

Overview of Social Development for Adolescents

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Abstract

Adolescence is a period of physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development. There has been much discussion about the social task and challenges of adolescence. In this paper, we will explore how peers influence gender roles, how adolescents think differently than children, how teenagers form a cultural identity role, and how important it is that the adolescent develops an identity. We will introduce the interaction of peer group influence, and the formation of identity as the adolescent develops physically, cognitively, and emotionally. At all ages especially adolescence, we strive to fit in with a particular group, and that group, of course, influences us. The factors of physical, cognitive, and emotional development will impact finding a cultural role and the adjustment of fitting into a social group.

Keywords: Social development; Adolescents

Introduction

As children transition into the early stages of adolescence, it is accompanied with puberty, which consists of growing body hair, more perspiration with physical or stressful activities, and oil production in skin and hair. Girls will be developing breast and hips will be widening, and the onset of menstruation will begin. Boys will observe the growth of testicles and penis, this will be associated with sexual dreams, and their voice will start to change, usually in a lower tone. There are tremendous growth and an increase in sexual interest. By the middle years of adolescence, puberty is complete and physical growth increases for boys and girls. By late adolescence, the young women are fully developed, and young men continue to gain muscle mass, height and body hair [1]. These changes are happening at a fast pace.

Literature Review

Physical and biological development in adolescence

Adolescence has often been described as a physical transitioning of the child into early adulthood. There are numerous biological changes take place; skeletal growth, which is associated with an overall change in body composition. The process of these changes is relatively consistent during puberty. However, there may be a significant number of divergences in the age of inception, prolongation, and momentum of these developmental variations within the individuals [1]. These are reasons that two adolescents can be the same age but can be extremely different in their physical appearance. This change is a correlation between genetics and nutritional diet. For example, a fourteen-year-old boy that has practically concluded the growth spurt that is associated with puberty and that has accomplished significant muscular development will have different levels of energy and dietary needs that the fourteen-year-old who has not experienced this stage of adolescence. Sexual maturation can be used to evaluate the degree of biological growth, development, and dietary needs of the adolescent in placed of chronometric scales [1].

Teenagers reach physical maturity years before they are ready to assume the role of an adult. This event can cause tension and frustration on psychological and physical levels. Indeed, adolescence is not just identified by physical trait changes. There are cognitive and social changes. As the adolescent begins to spend more time away from their families, they become more influenced by cultural and societal factors. These factors include friends, families, communities, religious beliefs,

schools, events in the world, and various forms of media [2]. Sexuality is a biological process, but cultural cognitive factors will also guide sexual behaviors.

Cultural and societal influences on adolescent cognitive development

As adolescence begins, we approach what developmental psychologists Jean Piaget referred to as the formal operational stage of reasoning. During early adolescence we can observe a growing capacity for conceptualized thought process the adolescent is very interested in the "now" with very limited concern for a process of reflection that involves the future. As the young person transitions through early adolescence, their intellectual interests will expand and become more imperative. The adolescent develops a deeper moral thinking approach [1].

During the middle years of adolescence, there is sustained growth in their aptitude for abstract thinking. The adolescent demonstrates a more goal-oriented approach to their daily routine. There is often a fascination with moral reasoning. Among most adolescents, they begin to ponder the meaning of life. By late adolescence, the young person has established the ability to think an idea through. They can analyze their inner experiences to formulate behaviors and express concern for the future. The adolescent will continue the exploration of moral reasoning [1].

During this development stage in their lifespan, the adolescent's reasoning has changed from that of a child to a more critical evaluation of situations. The adolescent has evolved to a mental progression that includes formal logic, theoretical reasoning, and an abstract thought process. These changes epitomize subjective growth in their cognitive skills. It's not a matter of thinking more, but rather they think in a different way. For example, trying to teach a six-year-old the

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functions of a motor neuron would be futile because the child simply can't get it. However, most adolescents have the mental tools to take on the abstract concepts to process the vital information [3]. We can remember working with our daughter on ideas that she could not see when she was seven- years-old. It was impossible. As she got older, we could almost see the wheels turning in her head as she tried to grasp these abstract concepts that she was confronted with. As she moved into adolescence, it was as if someone flipped a switch and illuminated the room, and she started to process the information.

