used in a specific study are described in detail.

Chapter Topics

My goal of presenting a fresh conception of young people’s development has resulted in chapters on topics not represented as strongly in most other textbooks. Most textbooks include a discussion of moral development, but this textbook has a chapter on cultural beliefs (Chapter 4), including moral development, religious beliefs, political beliefs, and a discussion of individualistic and collectivistic beliefs in various cultures. This chapter pro-

vides a strong basis for a cultural understanding of adolescent development, because it emphasizes how the judgments we make about how adolescents should think and act are almost always rooted in cultural beliefs.

While most textbooks also include a discussion of gender issues at various points, and some include a separate chapter on gender, this textbook includes a chapter on gender (Chapter 5) that focuses on cultural variations and historical changes in gender roles, in addition to discussions of gender issues throughout the book. Gender is a key defining guideline for life in every culture, and the vivid examples of gender roles and expectations in non-Western cultures should help students become more aware of how gender acts as a defining guideline for young people's development in their own culture as well.

This textbook also has an entire chapter on work (Chapter 11), which is central to the lives of adolescents in developing countries because a high proportion of them are not in school. In industrialized societies, the transition from school to work is an important part of emerging adulthood, and this transition receives special attention in this chapter. An entire chapter on media is included (Chapter 12) with sections on computer games and the Internet. In most societies today, media are a prominent part of young people's lives, but this is a topic that receives surprisingly little attention in most textbooks. Finally, this textbook closes with a chapter on adolescence and emerging adulthood in the 21st century, in which the futures awaiting young people around the world are considered. In this chapter, we take a sweeping tour of the future prospects facing young people in every part of the world, and we see once more how dramatically different the lives of young people in different cultures can be.

One chapter found in most other textbooks but not in this one is a chapter on theories. In my view, having a separate chapter on theories gives students a misleading impression of the purpose and function of theories in the scientific enterprise. Theories and research are intrinsically related, with good theories inspiring research and good research leading to changes and innovations in theories. Presenting theories separately turns theory chapters into a kind of "Theory Museum," separate and sealed off from research. Instead, I present theoretical material throughout the book, always in relation to the research the theory has been based on and has inspired.

Each chapter contains a number of critical thinking questions under the heading *Thinking Critically*.

Critical thinking has become a popular term in academic circles and it has been subject to a variety of definitions, so I should explain how I used the term here. The purpose of the critical thinking questions was to inspire students to a higher level of analysis and reflection about the ideas and information in the chapters—higher, that is, than they would be likely to achieve simply by reading the chapter. With the critical thinking questions I sought to encourage students to connect ideas across chapters, to consider hypothetical questions, and to apply the chapter materials to their own lives. Often, the questions have no "right answer." Although they are mainly intended to assist students in attaining a high level of thinking as they read, they may also serve as lively material for class discussion.

Supplements to the Textbook

The supplements for this textbook have been prepared by Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl and her graduate students in the Department of Education at the University of British Columbia. Kim is a respected scholar on adolescence who had years of experience as a high school teacher before becoming a professor, and she has made fruitful use of her skills as both a scholar and a teacher in preparing the Instructor's Resource Manual. I have worked with her in choosing the topics for the Manual so that it would complement the textbook.

The Instructor's Resource Manual with Tests and Web site (www.prenhall.com/arnett) was prepared carefully and thoroughly by Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, Helen Novak, and Sandra Jarvis Selinger under Kim's direction, and special care has been taken to ensure that the items are clear and accurate.

I have also prepared a book of readings to accompany this textbook entitled *Readings in Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*. The sections in the book of readings parallel the chapters in the textbook so that the two books complement each other. My selections for the book of readings followed a concept similar to the textbook. Consequently, the readings incorporate studies from a variety of cultures, on emerging adulthood as well as adolescence, and draw from a variety of disciplines. Instructors may wish to use the book of readings to supplement the textbook, especially for upper-level undergraduate courses.

Acknowledgments

Preparing a first-edition textbook is an enormous enterprise that involves a wide network of people, and I have many people to thank for their contributions. Becky Pascal, my original editor at Addison-Wesley, recruited me to write the book, and it was her excitement over my new ideas for a textbook that, in part, persuaded me to take on the project. Jennifer Gilliland, who took over as editor when the book was transferred to Prentice Hall, has supported the book wholeheartedly and has repeatedly gone the extra mile to provide me with the resources I've requested in my efforts to make the book as good as I could possibly make it.

The review process for the book was long and exacting, and the reviewers were indispensable for the many comments and suggestions for improvement they provided. I'm very grateful for the time and care expended by these reviewers to give me detailed, well-informed reviews. In the first two rounds of reviews, the reviewers were:

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Following the first two rounds of reviews, each chapter was reviewed by an outstanding scholar in the area covered by the chapter in order to provide the highest level of evaluation of the accuracy and currency of the material. These expert reviewers were:

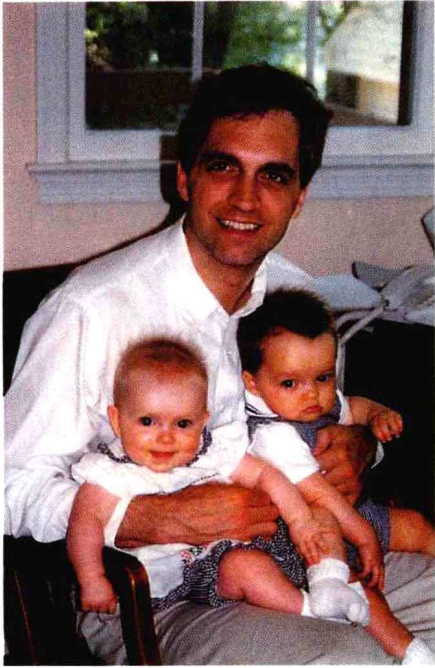
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I also wish to thank my parents, Marjorie and Calvin Arnett, who were remarkably patient (I see that now) during my own adolescence and emerging adulthood. Thanks to my wife, Lene Jensen, a developmental psychologist at Catholic University of America, who was a sounding board for many of my ideas for the book and who provided numerous good ideas as well. Finally, thanks to our twin babies Miles and Paris, who provided inspiring squeals at key moments and who showed their enthusiasm for the project by trying to eat the page proofs. Many thanks, all of you.

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About the Author



The author and his proofreading assistants, Paris (left) and Miles.

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett is a Visiting Associate Professor at the University of Maryland. He has also taught at the University of Virginia, Oglethorpe University, and the University of Missouri, and he has been a Visiting Scholar at the Center on Adolescence at Stanford University. He was educated at Michigan State University (undergraduate), the University of Virginia (graduate school), and the University of Chicago (postdoctoral studies). His research interests are in risk behavior in adolescence, media use in adolescence, and a wide range of topics in emerging adulthood. Currently, he serves on the Editorial Board of *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* and *Youth & Society*. He lives in University Park, Maryland, with his wife, Lene Jensen, and their infant twins, Paris and Miles.

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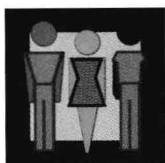
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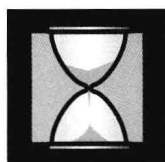
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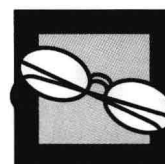
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