AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ADOLESCENCE

NEWMAN & NEWMAN

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To Sara and I. G.

Preface

In our treatment of adolescence, we will focus on three components of this period of life. First, we are concerned with the competences that adolescents acquire. These include the mastery of new motor skills, the acquisition of more abstract conceptual abilities, the formation of complex social relationships, and the formulation of a set of personal beliefs and values. Second, we are concerned with the social settings in which adolescents participate. The family, the peer group, the high school, college, work environments, and communities operate to structure the adolescent's experiences, and to provide the challenges of life for the adolescent. In our evaluation of these settings, we will look at how the demands and resources of the environment interact with the concerns and competences of adolescence. Third, we will look at the special life challenges that people face during adolescence and at the ways in which they cope with these challenges. As we examine these efforts to cope with challenges, we will explore deviant as well as creative adaptations.

Our primary orientation is to view adolescence as one of many periods in the life span. There are unique psychological developments in adolescence, just as there are in each period of life. There are unique social stresses and personal challenges during adolescence, just as there are during other periods of life. The events of adolescence are important both for the experiences of the period itself and for the pattern they set for future life choices. It is sometimes assumed that adolescence is the "stormiest" and most stressful period of life. For some people this is probably true. For the vast majority, however, it is not true. Each period of life can be difficult, stressful, and challenging. Although adolescence may be extremely stressful for some people, middle adulthood or early

school age may be more stressful for others. For some people every period is extremely upsetting, and for others each period passes calmly. What we wish to communicate is that each period of life is qualitatively different from every other period. The adolescent years of your life are unique in your experience. The events that occur, the new learning, the emotional involvements, the growing sense of self, have never occurred before and will never happen again in quite the same way. The adolescent period is an original experience in the life of an individual. It is not necessarily better or worse than other periods, and it is not by definition easier or more difficult.

The book is divided into four parts. In Part I, we present the theoretical, cross-cultural, and empirical perspectives on the study of the psychology of the adolescent. The theoretical perspective in Chapter 1 considers the ways in which a variety of psychologists have conceptualized adolescence. We identify how each theory treats adolescence in relation to the rest of the life span. In Chapter 2, we explore the ways in which the life tasks of adolescence are dealt with in different cultures. We look for uniformities from one culture to another. We also look for the differences among societies in order to understand the ways in which culture acts to influence the psychological development of adolescents. Chapter 3 considers adolescence as a topic for research. We look at some of the techniques that have been employed to study adolescent development and at some of the problems that arise in doing research with adolescents.

In Part II, we discuss early adolescence. This period includes the time from the onset of puberty until roughly the end of high school, or about 18 years of age. Chapter 4 is a discussion of physical maturation. We are concerned both with the normal pattern of growth and with the environmental influences that might alter that pattern. Chapter 5 treats cognitive development, including changes in hypothetico-deductive reasoning. In this chapter, we begin to consider the ways in which differences in intellectual skills generate different life-styles. Chapter 6 focuses on social development, particularly the adolescent's relationships with parents, siblings, and peers. Chapter 7 looks in detail at the high school environment as a socialization setting for adolescents. We consider the impact of the high school on cognitive and social development. Architectural design, curriculum organization, and informal social interaction with adults and peers are examined in order to evaluate their impact. Chapter 8, the final chapter in Part II, treats a variety of maladaptive strategies for responding to the stresses of early adolescence. For each form of deviant behavior, we discuss the

frequency and the meaning of the behavior, and the services and resources that have been developed to deal with it.

Part III presents the developmental changes of later adolescence—the years from 18 to the early 20s. Chapter 9 considers cognitive development, including morality, political orientation, and career selection. Chapter 10 discusses social development. Interpersonal skills, parent relations, sex role development, and the formation of loving relationships are each treated in depth. We also explore the ways in which cognitive and social skills contribute to the development of a sense of identity. In Chapter 11, the college environment is described in detail. We are concerned with who attends college, with the kinds of experiences that are encountered at different kinds of colleges, and with some of the ways in which college students change in the process of adapting to their college environments.

