

The Adolescent Paradox: Emotions, Behavior and Identity

Course Number: V05.0142

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This course carries 4 credits. No prerequisites.

Course Description:

Adolescence is a remarkable time of growth and development; in just a few years, children transition dramatically towards adulthood across multiple domains. While adolescence is physically the healthiest period of the lifespan, it is also marked by an enormous rise in morbidity and mortality. This seeming paradox can be explained, in part, by biological and psychological changes during puberty that affect emotion regulation, cognition, and consequent risk-taking behavior. At the turn of the twentieth century, adolescence was described as a developmental period inevitably filled with “storm and stress.” In what ways does this vision of adolescence still apply? How should current scientific findings inform our understanding of the propensity for risk-taking behavior during this period (including substance use, increasing sexual activity, and disordered eating)? In exploring the factors that shape emotions, behavior, and emerging identity during adolescence, this course will examine such questions from biological and psychosocial perspectives.

Course Aims:

Knowledge

- a. Knowledge - Students will learn key aspects of:
 - i. Historical, scientific and cultural perspectives on adolescence and the transition to young adulthood;
 - ii. Biological changes that occur in the brain and neuroendocrine system during puberty, as well as in later adolescence;
 - iii. Psychological and cognitive aspects of adolescent development, including emotion regulation and cognitive control, that affect risk-taking behavior in adolescence;
 - iv. Social perspectives on adolescence, including relationships with parents and peers; and
 - v. Concepts of personal identity, health vs. illness, and risk vs. resilience, as they relate to adolescence.

Skills

- b. Student will be able to:
 - i. Review, integrate and discuss diverse theoretical perspectives on concepts of adolescence, personal identity, and health vs. illness;
 - ii. Demonstrate an understanding of how biological, psychological and social factors contribute to high-risk behaviors in adolescents; and
 - iii. Further develop and demonstrate critical thinking and reasoning in class discussions, response papers, and essays.

Course Syllabus:

This course will be divided into two main parts, preceded by an introductory session and culminating in a final wrap-up session. The first session will introduce the historical framework for the questions examined and describe the course expectations. The first part of the course (*Current Perspectives on The Adolescent Period*) will consist of an overview of current perspectives on and knowledge about adolescence, organized into: 1) Biological, 2) psychological, and 3) social perspectives. Upon conclusion of the first section, a midterm in-class essay assignment will require students to analyze live interviews with two adolescents, thereby demonstrating their understanding of the range of normal development and the typical struggles encountered during adolescence. In the second part of the course (*Emotions, Behavior and Identity in Adolescence, through a Biopsychosocial Lens*), we will consider how the biopsychosocial considerations learned about in the first half of the term come together to impact: 1) Emotional, 2) behavioral, and 3) identity development during adolescence. In the concluding session, we will revisit the larger historical context, incorporating a debate about whether adolescence should be viewed as a time of storm and stress.

I. Session 1: Introduction - Overview of “The Adolescent Paradox,” Storm and Stress Debate, and the History of “Adolescence”

The teenage years have often been portrayed as a time fraught with irrational and emotionally influenced behavior. Only relatively recently, however, has adolescence been identified as a developmental stage of its own accord, occurring between childhood and adulthood. Over the past few centuries, particularly in western societies, this transitional stage has become longer, with normative life stages such as marriage and child-rearing occurring later, and puberty and sexual maturity beginning earlier. How has the perception of adolescence evolved over the years, as evidence has emerged about the myriad of biological, psychological and social factors that affect this part of the life span? While this stage serves as a great opportunity for growth, identity and development, and most adolescents go on to become healthy and productive adults, there is also a high risk of morbidity and mortality as teenagers navigate their way towards independence. In this class, we will begin to examine the forces behind this “adolescent paradox,” while studying how the concept of adolescence has been defined and revised throughout history. Students will be introduced to Hall’s description of the adolescent period at the turn of the twentieth century as a time of “storm and stress,” which will set the stage for a debate that will be continued throughout the remainder of the course. We will also review expectations, requirements and assignments for this course.

Readings:

- 1) Aries, preface: “The Study of Adolescence”; Chapter 1: “Historical Context” (pp xii-xvii, 2-5)
- 2) Arnett, Chapter “The History of Adolescence (Hall: Adolescence in Literature, Biography and History)”; Chapter “The Storm and Stress Debate (Arnett: Adolescent Storm and Stress, Reconsidered)”; Chapter “The Concept of Emerging Adulthood (Arnett: Theory of Development from the late teens through the twenties)” (pp 1-17).

- 3) Browning, Chapter 2: (Hanawalt: Historical Descriptions and Prescriptions for Adolescence) (pp. 19-30).
- 4) Schulenberg, Chapter 1: “Negotiating Developmental Transitions During Adolescence and Young Adulthood”; Chapter 2: “Cultural, Historical & Subcultural Contexts of Adolescence” (pp 1-53).