Apparently, adolescents don't always think with perfect precision and logic all the time. It is a time where they focus mainly on themselves. They tend to express that their feelings are exclusive. As they explore romance, they suggest that the feelings they are experiencing are unlike what any other person has ever felt. The break-up to them is hard to imagine that anyone, including their parents, has ever felt something so painful. They also have feelings of invincibility, which leads to impulsive behavior and risk taking. This behavior may be due to the brain's frontal lobe, which is responsible for long-term planning and controlling impulsive behavior are not fully developed till the mid-twenties [3]. Regardless of their focus on self, adolescents are still able to exhibit idealistic cognitive processing and can identify and denounce hypocrisy that they have identified within society. Once the adolescent finds a cause to be passionate about they tend to work hard for its acceptance. These formal operational thinking skills will also lead the adolescent to think about what they believe on deeper levels than in the past [3].

Morality

One vital aspect of cognitive development during adolescence is morality. The adolescent begins to have a deeper understanding of right and wrong. Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg introduced an idea that our way of thinking about morality changes at different development stages. Kohlberg formulated moral dilemmas to determine levels of moral reasoning among individuals [4]. Kohlberg developed three levels of moral reasoning that we transition through. Pre-conventional stage, which involves obeying to either to receive a reward or to avoid punishment. The next stage is the Conventional phase, which involves fitting in and being a good law abiding citizen. The final stage is Post-conventional, which consist of ethical principles and obligations of others. According to Kohlberg, not everyone will reach this final stage [4].

There has been some criticism of Kohlberg's Theory of the process of cognitive moral reasoning. Haidt stressed feelings were more important than the thinking process [5]. Do we make up our mind in moral situations based on what our gut instincts tell us? After we make our gut decision do we then defend that reaction? Regardless of your thoughts on this process the choices we make in adolescence or otherwise are necessary. These moral choices we make help our transition in social situations.

Humans are social, as we develop throughout the period of adolescence we find a sense of an identity, which can be an essential part of our transition from adolescence. The shyest adolescent will experience a measure of social interaction, which is a normal part of development process. The development of our communication skills depends on our social interaction. The friendships we form, the romantic relationships, how we conform or not conform, and popularity and detachment from family all are associated with social development [6]. The theory of social development presented by Erik Erikson suggested that particular issues manifest themselves at different

periods in our lifespan. According to Erikson, a person goes through psychosocial turning points, which may have a positive or negative consequence on personality development.

During the developmental period of adolescence, the essential job is to establish an identity. The adolescent needs to have a consistent idea of who they are and what they are. Often the adolescent will integrate many roles, which may be tried on in different ways they think and act. The young person will be on a journey to find a strong sense of self [6].

Adolescence will demonstrate many characteristics as they search for an identity. The central aspect of finding a sense of self is to develop to one's full potential and finding a cultural identity.

There are many characteristics of the adolescent identity expedition. The adolescent will use experimentation to examine, and use many school opportunities such as finding role models to visualize themselves in adult roles; doctors, artist, nurse, coach, or teacher. However, the competition is great parents and educators are competing with an array of sports figures, actors, actresses, and social media celebrities. The experimentation process can be unhealthy and less productive, drug use, crime, and uninhibited sexual behavior [7]. With this experimentation, the adolescent begins to build independence or even begins to exhibit behaviors of rebellion. For the most part, parents have an idea of what they want their children to become, and children do preserve their core values. However, the desire for independence will test the parent's patience. In some cases, the motivation for independence can be unhealthy when rebellion becomes unlawful or self-destructive [7].

Another interesting aspect of the identity search during adolescence is selfishness. In many cases the relationship that the adolescent forms tend to happen in selfish terms. Some of these relationships will be the short term the others will last a lifetime. Nevertheless, teens formulate most relationships with the mentality of how popular will it make me, how will others see me, and does it serve our best interests. The conversations that we have heard over the years of being a high school teacher suggest that the major concerns with finding an identity and establishing a relationship are how others will perceive me within our environment. Each relationship helps the adolescent learn new ways to interact socially [7].

The most important part of the process of adolescence is that the young person has new powerful cognitive skills, which will help guide them as they view the world and establish bright perspectives. They develop ideas about discrimination, racism, leadership, and other human rights issues, which may make the world a better place someday. Most adolescents find a sense of identity without much struggle. Some may find this process confusing throughout their entire life.

The Role of Gender and Ethnicity on Adolescence Development

Male or female can define gender, but these identities can be influenced by social and cultural characteristics and biology. Obviously, there is a genetic identification, but gender role can be the result of culture. There is an expectation of behavior for males and females in given culture. The person's sense of being either male or female is their gender identity, and your role in most societies comes from that identity. The question is how much of your gender role comes from biology and how much comes from societal expectations [8]. There is no surprise that gender expectations are demonstrated by peers and family members early in life, which is based on the doctor's ultrasound examination. The boys are the little slugger, and the girls are the little

princess, let the stereotyping begin. When we was growing up the boys in the neighborhood did the work outside; rack the leaves, cut the grass, and trim the hedges. The girls in the neighborhood cleaned the house, learned to cook, and played the piano. Not that we agreed with the roles, but that's what it was like for me. Genetics did not clarify who cut the grass or learned to cook, but our culture did, and as we grew up, we became socialized to accept that these roles are male and female oriented. When we became parents, this is not how we saw it; social norms had changed, in our opinion for the better.

