

PRINCIPLES OF ADOLESCENT PSYCHOLOGY

BY

EDMUND S. CONKLIN
INDIANA UNIVERSITY



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To the students and faculty of the University of Oregon, who were my loyal friends and colleagues for more than twenty years, this volume is affectionately dedicated

PREFACE

This volume is another consequence of my persistent effort to understand human nature. To me there is nothing in life more fascinating than a bewildering bit of human behavior, and nothing more satisfying than a good approximation toward its explanation. The next most fascinating thing is to lead others into an understanding of the explanations I have found.

For many years I have taught classes of older college students who were consciously preparing for the responsibilities of social leadership and parenthood. For our use I have searched the literature of the psychology of adolescence, and have directed researches, that we might have at our command the best that was available. In more recent years I have been repeatedly called upon to conduct courses in the same subject matter for the information and guidance of ministers and social workers seeking a better understanding of the young people among their charges. Deans of men and deans of women, teachers, physicians, and parents have constantly come to me for counsel concerning their more difficult problems in adolescent behavior. And in addition to these, many hundreds of students have sought me in my home and in my office for aid toward a better understanding of their immediate difficulties. All this has brought me the values of a rich personal experience in the problems of adolescent behavior.

These demands have influenced my point of view. While I have sought generalizations wherever the literature of the subject made them safe, I find myself constantly thinking in terms of the point of view of the student leader, the parent, the dean, the teacher, the physician, the pastor, and the social worker who must use this knowledge for the interpretation of particular behavior problems. As I have sought to lead these people to think of adolescent problems as but phases in the growth of personality, or distortions of such growth, so in this book I have sought to present adolescence as a progressive change in the personality

pattern and as normally a progressive integration of the many behavior patterns contributing to the personality as a whole.

The literature is vast. My bibliographies include far more than two thousand titles, and most of these bear dates of publication later than that of G. Stanley Hall's encyclopedic survey of the literature published in 1904. I have not therefore tried to include bibliographies in this book; but I have given with each topic discussed references which will give to the reader who desires a ready introduction to the literature on that subject. In the selection of these footnote references I have given preference to those which included good bibliographies. In so far as possible I have chosen references published in English; but where publications in other languages were of exceptional merit or without English equivalents I have not hesitated to include them. I believe that in these footnote references any reader will find a useful guide to the literature on every subject here treated.

I trust that the trained psychologists who read this volume will note how often it has been necessary for me to point out gaps and uncertainties in our knowledge. Vast as is the literature I am nevertheless convinced that adolescence is a neglected field of research. With the better orientation which we now have and the contributions of recent years to research methods, many of these gaps and uncertainties would quickly yield to research attack. While I have thought of this volume as primarily a teaching aid, I shall be disappointed if it does not at the same time stimulate some much-needed research.

For permission to reproduce copyrighted material I am indebted to the following persons and publishers: the *American Journal of Psychology*, A. S. Barnes and Co., the University of Chicago Press, Professors Floyd H. Allport and Daniel Katz.

E. S. C.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

DEFINITION OF ADOLESCENCE, ADULT AS NORM, NATURE OF
PERSONALITY, INTEGRATION OR SYNTHESIS, INSTABILITY, IN-
CONSISTENT BEHAVIOR, BIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF DEVELOP-
MENT

There is a period of several years in the life of every human being when he is no longer a child nor is he yet a mature adult. The length of that period varies greatly. Some individuals and some peoples mature early. Others enjoy, or suffer, a considerable period of growth after childhood has passed and before the full development of powers and abilities has been achieved, before life settles down into the routine of an adjusted efficient adult. It is this period which has come to be termed adolescence.

Definition. The definition of the term adolescence is not easy. It is sometimes defined as meaning the "teen age." Others say it designates the period between the development of sexual maturity (pubescence) and the achievement of adulthood. But both of these dividing lines are still harder to define with any degree of exactitude. Arbitrary points of physical growth may be selected to represent the dividing lines. But such physical marks tend to distract attention from those changes of behavior and experience which gave rise to the psychological studies of this period. For legal purposes, chronological boundaries have been set out; but most students of psychology, especially those who have looked at all into the problems of genetic psychology, know full well that a chronological dividing line touches people of many different stages of mental development. It seems better then to concentrate upon the nature of adolescent behavior and not to be too anxious for the sharp delimitation of its range in the life cycle.

