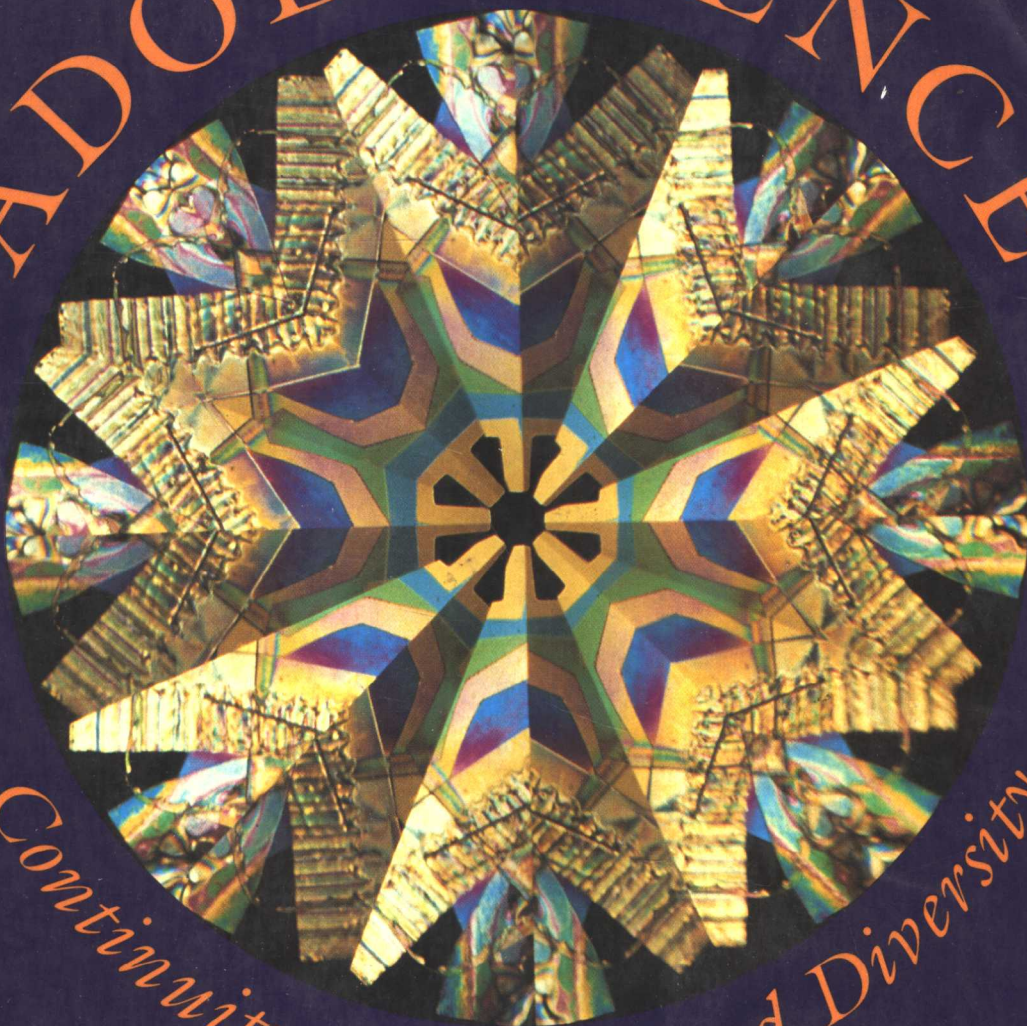


ADOLESCENCE



Continuity, Change, and Diversity

NANCY J. COBB



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NANCY J. COBB

California State University, Los Angeles



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To the Instructor

The purpose of *Adolescence: Continuity, Change, and Diversity* is twofold: it provides a comprehensive, up-to-date survey of the research findings and theories of adolescent development, and it shows how this information can be applied to help adolescents meet the challenges they face as they grow into adulthood. The book is distinctive in four important ways: First, it treats early and late adolescence as two distinct periods of development. Second, it relates each aspect of adolescent development to the unifying theme of identity formation, highlighting important gender differences when these exist. Third, it integrates discussion of cultural differences throughout rather than relegating such coverage to special focus boxes or an isolated chapter. Fourth, it views adolescence within a lifespan developmental perspective.

