# Peculiarities of Adolescence Development Stage

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*Abstract: -* **Adolescence period is a very important period in which an individual develops the ability to choose and determine self. This is the hallmark of maturity. It is believed that heredity interacts with environmental influences to determine individual's development. It is also believed that this adolescence period is a turbulent time charged with conflict and mood swings. These views have implications for the social development and education of the adolescents. It is on this premise that this researcher takes a look at the early history of adolescence, the twentieth century contribution of Stanley Hall, who was labeled the father of the scientific study of adolescence; and Margaret Mead's sociocultural view of adolescence. This paper also looks at the issue of stereotyping adolescents, the current status of adolescents, the nature of development and different theories of adolescent development. In conclusion, every adolescent needs a personal relationship with a caring adult to counsel him or her. The children and adolescents who successfully cope with stress consistently have someone in their lives whose actions say "you count, I love you and will care for you". Parents traditionally should be the source of this long-term trusting and supportive relationship. However, as the society becomes more complex and demanding, more and more parents depend on school counsellors.**

*Keywords:* **Adolescence, adolescents, development, stress, societal standards.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

In early Greece, both Plato and Aristotle commented about the nature of the youth. Plato (fourth century B.C) described three facets of human development (which he called 'soul') – desire, spirit and reason. According to Plato, 'reason' which is the highest of the facets does not develop in childhood, but rather first appears at about the age period we call adolescence today. Plato argued that because reason does not mature in childhood, children's education should focus on sports and music. He also emphasized that the onset of rational thought in adolescence requires a change in the educational curricular; sports and music should be replaced by science and mathematics.

Plato believed that character not intellect, should be developed in the early years of childhood. Even though Plato stressed the importance of early experience in the formation of character, he nevertheless pointed out that experiences in later years could modify character. Arguments about the importance of early experience in human development are still prevalent today.

Aristotle (fourth century B.C) argued that the most important aspect of the age period we now call adolescence is the development of the ability to choose, and that this self-determination becomes the hallmark of maturity. Aristotle believed that at the onset of adolescence, individuals are unstable and impatient, lacking the self-control to be a mature person. But he felt that by about 21 years of age, most individuals have much better self-control. Aristotle was one of the first to describe specific time periods for stages of human development. He defined three stages infancy-the first 7 years of life; boyhood-age 7 to puberty; and young manhood-puberty to age 21. Aristotle's view is not unlike some contemporary views which use labels like 'independence', 'identity' and career choice to describe the importance of increased self determination in adolescence.

## II. THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The end of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century represented an important period in the invention of the concept we now call adolescence. Stanley Hall (1844-1924) was labeled the father of the scientific study of adolescence. Hall's ideas were first published in the two-volume set 'Adolescence' in 1904.

Hall was strongly influenced by Charles Darwin, the famous evolutionary theorist. Hall applied the scientific and biological dimensions of Darwin's view to the study of adolescent development. Hall believed that all development is controlled by genetically determined physiological factors and that environment plays a minimal role in development, especially during infancy and childhood. He did acknowledge however, that environment accounts for more change in development in adolescence than in earlier periods. Thus Hall believed, as commonly believed today, that heredity interacts with environmental influences to determine the individual's development.

Hall subscribed to a four-stage approach to development: infancy, childhood, youth and adolescence. According to Hall, adolescence is the period from 12 to 23 years of age and is filled with storm and stress. The 'storm and stress' view is Hall's concept that adolescence is a turbulent time charged with conflict and mood swings. In Hall's view, adolescents' thoughts, feelings and actions oscillate between conceit and humility, good and temptation, happiness and sadness. The adolescent might be nasty to a peer one moment, and kind the next moment. At one moment, the adolescent might want to be alone, but seconds later might seek companionship.

Hall's views had implications for the social development and education of adolescents. Hall conceived of development as a biological process that directed social

development. In Hall's view, biological changes in adolescence allow for more complicated social arrangements, such as dating. With regard to education, Hall said that such facilities as civility, scientific thinking and morality should be intensely taught after the age of 15.

According to Santrock (1998), Hall's developmental vision of education rested mainly on highly speculative theory, rather than specific data. He commented further that although Hall believed systematic methods should be used to study adolescents, his research efforts resorted to the creation of rather weak and unconvincing questionnaires.