Gender roles are not just confined to our living rooms. Throughout the world men dominate politics. In the US women were not even able to vote till 1920. Many historical trends will prove further that men tend to dominate certain factors in our society. We are glad to see it's changing, and we are proud our daughter will be part of it. For us, we say it's about time. Men tend to be more physically prone to aggression than women. The aggression control center in the human brain is the Amygdala and is ignited by testosterone, which is in more supply in males than females [9]. Usually, a biological difference will show up in our behaviors.

From a social aspect, girls tend to socialize in smaller groups or even with just one friend. However, boys are usually found socializing in larger groups that usually involves competition on some level. Nature may cause the biological differences, but our societal expectations intensify these differences. The adolescent will attempt to fit into the role in acceptance to their culture and gender that will best support social environment [10].

Within the United States, we have many ethnicities, all equally important and coexisting cultures. Ethnicity is a concept that replicates traits that we share with a large group of people that share a history. For the adolescent being able to identify with an ethnic and racial group is important especially if that group is a minority. This concept of self helps the adolescent establish a sense of belonging and socially it enables the adolescent to communicate common values and shared commitments. Ethnic identity tends to develop during adolescence and is passed down by customs, traditions, and cultural values. These values can be influenced by mass media, literature, and events that happen in the world. For the minority, ethnic identity will play a significant role. Minorities may have a more challenging experience due to the lack of recognition or acceptance of their ethnic identity [11].

Today's Theories and Research on Adolescence

Carlo, Padilla-Walker, and Nielson [12] conducted a longitudinal study that examined the relationship of adolescence and their development of sympathy and prosocial behaviors. Within our society today, there is much need for more research devoted to the importance of understanding prosocial behavior and how sympathy is developed in the adolescent years. The longitudinal study conducted earlier [12] consisted of 500 early and middle years' adolescents, (52% girls). These participants were evaluated at five different times measuring sympathy and prosocial behaviors one year apart each time. The procedures consisted of various waves with the initial wave selecting families randomly based on census information that was identical to the local school districts. At the different waves data was collected through questionnaires. These surveys used a five-point scale to measure sympathy; a score of one meant strongly disagree and a score of five indicated strongly agree. An example of one of the questions was, "When we see someone being taken advantage of, we feel kind of protective toward them" [12]. To evaluate prosocial behavior, the researchers used the topic of providing assistance to a stranger. At each

wave, researchers assessed levels of kindness and generosity. Findings supported their expectations of a bidirectional connection between sympathy and prosocial behavior in adolescence [12]. These results were consistent with social cognitive theorists. The data also indicated a stability of both prosocial behavior and sympathy and girls reputed more sympathy and prosocial behaviors than boys of the same age, which is correlated with previous data [12,13].

Priess, Lindberg and Hyde conducted research in gender intensification, which involved added pressure in today's society to conform to cultural expectations in gender roles and how those expectations in gender roles explain gender differences in depression [8]. The researchers used a longitudinal study that evaluated if adolescents became more stereotypical in gender role identity throughout adolescence and if the patterns indicated depressive diagnostics. In girls and boys ages 11,13 and 15. Girls reported higher levels of femininity, but girls and boys did not vary in masculinity. This data discovered by the researchers contradicts previous studies. There was no data that would suggest intensification in femininity or masculinity.

Positive traces for boys and girls showed fewer depressive indicators, exclusively at slightly above average levels of stress. The researchers call for more research on gender intensification in factors for contemporary adolescence [8].

Conclusions

Biology, cognition and social changes are all characteristics of adolescent development. The social changes are more observable during adolescence as they make adjustments with how they interact with parents, peers, and begin their discovery of romantic relationships and sex.

Adolescents form identities, which can be related to the cognitive process resulting in periods of exploration. In some cases, this transition can be characterized by risk taking on the part of the adolescent. This action could be related to the reward areas in the brain developing quicker than the control centers in the brain, which makes the adolescent more responsive to reward than the possible pain of responsibility. Regardless of generalizations, these factors help adolescents develop gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation identities they can be comfortable with. These factors also can lead to diversity throughout adolescence and into adulthood. More research is needed as society changes to evaluate the journey of the adolescent.

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