Early and Late Adolescent Development

The primary developmental issues and experiences of early adolescents differ markedly from those of late adolescents. Early adolescents are just one step beyond the comfortable routine of grade school; high school students are one step away from the responsibilities of adult life. Early adolescence is identified with the onset of puberty and the changes that transform the body into that of a mature adult. Maturation of the reproductive system and a growth spurt put the adolescent eye to eye and nose to nose with his or her parents. Early adolescents must integrate these changes into a new sense of themselves. By late adolescence, puberty is no longer the dominant theme; instead, late adolescents must deal with changes in their relationships and take steps toward the commitment that will define their adult social roles. For early adolescents, the major social issue is achieving autonomy; for late adolescents, this becomes consolidating the changes that accompany autonomy into a mature personality structure. The social world of friends changes as well, from circles of same-sex friends to couples seeking to establish a more mature, intimate sexual identity. In the intellectual realm, early adolescents develop the ability to think abstractly; late adolescents use this ability to formulate a set of values and an ethical system to guide their behavior. By virtue of its two-part organization, this textbook

aims to make these and other important distinctions between early and late adolescence clearer than any other textbook currently available.

Identity Formation and Gender

A second key feature of this textbook is its integration around the theme of adolescence as the search for a stable personal identity, a search often affected by differences in the ways adolescent females and males define themselves. The task facing all adolescents is to achieve a sense of themselves, but the contexts in which this process takes place, as well as the definitions of maturity, may differ significantly for males and females, and the differences cannot be ignored in the study of adolescent development. Many developmental theories assume the experiences of males to be normative for both sexes, even though current research increasingly shows this assumption to be in need of revision.

It is also important to examine gender similarities. Scholars have long accepted that self-definition for males characteristically involves increasing autonomy and separation from others, along with strong occupational and ideological commitments. Few books give much attention to young women's need for increasing autonomy, especially in their work roles and their sexuality. Conversely, the close interpersonal relationships and the sense of connectedness with others that are commonly viewed as hallmarks of female maturity are increasingly being recognized as aspects of a mature male identity, too. The interplay in this book between established developmental theory and recent challenges to it should spark the reader's interest and convey the dynamic nature of this field of inquiry.

Cultural Diversity

A third feature of this book is its emphasis on the ways that the different ethnic and cultural backgrounds of adolescents affect their development. Although the cultural and ethnic composition of the United States is rapidly changing, most developmental theories fail to reflect or address such change. Erik Erikson, perhaps better than any other current theorist, captures the dialectical interplay between a changing self and an evolving society, and yet he speaks of identity largely in terms of a white male society even though he has examined the impact of social conditions on a number of ethnic groups.

The developmental challenges faced by minorities and females are remarkably similar. Frantz Fanon speaks of the "colonization of the unconscious" in describing the incorporation of dominant white values by members of the black minority. Ethnic minorities and adolescent females face a similar problem: how to forge a sense of self in the context of social norms that reflect, and place a greater value on, white-male-defined characteristics that often differ significantly from their own. The field still lacks a systematic examination of prevailing cultural images and their impact on

minority and female adolescents. To the extent possible, this textbook considers developmental theory in the light of what is known about class, ethnic, racial, and sex differences.

The Lifespan Perspective

Our understanding of the psychological, biological, social, and historical forces that shape individual development throughout life has grown immensely during the 1980s. Yet few textbooks seek to integrate these multidisciplinary findings into a cohesive portrait of adolescence within the lifespan. This book views adolescence as a period of both the consolidation (continuity) of developmental tasks and the establishment of new foundations (change) for the future of the maturing adult.

Organization

Part One provides the foundation for the study of adolescence. Chapter 1 introduces the basic definitions and then places adolescence in historical context. Adolescence has not always existed as it does today in technological societies; even in today's world, there are cultures in which only two stages of life are recognized: childhood and adulthood. Chapter 2 introduces theories and models of adolescence and relates these to the broad developmental issues discussed throughout the book.

Most textbooks on adolescence introduce the topic of research methods at the very beginning, when students are least interested, and then ignore the topic for the rest of the course. This book treats research methods in special "Research Focus" boxes in every chapter, as the methods become pertinent to specific problems, and then more comprehensively in an appendix for reference or assignment as the instructor sees fit. Each Research Focus box starts with a practical problem and illustrates how researchers used a particular approach to solve it. A list of the Research Focus boxes appears at the end of the table of contents. Taken all together, the boxes present the full range of topics important for an understanding of the methodologies employed by developmental researchers.

Parts Two and Three, Early Adolescence and Late Adolescence, are the core of the textbook. Part Two opens with puberty in Chapter 3 and traces the changes early adolescents undergo intellectually (Chapter 4), within their families (Chapter 5), with peers (Chapter 6), and at school (Chapter 7). These chapters give students a picture of early adolescents in the various contexts of their lives. Part Three follows a parallel organization, first looking at sexuality in late adolescence (Chapter 8), then the intellectual developments that take place in high school and continue into college (Chapter 9). The changing relationships within the family that were discussed in Part Two provide the foundation for the personality consolidation (Chapter 10) that characterizes late adolescence. Vocational choices and adolescents in the workplace receive attention in Chapter 11.