Even though the quality of his research was debatable, Hall was a giant in the field of adolescence. It was he who began the theorizing, the systematizing, and the questioning that went beyond mere speculating and philosophizing. Indeed, the beginnings of the scientific study of adolescent development were owed to Hall.

## III. MARGARET MEAD'S SOCIOCULTURAL VIEW OF ADOLESCENCE

Anthropologist Margaret Mead (1928) studied adolescents on the South Sea Island of Samoa. She concluded that the basic nature of adolescents is not biological, as Hall envisioned, but rather sociocultural. She argued that when cultures allow adolescents to observe sexual relations, see babes born, regard death as natural, do important work, engage in sex play, and know clearly what their adult roles will be, they promote a relatively stress-free adolescent. She went further to say that in cultures like the United States, in which children are considered very different from adults and where adolescence is not characterized by the aforementioned experiences, adolescence is more likely to be stressful.

More than half a century after Mead's Samoan findings, her work was criticized as biased and error-prone (Freeman, 1983). The current criticism also states Samoan adolescence is more stressful than Mead observed and that delinquency appears among Samoan adolescents just as it does among Western adolescents.

## IV. STEREOTYPING ADOLESCENTS

It is easy to stereotype a person, groups of people or classes of people. A 'stereotype' is a broad category that reflects our impressions and beliefs about people. All stereotypes refer to an image of what the typical member of a particular group is like. We live in a complex world and strive to simplify this complexity. Stereotyping people is one way this is done. People simply assign a label to a group of people-for example, they say youths are promiscuous. Then one has less to consider when one thinks about this set of people. Once stereotypes are assigned, it is difficult to abandon them, even in the face of contradictory evidence.

Such stereotyping of adolescents is so widespread that adolescence researcher Joseph Adelson (1979) called it the 'adolescent generalization gap', meaning that widespread generalizations about adolescents have developed, that are based on information about a limited, often highly visible group of adolescents.

Beginning with Stanley Hall's portrayal of adolescence as a period of storm and stress, adolescence has unfortunately been perceived as a problematic period of the human life span that youth, the families, and society had to endure. But a large majority of adolescents are not nearly as disturbed and troubled as the popular stereotype of adolescence suggests. Public attitudes about adolescence emerge from a combination of personal experience and media portrayals, neither of which produces an objective picture of how normal adolescents develop (Santrcock, 1998).

Some of the readiness to assume the worst about adolescents likely involves the short memories of adults. Many adults measure their current perceptions of adolescents by memories of their own adolescence. Adults often portray today's adolescents as more troubled, less respectful, more self-centred, more assertive and more adventurous than they were.

However, in matters of taste and manners, the youth of every nation have seemed radical, unnerving and different from adults – different in how they look, how they behave, the music they enjoy, their hairstyles and the clothing they choose. It is an error to confuse the adolescent's enthusiasm for trying on new identities and enjoying moderate amounts of outrageous behavior with hostility toward parental and societal standards. Acting out and boundary testing are time-honoured ways in which adolescents move towards accepting rather than rejecting, parental values.

## V. THE CURRENT STATUS OF ADOLESCENTS

Today's adolescents face demands and expectations, as well as risks and temptations, that appear to be more numerous and complex than those adolescents faced only a generation ago (Hamburg, 1993). By some criteria, today's adolescents are doing better than their counterparts from a decade or two earlier. According to Santrock (1996) in the last few years in America, adolescent accidents and homicides have declined, as have drug use, juvenile delinquency and adolescent pregnancy rates. More adolescents today complete high school. Most adolescents today have positive self-conceptions and positive relationships with others.

These contemporary findings do not support a portrayal of adolescence as a highly disturbed, overly stressful time period in the life cycle. Rather, the majority of adolescents find the transition from childhood to adulthood a time of physical, cognitive and social development that provides considerable challenge, opportunities and growth.