II. The Adolescent Period - Current Perspectives

II.A. Biological Factors

II.A.1. Session 2: Endocrine Changes in Puberty – Hormones and Behavior

Puberty typically brings many physical changes, including a growth spurt and sexual development. In this session, we will review the biology of the endocrine system that governs such changes. We will look at how alterations in neuroendocrine factors during this time, including the hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal axis, affect adolescent behavior. We will also consider the effect of timing of pubertal maturation on adolescent development, behavior and the risk of psychopathology.

Readings:

- 1) Arnett, Chapter “Effects of the timing of Puberty (Braber et al: Is psychopathology associated with the timing of pubertal development?)” (pp 40-50).
- 2) Cameron JL. *Interrelationships between hormones, behavior, and affect during adolescence: understanding hormonal, physical, and brain changes occurring in association with pubertal activation of the reproductive axis.* Ann NY Acad Sci. 2004 Jun; 1021: 110-23.
- 3) Dahl RE. *Adolescent brain development: A period of vulnerabilities and opportunities.* Annual of the New York Academy of Sciences 2004; 1021: 1-22.
- 4) Schulenberg, Chapter 4: “Self-Reported Maturation Timing and Adaptation in Adolescence” (pp 85-109).

Response paper #1 due*

*Each week, students will be expected to write 2 page response papers, answering questions reflective of the reading material assigned the prior week. Papers will be due at the beginning of each relevant session. (For further information, see Question 11 of the proposal regarding homework assignments).

II.A.2. Session 3: The Developing Adolescent Brain

In this session, we will further explore “the adolescent brain,” including changes in cognitive control and affect regulation, as determined by neuronal pruning and prefrontal cortex maturation. We will also return to the subject of pubertal hormones, this time focusing on their relationship to the organization of the adolescent brain and behavior. In the second half of this

class, we will examine changes in circadian rhythm and sleep patterns during adolescence and the implications of these changes on teenage life.

Readings:

- 1) Aries, Chapter 3: “Biological Development (Introduction, Association between Puberty and Delayed Phase Preference)” (pp 60-62, 71-79).
- 2) Carskadon M et al. *Adolescent Sleep Patterns, Circadian Timing, and Sleepiness at a Transition to Early School Days*. *Sleep* 1998; 21(8): 871-81.
- 3) Casey BJ et al. *Imaging the developing brain: What have we learned about cognitive development?* *Trends in Cog. Sci* 2005; 9: 104–110.
- 4) Romeo R and McEwen B. *Stress and the Adolescent Brain*. *Annals of New York Acad of Sci* 2006 Dec; 1094: 202-214.
- 5) Sisk CL and Zehr JL. *Pubertal hormones organize the adolescent brain and behavior*. *Front Neuroendocrinol* 2005 Oct-Dec; 26(3-4): 163-74.

Response paper #2 due

II.B. Psychological Factors

II.B.1. Session 4: Cognitive Development in the Adolescent

This session will examine cognitive changes that typically occur in adolescence, including biological, developmental, and psychological perspectives. We will review theories developed by Kagan and Piaget that describe the cognitive changes during adolescence. Notions of egocentrism will be explored, as well as how aspects of cognitive processing affect risk-taking behavior during this period.

Readings:

- 1) Aries, Chapter 4: “Cognitive Development” (pp 96-127).
- 2) Browning, Chapter 11: (Inhelder and Piaget: Adolescent Thinking) (pp. 207-220).
- 3) Galambos NL et al. *Cognitive performance differentiates selected aspects of psychosocial maturity in adolescence*. *Dev Neuropsychol* 2005; 28(1): 473-92.
- 4) Schulenberg, Chapter 5: “Adolescents’ Decisions About Risks: A Cognitive Perspective” (pp. 110-138).

Response paper #3 due

II.B.2. Session 5: Temperament and the Physiology of Personality

In this session, we will study the concept of temperament and examine how it affects attachment, both positively and negatively. We will look at the theory of behavioral inhibition and how it serves as a link between biology and cognition. We will also explore biological

factors related to the physiology of personality. In doing so, we will consider the various taxonomies of personality, including Cloninger's model, and the biological systems of different neurotransmitters. We will consider how these factors affect the development and manifestation of personality during adolescence.

Readings:

- 1) Calkins S and Fox N. *The Relations Among Infant Temperament, Security of Attachment, and Behavioral Inhibition at Twenty-Four Months*. Child Development 1992 Dec; 63(6): 1456-72.
- 2) Cloninger CR et al. Review. *A psychobiological model of temperament and character*. Arch Gen Psychiatry 1993 Dec; 50(12): 975-90.
- 3) Cloninger CR et al. Review. *Childhood personality predicts alcohol abuse in young adults*. Alcohol Clin Exp Res 1988 Aug; 12(4): 494-505.
- 4) Fox N et al. *Behavioral Inhibition: Linking Biology and Behavior within a Developmental Framework*. Annual Review of Psychology 2004 Aug; 56: 235-262.
- 5) Wills T et al. *Novelty seeking, risk taking, and related constructs as predictors of adolescent substance use: An application of Cloninger's theory*. Journal of Substance Abuse 1994; 6(1): 1-20.