Part Four is about atypical developments such as substance abuse, eating disorders, suicide, AIDS, and juvenile delinquency. For readers who will live and work with adolescents, knowing more about the potential obstacles to healthy development is immensely important.

Learning Aids

Each chapter begins with a personal vignette that provides an insight into how adolescents perceive their world or deal with its challenges. These vignettes are intended to engage the reader and focus attention on themes within the chapter.

In addition, each chapter begins with an Overview and ends with a Summary and a list of Key Terms. Key terms appear in bold type in the chapter and are defined in the Glossary at the end of the book.

To clarify and reinforce essential points, the text is illustrated extensively with charts, tables, drawings, and photographs. An eight-page full-color photo essay begins each part. These photo essays are designed to enhance the reader's appreciation of the many contexts of adolescent experience and development: cultural, physical, cognitive, family, school, and community.

Supplemental Teaching Aids

An Instructor's Manual includes convenient chapter outlines and summaries, additional suggestions for reading, lists of audio-visual resources, and exercises that can be used in group or individual projects.

An extensive test bank, available in printed form and on computer disk in the Brownstone Diploma II testing system for IBM compatibles and Apple Macintosh, includes, for each chapter, multiple-choice items, true/false questions, and fill-in or short-answer questions.

A set of transparency masters is available to supplement class lectures. Some of the masters reproduce essential material from the text, but many are additional.

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Nancy Cobb

To the Student

Think about adolescents you know. Or try to remember yourself as an adolescent. If your experience of adolescence is recent, your perspective may still be fresh and somewhat subjective. If your own adolescence is a number of years behind you, your vision may be more objective but may also have blurred with the passage of time. Whether thinking about adolescents you know or of your own adolescence, one thing is certain: you cannot recapture the excitement, the anguish, or those many "firsts" you experienced then. As adults, our perspective is different, balanced by having "firsts" followed by seconds and thirds. It is because we recognize that our adult perspective is so different that we have a new appreciation for the special contexts of adolescent development. Today, we have a better appreciation for the context of adolescence, a context simultaneously shaped by the forces of continuity, change, and diversity.

This perspective allows us to see that, despite frequent similarities between adolescents and adults in speech and appearance, striking differences often separate our understanding of the world from theirs. The differences can be dramatic:

A 14-year-old, when asked by her mother why she's been acting so dreamy lately, replies, "You wouldn't understand, Mom, you've *never* been in love!"

A 15-year-old who occasionally experiments with drugs and knows others who have overdosed with the same substance tells himself, "It can't happen to me—I'm different."

A frightened 16-year-old tells his mother that because he hadn't had sex "enough times" with his girl, that he didn't think she could get pregnant. "Girls just don't get pregnant that way, not by having sex just once, just that one time!"

A gifted 17-year-old who can think circles around most adults still feels like a child inside and becomes anxious at the thought of leaving home for college.

Thoughts and feelings like these convince us of the very deep differences in the ways adolescents and adults perceive and relate to their worlds. This textbook examines the many contexts of adolescent experience and development: the physical changes brought on by puberty, the growth of intellect and logic, relations with family and friends, sexuality, and the larger worlds of school and work. The goal is to present information in a way that makes it possible to appreciate the complexity of adolescent interactions with adults and others. It is only through understanding what is meaningful in adolescent development that we can become positive influences in the lives of today's adolescents and tomorrow's adults.

A Focus on Meaningful Differences

Just as we distinguish phases of childhood and adulthood, such as toddlers and school-age children, or young adults from middle-aged adults, we also can distinguish early adolescents from late adolescents. Early adolescents' first steps take them out of childhood. Late adolescents stand at the threshold of adulthood. Early adolescents struggle with the changes of puberty, a new awareness of their sexuality, and with changing parental and peer relationships. Late adolescents grapple with the challenge of achieving an identity, preparing for adult roles by taking a first job or continuing their education, and integrating sexuality into their relationships.

Increasing your understanding of the many aspects of adolescent behavior is the objective of this textbook. You will learn that many questions still remain unanswered. The study of adolescent development is a "young" field and has not been investigated as extensively as other developmental periods, such as infancy or early childhood. Many interesting questions have not even been asked, let alone identified, and you will probably find that you want to know more than developmentalists can answer.