Yet, while most adolescents experience the transition from childhood to adulthood more positively than is portrayed by many adults and the media, too many adolescents today are not provided with adequate opportunities and support to become competent adults (Noam, 1997; Weissburg and

Greenberg 1997). Adolescents are not a homogeneous group. Most adolescents successfully negotiate the lengthy path to adult maturity, but too large a minority do not. Ethnic, cultural, gender, socio-economic, age and lifestyle differences influence the actual life trajectory of each adolescent.

In sum, different portrayals of adolescents often emerge, depending on the particular group of adolescents being described. Feldman & Elliot (1990) described how adults' idealized images of adolescents and society's ambivalent messages to adolescents may contribute to adolescents' problems:

- Many adults treasure the independence of youth, yet insist that adolescents do not have the maturity to make autonomous, competent decisions about their lives.
- Society's sexual messages to adolescents are especially ambiguous. Adolescents are somehow supposed to be sexually naive but become sexually knowledgeable.
- Laws prohibit adolescents from using alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs, and adults decry the high level of drug use by adolescents. Yet many of the very same adults who stereotype and criticize adolescents for their drug use are themselves drug abusers and heavy cigarette smokers.
- Society promotes education and the development of knowledge as essential to success as an adult. Yet adolescents frequently observe the rewards society doles out to individuals who develop their athletic skills and business acumen. As adolescents interact with adults who do not value the process of learning, adolescents may not attach enormous importance to getting University degrees.

## VI. THE NATURE OF DEVELOPMENT

Development is the pattern of change that begins at conception and continues through the life span. Adolescent development is determined by biological, cognitive, and socio emotional processes (Santrack, 1998).

*Biological processes:* These involve changes in an individual physical nature. Genes inherited from parents, the development of the brain, height and weight gains, motor skills, and the hormonal changes of puberty all reflect the role of biological processes in the adolescents' development.

*Cognitive Processes:* These involve changes in an individual's thought, intelligence and language. Memorizing a poem, solving a mathematical problem and imagining what it would be like to be a movie star all reflect the role of cognitive processes in the adolescent's development.

*Socio-emotional processes:* These involve changes in an individual's relationships with other people, in emotions, in personality and in the role of social contexts in development. An aggressive attack on a peer, the development of assertiveness, an adolescent's joy at social events, and a

society's gender-role orientation all reflect the role of socio-emotional processes in the adolescent's development.

Biological, cognitive and socio-emotional processes are intricately interwoven. Socio-emotional processes shape cognitive processes, cognitive processes advance or restrict socio-emotional processes, and biological processes influence cognitive processes.

## VII. ADOLESCENCE PERIOD

No boy or girl enters adolescence as a blank slate with only a genetic blueprint determining thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Rather, the combination of a genetic blueprint, childhood experiences, and adolescent experiences determines the course of adolescent development.

Developments increasingly describe adolescence in terms of early and late periods. Early adolescence corresponds roughly to the middle school or junior high school years and includes most pubertal change. Late adolescence refers to approximately the latter half of the second decade of life career interests, dating, and identity exploration are often more pronounced in late adolescence than in early adolescence.

## VIII. THEORIES OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

The diversity of theories makes understanding adolescent development a challenging undertaking. Just when one theory appears to correctly explain adolescent development, another theory crops up and makes one rethink an earlier conclusion. Adolescent development is complex and multifaceted. Although no single theory has been able to account for all aspects of adolescent development, each theory has contributed an important piece to the puzzle. Although the theories sometimes disagree about certain aspects of adolescent development, much of their information is complimentary rather than contradictory.

- *Psychoanalytic Theories*

For psychoanalytic theorists, development is primarily unconscious – that is, beyond awareness – and is heavily coloured by emotion. Psychoanalytic theorists believe that behaviour is merely surface characteristic. To truly understand development, one has to analyze the symbolic meanings of behaviour and the deep inner workings of the mind. Psychoanalytic theorists also stress that early experiences with parents extensively shape development. These characteristics are highlighted in the main psychoanalytic theory, that of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939).

❖ *Personality Structure*

Freud (1917) believed that personality has three structures: the id, the ego and the superego. The id is the Freudian structure of personality that consists of instincts, which are an individual's reservoir of psychic energy. In Freud's view the id is totally unconscious; it has no contact with reality. As children experience the demands and

constraints of reality, a new structure of personality emerges – the ego, the Freudian structure of personality that deals with the demands of reality. The ego is called the "executive branch" of personality because it makes rational decisions. The superego is the Freudian structure of personality that is the moral branch of personality. The superego takes into account whether something is right or wrong. One can refer to superego as the "conscience".