Since the dawn of the twentieth century there has been a vast

amount of material published on what has been termed the "boy problem" and the "girl problem." Some of this has been devoted to the problems of childhood, but much of it has been concerned with young people who are approaching maturity. Parents and moralists have been concerned about the delinquencies of young people who either ought to know better or who do know better, and yet for some reason do not act according to their knowledge. The clergy and other religious leaders have been concerned about the inconsistencies of youth as well as their delinquencies, and have sought to understand and through religion to stabilize and to moralize each rising generation. Welfare workers have been concerned about the problems of vocational placement because they have seen so many mistakes, and consequent unhappiness, resulting from the unguided efforts of youth to find vocational placement in life. It is the period of leaving school, of breaking away from parental domination, of vocational selection and adjustment, of establishing self-reliance and self-responsibility in conduct; it is the period of sexual restraint in the years between sexual maturation and the age when marriage is approved; it is the period in which the body as a whole reaches its mature proportions and is normally a time of vigorous health; it is a period in which religion plays a large and often changing function in life; and it is above all a period of social adjustment, one in which the social situation has perhaps a larger influence upon the personality pattern than at any other time in life. It is a period so freighted with problems and possibilities as to make it a most critical period of growth.

Adult as Norm. It is customary to evaluate adolescent behavior in terms of adult behavior. By this comparison the adolescent appears to be inconsistent, erratic, romantic, childish, impulsive, idealistic, selfish, altruistic, excitable, and so on through a long list of differentiating traits. Obviously if we had no adult norm and only adolescent behavior before us we should use very different terms in the description of these and other forms of behavior. We should then be thinking only in terms of individual differences, of central tendencies and deviations from them. But we do have adult behavior about which we are fairly well informed, and we know that adolescents are in process of becoming adults. So it is probably wise to follow the cus-

tom of evaluating adolescent behavior in terms of adult norms.

But in so evaluating adolescent behavior there is grave danger of setting up false standards of what is adult. It requires but little reflection to realize that adults differ greatly. Some are sociable while others are not; some are well poised and self-controlled, while others are impulsive and erratic; some have wide ranges of interest, while others are limited in their interest range; some are extroverted, and some are introverted; some are well adjusted to their social situation, while others are poorly adjusted; some have high ideals and some have low; some are optimistic and some are pessimistic; some have achieved a working philosophy of life while others have not. It would thus be wide of the mark to think of that adulthood toward which all adolescents are in course of approximation as highly uniform. Rather is it quite the opposite. Adolescents are thus not converging in their growth toward adulthood as a focal point. They are in the course of a progressive divergence. As they grow they are approximating to some one or other of the vast number of different personality patterns which make up the adult population. Adolescence may thus be thought of as primarily a period in which the personality is differentiated and molded into that which is to be characteristic of the individual in the years of adult life.¹

Definition of Personality. The term personality as here used connotes nothing metaphysical nor anything metapsychological. It is used as the most inclusive term available to the psychologist for the designation of an individual. Personality means the sum total of what an individual human being is. It includes all that is native and all that has been acquired.² It means that the personality is the combined product of a vast number of traits, abilities, characters, trends, drives, tendencies, and the like, much of which is still beyond scientific knowledge. It means that the

¹ Clearly as this seems to be indicated by all the many studies of interests and attitudes and social adjustment and the like, it is also true that studies of physical features and certain mental functions do not indicate an increase of variability in adolescence. See Henmon, V. A. C., and Livingston, W. F., "Comparative Variability at Different Ages," *J. Educ. Psychol.*, 1922, 13, 17-29; Hollingworth, H. L., *Mental Growth and Decline*, pp. 268-270.

² Prince, Morton, *Clinical and Experimental Studies in Personality*, chap. 6. Warren, H. C., and Carmichael, L., *Elements of Human Psychology*, p.

anatomical size and shape, the peculiarities of individual physiology, the health of the body, the degree of intelligence, the range and nature of knowledge acquired, all the native abilities and the degrees of their development and utilization, the ideals past and present, the pattern of emotional development, the whole social experience, especially the parental experience, the habits, the complexes (however they be defined), the adjustments and the maladjustments—that all of these and any other features or traits which may have been omitted from the above list enter into the grand synthesis or sum total termed the individual personality. As these traits and factors and functions differ from individual to individual so personalities differ. And, still more important for our present purposes, as any of these differ with growth changes so will adolescent personalities differ from each other and also from adult personalities.