Some of your questions will remain unanswered for another reason. To obtain answers one would have to study adolescents in ways that are simply not possible. Many factors interact to make adolescents the individuals they are. Some factors are undoubtedly inborn; others are shaped by the contexts of their lives—by families, friends, schools, and communities. Many of the research methods that contribute to our understanding of adolescence isolate a behavior for closer study and then extrapolate from the findings to other developmental contexts. Although isolating behavior in order to study it increases our knowledge, it can also lead to distortions, because a person's behavior always assumes a somewhat different form in each different context. Compensating for such distortions is at best an inexact science. In the chapters that follow, you will find information that increases your understanding of adolescent behavior, but you are cautioned that such knowledge is subject to future revision as more research is conducted and applied.

Other questions cannot be answered because of ethical limitations. Does assignment to a lower academic track lead to poorer learning and increased risk of

dropping out of school? To answer such a question, we would have to assign adolescents at random to either a lower or higher track, and compare their academic performance. Most parents would naturally object to any chance assignment of their children to classes in ways that could limit their academic achievement. Also, investigators who believe that assignment to a lower academic track might adversely affect learning could not ethically conduct such studies. Researchers have therefore chosen to study naturally occurring groups instead. But they face still other problems when they do. For example, there is always the possibility that some unknown factor contributes to the differences one is observing. Consequently, there are many questions for which we do not have—and are unlikely to get—definitive answers.

Extending Knowledge to Practical Outcomes

Many who read this textbook will become teachers, nurses, social workers, or counselors. Almost all will establish families of their own, if not done so already, and will face the immensely important challenge of raising adolescents. One way or another, all will come into contact with adolescents who will affect their lives. This textbook will help you make connections between learned concepts and everyday situations to which they apply. Throughout each chapter, adolescent development is discussed within the context of practical applications. The examples used to establish these connections illustrate in concrete ways the situations faced by adolescents of different ages, sexes, and cultural backgrounds.

Finally, it is important to stress that research can have meaningful applications to the lives of adolescents. The two Research Focus boxes that appear in each chapter isolate recent studies that warrant special attention. It is important to learn to distinguish between one kind of research and another and to know what kinds of issues researchers face. In addition, each piece of research is discussed in terms of practical applications that can make a difference in the lives of adolescents.

The Place of Values

Developmentalists attempt to study adolescents in a value-free context, in order to objectively observe and record what they see. Yet values affect their observations if only through their choice of what they consider important enough to observe. Observations that confirm our expectations are usually not subjected to the same critical tests, or followed up with further observations, as are those that are unexpected. Such expected observations often reflect gender and ethnic stereotypes, however unintentionally. Thus, when research finds that males use rules more effectively than females to regulate and prolong their play, few questions are asked. Similarly, studies finding that minority adolescents are more likely to be in noncollege than college tracks in high school are not questioned. Each finding reflects an expected outcome.

But when we look beneath the surface of studies such as these, we often find that other conclusions are equally supportable. Take the case of the use of rules. Is it simply a matter of males being "better" at this than females? Hardly. But it takes a different set of values to alert researchers to look for other answers. When one does, one finds that females interpret the need to settle their differences through rules as a sign that the friendship is in jeopardy, and they tend to end the game to protect their relationships. Similarly, a closer look at the relatively larger numbers of minority students in noncollege tracks supports alternative conclusions. Research controlling for background variables, such as minority status and intelligence, finds that students assigned to noncollege tracks still do more poorly than those in the college tracks. Assignment to the track itself, rather than ability or minority status, appears to be the key factor in determining a student's investment in learning.

It is only fair to point out that this textbook is not free of values. It makes a deliberate effort to take this second look, to determine whether expectations concerning gender and ethnicity contribute to the conclusions researchers make. Many psychological theories have been formulated on the basis of data collected only from males. Others implicitly assume a male perspective. And nearly all theories assume the perspective of the dominant culture. This book explicitly points out these shortcomings when they occur and organizes the coverage of topics within chapters to include issues of gender and ethnicity.

Even so, an additional set of values will color what you are reading. These are your own values. They operate in much the same way as those of the developmentalists who collected the initial observations. As a student, you need to be a discerning reader. Think about how you are reacting to what is stated and what the research implies. You may be surprised to find that many of your assumptions about adolescents run counter to what you are reading.

Your understanding of adolescence will have increased immensely by the time you finish the final chapter of this textbook. For those of you planning to work or share some part of your lives with adolescents, the knowledge you gain will be both meaningful and practical. Above all, you will have gained a sense of the immense richness of diversity in the human experience.

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