Freud considered personality to be like an iceberg. Freud believed that adolescents' lives are filled with tension and conflict. To reduce this tension, adolescents keep information locked in their unconscious mind, said Freud. He believed that even trivial behaviours have special significance when the unconscious forces behind them are revealed. A twitch, a doodle, a joke, a smile – each might have an unconscious reason for appearing, according to Freud.

❖ *Defense Mechanisms*

The ego resolves conflict between its demands for reality, the wishes of the id, and the constraints of the superego by using defense mechanisms. They are unconscious methods the ego uses to distort reality and protect itself from anxiety.

Repression is the most powerful and pervasive defense mechanism, according to Freud. It pushes unacceptable id impulses out of awareness and back into the unconscious mind. Repression is the foundation from which all other defense mechanisms work; the goal of every defense mechanism is to repress, or push, threatening impulses out of awareness.

Freud's theory has undergone significant revisions. Unconscious thought remains a central theme, but most contemporary psychoanalysts believes that conscious thought makes up more of the iceberg than Freud envisioned.

• *Erikson's Theory*

Erik Erikson (1902 – 1994) recognized Freud's contributions but believed that Freud misjudged some important dimension of human development. Erikson (1968) said we develop in psychosocial stages. Each stage consists of an unique developmental task that confronts individual with a crisis that must be faced. For Erikson, this crisis is not a catastrophe but a turning point of increased vulnerability and enhanced potential. The more an individual resolves the crises successfully, the healthier that individual's development will be.

Identity versus identity confusion is Erikson's fifth developmental stage, which individuals experience during the adolescent years. At this time, individuals are faced with finding out who they are, what they are all about, and where they are going in life. Adolescents are confronted with many new roles and adult statuses – vocational and romantic, for example. Parents need to allow adolescents to explore many different roles and different paths within a particular role. If

the adolescent explores such roles in a healthy manner and arrives at a positive path to follow in life, then a positive identity will be achieved. If an identity is pushed on the adolescent by the parents, if the adolescent does not adequately explore many roles, and if a positive future path is not defined, then identity confusion reigns.

• *Cognitive Theories*

Whereas psychoanalytic theories stress the importance of adolescents' unconscious thoughts, cognitive theories emphasize their conscious thoughts. Below is an important cognitive theory.

❖ *Piaget's Theory*

The famous Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget (1896-1980) stressed that adolescents actively construct their own cognitive worlds; information is not just poured into their minds from the environment. Piaget emphasized that adolescents adapt their thinking to include new ideas because additional information furthers understanding. Piaget (1954) also believed that we go through four stages in understanding the world. Each of the stages in age related and consists of distinct ways of thinking. It is the different way of understanding the world that makes one stage more advanced than the other. The formal operational stage, which appears between the ages of 11 and 15, is the fourth and final Piagetian stage. In this stage, individuals move beyond the world of actual, concrete experiences and think in abstract and more logical terms.

• *Behavioural Theory*

The version of the behavioural approach that is most prominent today is the view of B.F Skinner (1904 – 1990).

Skinner's Behaviourism

Behaviourism emphasizes the scientific study of observable behavioural responses and their environmental determinants. In Skinner's behaviourism, the mind, conscious or unconscious, is not needed to explain behavior and development.

## IX. CONCLUSION

Every adolescent needs a personal relationship with a caring adult to counsel him or her about career opportunities and life options. When their parents are not equipped to play this important role, adolescents need access to a teacher, school counsellor and professional youth worker.

The children and adolescents who successfully coped with stress consistently had someone in their lives whose actions told them "you count. I love you and will care for you. I will always be there for you". In sum, the long-term presence of a basic, trusting relationship with an adult is a key factor in the protective buffering of adolescents from stressors and problems. One or both parents have traditionally been the source of this long-term trusting, supportive relationship, and many parents continue to fill this critical role in adolescents'

development. However, as our society has become more complex and demanding, more and more parents depends on school counsellors.

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