We recognize, of course, that many people between the age of 18 and the early 20s do not go to college. We treat the experiences of people who do not attend college in the chapter on cognitive development when we discuss career selection and training and the influences of the work setting on moral and political development. We also explore the differences among college and noncollege adolescents in the chapter on social development, particularly in the discussion of identity formation. Finally, in Chapter 11, we examine the effects of college on adaptation. Each chapter on later adolescence includes the experiences of noncollege adolescents. Because college has evolved as an institution that provides advanced training in a technological society, because there is an extensive literature on the psychological impact of the college environment, and because increasing numbers of people are attending colleges, we feel that it is important to explore the impact of the college environment on students. Chapter 12 treats some of the maladaptive strategies that have been observed during later adolescence. As in Chapter 8, we discuss the frequency and the meaning of each maladaptive strategy and the services or resources that have been developed to deal with it.

Part IV consists of a single chapter. In this chapter we present an integrated view of adolescence and its meaning for development across the life span. We trace patterns of continuity and change from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood. We begin to evaluate how well the settings and resources designed for adolescents actually meet adolescents' changing needs for intellectual, emotional, and social growth.

One of the prominent features of adolescence is the emphasis on experimentation. During adolescence, young people acquire the intellectual capacity to imagine a variety of behaviors, roles, and

relationships that they may not have actually experienced. They also have the freedom to try out some of these new behaviors apart from the supervision of parents or other adult authorities. Insofar as no other people are directly dependent on adolescents for their well-being or their livelihood, adolescents are freer to take risks in their behavior and to challenge existing social norms than they may be when they are older. The energy that adolescents can invest in experimentation and their opportunities to experiment without concern for risk sometimes lead adolescents to unfortunate consequences. Many of the topics that are described as examples of deviant behavior are best understood as the negative outcomes of a whole range of experimental efforts by adolescents. For the most part, experimentation during this life stage helps to clarify the content and the limits of the opportunities available in the culture for future growth.

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PART II

Part I

Hiroji Kubota/Magnum

We draw from many theories in order to appreciate the full range of behaviors that are observed during adolescence.

1

Theories of Adolescence

The purpose of this chapter is to present some of the major theories of psychological development in order to understand how they conceptualize the life stage of adolescence. One must ask certain questions of a theory in order to evaluate its usefulness. First, one must ask what phenomena the theory is trying to explain. If a theory is trying to explain intellectual development, it might hypothesize about the evolution of the brain, the growth of logical thinking, or the capacity for symbolism. We are less likely to expect insights about fears, motives, or friendship from such a theory. Understanding the frame of reference allows us to place a particular theory in perspective. We will expect cognitive theory to clarify the intellectual development of adolescents, but we will not expect it to tell us very much about social development. Social psychological theory may be expected to inform us about interpersonal relationships but not about logical reasoning. Since our goal is to understand the full range of behaviors that are observed during adolescence and to understand adolescents as psychologically integrated individuals, we will draw from the relevant aspects of many theories to accomplish this goal.

The second question one must ask of a theory is what specific predictions it makes about the phenomena under study. Some theories make very specific predictions about how individuals will be influenced by internal events or environmental pressures. Other theories make very general, vague, or circular predictions. The more clearly specified the predictions, the easier it is to test the theory in the laboratory or in the field.

The third question to ask of a theory involves the fundamental assumptions on which the theory is based. The assumptions of a theory are the guiding premises that provide the logic of the theory. Einstein assumed that the speed of light was a constant before he derived his famous equation. Darwin assumed that evolutionary progress from lower to higher life forms underlay the principle of the survival of the fittest. Freud assumed that all behavior was motivated, and this led him to derive the idea of unconscious mental processes and motives. The assumptions of a theory may be limited by the cultural context, by the sample of observations from which the theorist draws, by the current knowledge base of the field of study, and by the logical capacities of the theorist. The limitations of any theory can be attributed, in part, to the accuracy of the assumptions which generate the logic of the theory.

In this chapter, five groups of theories are discussed. The *evolutionary theories* include the works of Charles Darwin (1859) and G. Stanley Hall (1904). Darwin considers human development in relation to the development of other animal species. Hall, often

considered the father of adolescent psychology, relates the life phases from childhood to adulthood to the cultural evolution of human societies.