Differences of Personality Integration. Personality differences are, however, to be thought of not only in terms of differences of pattern but also in terms of differences in what is called synthesis or degree of integration. This latter is a most useful concept, and especially important in the understanding of adolescent behavior, although the nature of what is designated by it is not yet known in full.¹

These differences in synthesis or degree of integration are a matter of everyday experience for those who are accustomed to observation of human behavior. Here is a person who is well educated, cultured, trained in a variety of physical activities, enjoying an excellent range of knowledge, and known to possess the most acceptable of ideals; but the day-to-day conduct of this person is such as to acquire the reputation of being unstable, unpredictable, jumpy, unreliable, impulsive, of one who “goes off at half cock.” Associates complain that there seems to be little control or inhibition. What the person knows, the background as it were, seems to have little influence upon the immediate response. Such a person is defective in the development of personality synthesis. Numerous behavior patterns have been estab-

¹ This concept has been taken over from psychopathology and so is ordinarily presented from a medical point of view. For an introduction to such literature see the following: Diethelm, O., “Non-organization and Dis-organization of the Personality During Psychoses,” *Arch. Neur. & Psychiat.*, 1933, 29, 1289-1304; Janet, P., *Major Symptoms of Hysteria*.

lished, but they are apparently not sufficiently connected with each other, not sufficiently organized for the exercise of an adequate and effective influence upon each other.

Fortunately, one more often meets people who are better organized, whose organization is indicated by better control or more poise. Most efficient and successful business men are of this variety. Actions are deliberate and under the full influence of habits, knowledge, the background of experience and training. They have the reputation for reliability and wisdom because their responses are controlled and because their conduct is consistent with their past and their ideals.

Between these two extremes most adults may be placed. And it is helpful at times to think in terms of such a dimension and to attempt, crudely of course, to judge people in terms of their place on such a scale, running from the most poorly to the most highly integrated. But when one comes to apply this concept to the changes of personality in the growing years, one soon discovers that growth from birth to maturity may be thought of as a progressive development of the personality synthesis.

The infant has a personality, to be sure, because it has a sum total; but there is little about its behavior, except for some vegetative functions, which can be thought of as integrated. Arms and legs and voice apparatus and the like respond to stimuli, although in a notably incoordinate fashion. But it is not long before arms and legs respond in a coordinated manner, in creeping or hitching and later on still in walking. These means of locomotion are in turn organized with perceptions and later with conceptions, and also with emotional reaction patterns. The synthesis is becoming manifest. But with growth there is much acquisition as well as development of synthesis, hence for years the progress in synthesis ordinarily does not, perhaps cannot, catch up with the establishing of new patterns. Hence the growth in synthesis continues on up to adulthood, by which time some considerable degree of it is ordinarily achieved. Perhaps individuals who become prematurely adult, who settle down early, achieve a synthesis too soon; others, for reasons not yet known, seem never to develop much of a synthesis, or at least not enough for their happiness and efficiency.

With childhood past and adulthood not yet attained, the

adolescent is but midway in the course of the development of this personality integration. Many behavior patterns have been acquired. Many more are being acquired. Some degree of integration has been established, but much more is needed before the poise and consistency of maturity appear. To this imperfection of integration or synthesis much of the erratic, impulsive, and inconsistent conduct of adolescence is attributable. Instances of this will appear again and again in the chapters which follow.

Instability of Adolescence. By contrast with maturity youth has often been characterized as a period of relative instability. On first reading, the meaning of this term appears to be obvious; but unfortunately it has meant different things to different people. The consequence is a confusion of meanings and a proper alarm on the part of some¹ that its significance may be distorted. The difficulty seems to lie in a failure to distinguish between instability and inconsistency. Instability of personality in adolescence should mean insecurity of development, liability to fail or to fall, and thus point directly toward the possibility of defect and of degeneration or disease of personality. Inconsistency of adolescent behavior might of course be related to instability, but it is far from being necessarily so. Inconsistency may be and doubtless more often is merely an indication of the immaturity of development and of integration of the personality.

