



SECOND EDITION

*Adolescence  
and Youth  
Psychological  
Development  
in a Changing  
World*

John Janeway Conger

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# *Adolescence and Youth*

*I have sent forth my prayers.  
Our children,  
Even those who have erected their shelters  
At the edge of the wilderness,  
May their roads come in safely,  
May the forests  
And the brush  
Stretch out their water-filled arms  
To shield their hearts;  
May their roads come in safely;  
May their roads all be fulfilled,  
May it not somehow become difficult for them  
When they have gone but a little way.*

*May all the young boys,  
All the young girls,  
And those whose roads are ahead,  
May they have powerful hearts,  
Strong spirits;  
On roads reaching to Dawn Lake  
May they grow old.*

*—Zuñi Indian Prayer*

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# Preface

Today's young people are coming to maturity in a rapidly changing complex society, a society whose future directions are shrouded in uncertainty and whose present hopes for stability and purpose are often torn by disillusionment and doubt for the many, and tragedy for the few. At times, it seems, the only thing we can be certain of is change itself.

In the preface to the first edition of this book, I stated my conviction that any attempt to provide a comprehensive, contemporary view of adolescent development must include an appreciation of the effects of current social change. Indeed, one of my primary aims was to show how the adolescent's development is influenced by changes in such social institutions as the family, schools, peer culture, and the world of work, as well as by divisions and conflicts taking place in society generally. The intervening four years since publication of the first edition have only served to reinforce this conviction. The problems faced by the nuclear family have increased and become still more complex. Political and social activism have declined, but other aspects of the youth culture of the 1960s—including the so-called sexual revolution and loss of confidence in many social institutions, including government—have continued into the middle 1970s. The affluent society of less than a decade ago, with an overabundance of jobs for economically privileged youth, has been replaced by “a society of lowered expectations,” with historically high unemployment rates for young people generally, and especially for economically disadvantaged minorities. Reduced budgets, social tensions, and renewed questioning of the fundamental purposes of education have created increased problems for our schools. Changing sex roles, particularly for women, are

leading to changes in educational and vocational opportunities and, in many instances, to reappraisals of personal and social goals. Patterns of drug use, of alienation, of psychological problems, and of delinquency have also changed.

All these changes, and others, have affected the individual adolescent's development and the challenges he or she faces in the search for a stable, workable sense of identity. Much of the new material in this edition reflects the influence of these changes. This is particularly the case in chapters on the family, parent-adolescent relationships, sexual attitudes and behavior, the schools, vocational choice, drug use, and patterns of alienation and commitment. In addition, an entirely new chapter has been added dealing with psychological and psychophysiological disturbances in adolescence and their treatment.

In an effort to make the book maximally useful to undergraduate students in developmental psychology and other behavioral sciences and to interested parents and adolescents, as well as to advanced students and established professionals, I have tried to combine thorough, current coverage of the research literature and detailed bibliographic references with a straightforward and, I hope, well-organized and integrated presentation of the text. If desired, most chapters can be read or assigned separately as a coherent, self-contained presentation of the topic under consideration.

The principal emphasis throughout this book is on findings resulting from empirical research, rather than on the much larger body of abstract theory, speculation, and (all too often) special pleading that frequently characterize this still embryonic field. Nevertheless, it is not possible to begin to order and make sense of empirical findings without some recourse to underlying assumptions regarding the nature of development. Consequently, a number of basic principles of development—maturation, learning, cognition, motivation, identification, identity formation, psychological defense mechanisms—are employed in an effort to lend coherence and meaning to the rapidly expanding body of research findings in the field of adolescent development.

A book such as this inevitably reflects not only the current status of an area of scientific investigation, but, at least to some extent, the outlook of the author himself—his values, his hopes and fears, his perceptions and his blind spots. To the extent that the hopes outweigh the fears and that, despite the blind spots, there is some understanding, my greatest single debt is to my family—my parents and sister, my wife and our children. For me they have provided not only pleasure and love, but equally important, a meaningful link between the best of the past, present, and future.

Among the many others to whom I am indebted are Paul Henry Mussen, my longtime collaborator and friend, who read the entire manuscript and made valuable suggestions; Lois Hoffman, who reviewed the chapters on physical growth and physiological development, parental models and the development of independence, sexual attitudes and behaviors, and vocational choice; and Gary May and Frank Timmons, who read the chapters on psychological and psychophysiological disturbances in adolescence. My

longtime secretary and friend, Dorothy Townsend, in her usual calm, cheerful, and efficient way, played an indispensable role in helping to put the book together. She deciphered my illegible hieroglyphics, noted errors, tracked down references, and typed the entire manuscript.

Finally, I wish to express my appreciation to the psychiatric, psychological, nursing, social services, and teaching staffs of the adolescent service of the University of Colorado Psychiatric Hospital, with whom I have worked over the past four years. In a society that loudly asserts its concern for children and adolescents, but does far too little to manifest it in needed action, they have continued—through their understanding, perseverance, flexibility, humor, and mutual cooperation (with a welcome absence of personal “ego trips”)—to demonstrate what caring is really all about.

J. J. C.

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# *Introduction*

## *Chapter I*