Response paper #4 due

II.C. Social Factors

II.C.1. Session 6: Parents and Peers

Adolescence is a period of changing social dynamics, characterized by increasing independence from parents along with greater rebellion against parental rules and authority. Accordingly, peer groups become a prevailing factor in an adolescent's life, often superseding parental influence in many regards. Peer groups serve as a distinct and critically important contribution to social development. This session will examine the significance of both parents and peer groups on adolescent decision-making across various situations.

Readings:

- 1) Ackard D et al. *Parent-child connectedness and behavioral and emotional health among adolescents*. American Journal of Preventive Medicine 2006; 30(1): 59-66.
- 2) Aries, Chapter 10: "Family Relationships"; Chapter 11: "Peers and Social Groups" (pp 341-429).
- 3) Sentse M et al. *Rejection and Acceptance Across Contexts: Parents and Peers as Risks and Buffers for Early Adolescent Psychopathology. The TRAILS Study*. Online publication J Abnorm Child Psychol 2009 Aug 26.

Response paper #5 due

II.C.2. Session 7: Neighborhood, School and the Media – How External Social Factors Influence Development

Despite universal changes, such as puberty and cognitive development, adolescents' experiences vary considerably across cultures and throughout history. The first half of this session will evaluate how neighborhoods and their surrounding culture, along with socioeconomic status and the school atmosphere, affect adolescent development, given that the majority of an adolescents' typical day is spent in these social environments. For the second half of this class, we will explore how celebrity icons and media, such as television and movies, influence adolescent emotions, identity and behavior. In addition, we will look at a recent issue of a popular magazine, scrutinizing the underlying messages given to its readers.

Readings:

- 1) Aries, Chapter 6: "Racial and Ethnic Identity"; Chapter 7: "Social Class" (pp 161-258).

Hawkes TE. *Drowning in Itself: The Plight of Adolescence in America*. Schools: Studies in Education; vol. 5: 35-69. (Note: Written by Elijah Hawkes, principal of James Baldwin School, New York City.)

- 2) Villani S. *Impact of Media on Children and Adolescents: A 10-year Review of the Research*. Journal of Amer Acad of Child & Adol Psych 2001 Apr; 40(4): 392-401.
- 3) Wiseman C et al. *Impact of the Media on Adolescent Body Image*. Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America 2005 July; 14(3): 453-471.
- 4) Recent issue of US Weekly magazine

III. Session 8: In-class Interview with Two Adolescents

This session will consist of an interview with two adolescent high school students from the James Baldwin School (West 18th Street, New York, NY), each at a different stage of development and coping with different stressors affecting teenage life. After the interviews, the participants will be discussed in class. The students will then be asked to write an in-class essay describing their perceptions of which biopsychosocial factors contributed to each individual's development.

Take-home midterm exam due.

IV. Emotions, Behavior and Identity in Adolescence (Through a Biopsychosocial Lens)

IV.A. Session 9: Emotions and Mood

In this session, we will consider how emotions are regulated and manifested during adolescence. In doing so, we will review concepts of Traits vs. States and the notion of affect regulation. We will consider the impact of mood and anxiety disorders on emotional states during this period. In order to fully examine these questions, we will explore how we draw boundaries between "Normal vs. Abnormal" with the aid of perspectives drawn from theories of health and illness. We will review categorical vs. dimensional approaches to these questions, which influence how we classify mental illness. Finally, we will discuss how these concepts shape our understanding of psychopathology in adolescence.

Readings:

- 1) Aries, Chapter 3.1: "Adolescence: Lives of Emotional Flux" (pp 63-71).
- 2) Essex MJ et al. *Early risk factors and developmental pathways to chronic high inhibition and social anxiety disorder in adolescence*. Am J Psychiatry 2010 Jan: 40-46.
- 3) McHugh and Slavney, *The Perspectives of Psychiatry*, Chapter 11: "Temperament, Affective Dimensions, and Personality Disorders"; Chapter 12: "Emotions, Life Events, Traits of Temperament, and Treatment" (pp. 126-150).
- 4) Muris P et al. *Anxiety and depression as correlates of self-reported behavioural inhibition in normal adolescents*. Behaviour Research and Therapy 2001 Sept; 39(9): 1051-1061.
- 3) Shiner RL. *The development of personality disorders: perspectives from normal personality development in childhood and adolescence*. Dev Psychopathol 2009 Summer; 21(3): 715-34.