When one thinks of instability as a condition in which degeneration and disease is easily brought about and asks if adolescence is a period in life characterized by such instability, one will find that contemporary specialists in psychopathology will answer with great caution. That there are nervous and mental diseases occurring in personalities of adolescent age none will deny; but there is grave doubt if adolescence as a developmental period is any more liable to such instability than other periods of life.

It is quite true that intrinsic defects may not become apparent until adolescent years; and it is possible that the greater demands and the strains of the complicated life which adolescents must live in our civilization may serve to bring out intrinsic defects not before apparent. This is no doubt true of many epilepsies,

¹ See for example Hollingworth, L. S., *Psychology of the Adolescent*, p. 192.

although the onset of epilepsy may occur in childhood and may be delayed until after full maturity has been achieved.¹ Not infrequently it has been assumed that every individual began life with a certain amount of capacity for development. This might be wholly adequate to carry the individual through all the stresses and strains of growth up to a full maturity, or it might be inadequate and therefore exhausted before maturity is reached. Certainly there are individuals who grow well up to somewhere in adolescent years and deteriorate into a condition of dementia. This was once termed adolescent insanity or dementia præcox. In recent years, however, the interpretation of this disease is changing rapidly. It is now known to be no longer in anywise peculiar to adolescence, and the notion of an intrinsic defect at its base is being discarded by many.

Students of all the many forms of hysteria have frequently asserted that adolescence was a stage of development peculiarly susceptible to hysterical disturbance. It is quite true that hysteria is more easily produced in those personalities which lack well-organized inhibitions, in which emotions are easily aroused and are poorly controlled; and it is also quite true that conflicts between ideals and native impulses or drives contribute to the development of hysterical behavior. Young people in the teen ages are imperfect in the development of control and frequently have conflicts to struggle with; and hysterics do appear with a fair degree of frequency in adolescent years. But it is also true that there is much hysteria in mature years. There are many adults with poorly integrated personalities and many others whose control breaks down under the strains of life. Figures on the relative frequency of hysteria at different times in life as well as of the other borderline abnormalities are notoriously unreliable. Consequently it is unsafe to conclude that adolescence is a period characterized by any special predisposition toward hysterical disturbance.

These, epilepsy and dementia præcox (schizophrenia) and hysteria, are the three diseases of personality most frequently mentioned as appearing in adolescence. If adolescence is to be thought of as a period of instability then it must be a period of

¹ For more detailed presentation of epilepsy and the other abnormalities of development mentioned here see chap. XVII.

relatively greater susceptibility to these diseases, and that cannot now be substantiated. There are individuals who are decidedly unstable in adolescence and it is the function of mental hygiene so to guide and protect them that they may pass through the tensions of adolescence without breaking down. These deserve special study, and they will receive special consideration from time to time in this volume, but one must not of course describe adolescence as a period of instability because some adolescents are unstable, requiring special attention and study.

Inconsistency of Adolescent Behavior. Of this there can be no question. It has been recognized at least since the days of Aristotle who described the inconsistent behavior of youth in a way that is almost as applicable in our day as in his.¹ In a charming and illuminating essay Dean Briggs has given expression to similar observations coming from his many years of experience with Harvard students.² Among the psychologists G. Stanley Hall³ has no doubt described the inconsistencies of adolescent conduct most effectively. He summarized his observations in pairs of antithetic or contrasting modes of behavior. While the original should be read in its entirety the following abstract of his presentation in terms of paired contrasts will present the substance of his thinking:

1. Oscillations between activity and idleness.

Youth is represented as being more savage than civilized in work habits. Instead of working regularly by the clock as does the modern adult, youth is prone to spasms of prolonged and intense activity, training with severe application and self-discipline for some athletic event or studying with equal persistence; and likewise to spells of indifferent, lazy, apathetic neglect of responsibilities and opportunities.

2. Fluctuations between euphoria and disphoria.

The mood changes of childhood become in adolescence modified into periods of happiness or euphoria and periods of depression or melancholy or disphoria which are of much longer duration. There is the oft-described careless and even silly gaiety of youth; and there are likewise the blue moods which in rare cases terminate in suicide but more often in meditation and poetizing.

¹ Wellston, J. E. C., *Rhetoric of Aristotle*, 1886, pp. 164-166.

² Briggs, LeB. R., *School, College and Character*, chap. 3.

³ Hall, G. Stanley, *Adolescence*, Vol. 2, pp. 75-94.