The *normative theories* describe the average pattern of growth and change at each life stage. Arnold Gesell (Gesell and Ilg, 1949, 1956) and Robert Havighurst (1972) offer two different views of normative change. The former emphasizes a waxing and waning of inner- and outer-directed growth, whereas the latter considers the specific competences which are achieved at each stage.

Psychodynamic theories focus on changes in emotional and social functioning. The psychoanalytic theorists, including Sigmund Freud (1963a; Strachey, 1953–74), Anna Freud (1946, 1965), and Peter Blos (1962), emphasize the consequences associated with the expression or inhibition of sexual and aggressive motives at each life stage. Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) focuses on characteristics of interpersonal relationships during childhood and adolescene. Erik Erikson (1950, 1959, 1968, 1977) directs our attention to the interplay between individual competences and cultural expectations at every phase of development.

Cognitive theories offer explanations about the development of intellectual competences. Jean Piaget (1950, 1970, 1971, 1976) has developed a stage theory which describes qualitative changes in logical thinking from infancy through adolescence. Lawrence Kohlberg (1964, 1969) has elaborated this stage theory to explain patterns of moral reasoning based on a growing appreciation of abstract principles of justice, intentionality, and social contracts. Heinz Werner (1948, 1957) discusses changes in cognitive functioning as a result of a dynamic interplay between forces toward differentiation and specialization and forces toward integration and synthesis. George Kelly (1955) extends the cognitive approach to a theory of personality that focuses on the concepts individuals use to define themselves and others.

The *social psychological theories* include those of Kurt Lewin (1935, 1936, 1951), Orville Brim (1965, 1966, 1976), and Roger Barker (1963a, 1963b, 1968). Each of these theories describes the importance of interaction with the social and physical environment as a necessary component for growth. Lewin proposed the concept of psychological space as a primary determinant of a person's experiences. Brim considers the array of social roles which create the context for development. Barker has attempted to analyze specific settings in order to understand how individuals define their environments as well as how environments determine the behavior of individuals. Our discussion of each of these theories includes three sections: (1) a presentation of basic concepts; (2) an analysis

of the predictions and assumptions of the theory; and (3) a statement of how the theory conceptualizes the life period of adolescence within its own framework.

EVOLUTIONARY THEORIES

Evolutionary theories demonstrate that the natural laws which apply to plant and animal life also apply to humans. These theories are important for the study of psychological development because they integrate human beings into the vast array of all life forms. Evolutionary theories emphasize the power of natural forces to direct and modify growth.

Biological Evolution: Charles Darwin

Charles Darwin was not the first person to speculate about a theory of evolution. In the century prior to Darwin's scientific work, a number of philosophers and naturalists, including Montesquieu, de Maupertuis, Diderot, Buffon, and Linnaeus, made observations which suggested that a species might change and evolve into a new species. Darwin's grandfather Erasmus Darwin argued that evolution was the result of the response of specific species to their own motives and needs. The pre-Darwinian theories of evolution tended to be intuitive, and none of them offered explanatory mechanisms to account for how species changed. The main resistance to theories of evolution was offered by religions that believed in the "creation." The theory of evolution directly contradicts the notion that a creator formed each species separately at a particular time (de Beer, 1974).

Charles Darwin was born in 1809 into a family that had an intellectual tradition of belief in the concept of evolution. In his childhood, he was not particularly good at his studies. During his adolescence he was sent to study medicine, but he found the lectures boring and the work disgusting. He left medical school to the serious disappointment of his father and was then sent to Cambridge to be trained for the clergy. He was no more interested in theology than he had been in medicine. Throughout his childhood and adolescence, he was mainly interested in collecting things and in being out in nature.

In 1831 an opportunity arose which provided the real training ground and sources of observation for Darwin's career as a naturalist. He became the ship's naturalist on the H.M.S. *Beagle* on a voyage that was undertaken to survey the coasts of South America and islands of the Pacific. The voyage lasted from 1831 to 1836. On this voyage, Darwin showed unending energy in the exploration