Response paper #6 due

IV.B. Behaviors in adolescence

IV.B.1. Session 10: Risk-Taking Behaviors

Taking chances and trying new things are normative processes for adolescents in order to develop into healthy, mature adults. Furthermore, some element of risk and chance is necessary in order to develop. Along the way, however, many adolescents engage in what are considered to be unnecessarily high-risk behaviors, which may still fall within the range of "normal" adolescence and not absolutely signify mental illness or psychopathology. Risk taking helps shape a person's experience, which ultimately leads to the development of one's identity. However, increased risk-taking behavior also leads to a significant increase in morbidity and mortality. Adolescence is strongly associated with an increase in risk-taking and sensation-seeking behavior, such as self-injury, increased sexual activity, disordered eating patterns and substance use. What factors determine whether such behaviors disrupt or enrich normal development? This class will examine risk-taking behaviors and how they are influenced by various biopsychosocial factors, using the movie "Thirteen" to further elucidate these ideas.

Readings:

- 1) Aries, Chapter 14: "Teenage Pregnancy"; Chapter 15: "Eating Disorders" (pp 500-559).
- 2) Collins R. *Sex on Television and Its Impact on American Youth: Background and Results from the RAND Television and Adolescent Sexuality Study*. Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America 2005 July; 14(3): 371-385.

- 3) Schulenberg, Chapter 14: “Health Risks and Deviance in the Transition from School to Work”; Chapter 19: “Preventing Health-Compromising Behaviors Among Youth and Promoting Their Positive Development” (pp 372-394, 498-521).
- 4) Stewart P et al. *Integrative research review of risk behaviors among adolescents in rural, suburban, and urban areas*. Journal of Adol Health 1999 Apr; 24(4): 230-243.
- 5) “Thirteen” is to be viewed prior to this session.

IV.B.2. Session 11: Risk vs. Resilience

Why is it that some children grow up in adverse circumstances and still have a relatively positive psychological outcome? What allows some individuals to engage in high risk behaviors and to learn from them, while others fall victim to psychopathology? In this session, we will examine the concept of resilience in adolescence. We will focus on protective factors that contribute to the development of resilience in an individual, particularly in the face of genetic or environmental risk factors. We will consider how the concepts of risk and resilience impact later development and the transition to adulthood.

Readings:

- 1) Gutman, LM. “Risk and Resilience.” Encyclopedia of Infant and Early Childhood Development 2008 (pp. 23-34).
- 2) Perkins DF and Border LM. *Positive behaviors, problem behaviors, and resiliency in adolescence*. Handbook of Psychology 2003, Vol 6: Developmental Psychology (pp 373-394).
- 3) Schulenberg, Chapter 5: “Adolescents’ Decisions about Risks”; Chapter 18: “Promoting Mental Health during the Transition into Adolescence” (pp 110-138, 471-497).

Response paper #7 due

IV.C. Identity and Adolescence

IV.C.1 Session 12: Gender Roles in Identity Formation

Over the last few decades, gender-role attitudes and behaviors have become less traditional in adults, a phenomenon that has also trickled down to impact adolescents. While gender roles have become less strictly defined, such as with careers, sports and family responsibilities, these roles still significantly impact self-esteem and school performance, among other things. Gender roles are strongly influenced by how the sexes are portrayed within a family, by peers, and in society. There are also biological differences between the sexes that impact risk-taking behaviors, emotional control, and psychopathology in the adolescent population. This session will consider the biological, psychological and social factors that differentially impact adolescent development in males and females.

Readings:

- 1) Aries, Chapter 8: “Gender Role Identity” (pp. 259-307).

- 2) Browning, Chapter 10: (Chu: A Relational Perspective on Adolescent Boys' Identity Development); Chapter 14: (Horney: Personality Changes in Female Adolescents) (pp 183-190, 255-265).
- 3) Caglar E. *Similarities and differences in physical self-concept of males and females during late adolescence and early adulthood*. *Adolescence* 2009; 407-19.
- 4) Priess HA et al. *Adolescent gender-role identity and mental health: gender intensification revisited*. *Child Dev* 2009; 1531-44.
- 5) Renk K and Creasey G. *The relationship of gender, gender identity, and coping strategies in late adolescents*. *Journal of Adolescence* 2003 Apr; 26(2); 159-168.

Response paper #8 due

IV.C.2. Session 13: Identity, Self-Concept, Self-Esteem, and Personality

What is identity? When does it emerge? How stable is it? What influences it, in broad terms? What is the difference between personality, identity, self-concept, and self-esteem? This session will examine these concepts and how they play out during the adolescent period. We will consider personality disposition over time, as well as self-esteem changes during the transition from childhood to adolescence. In doing so, we will draw on and review the myriad of biological, psychological and cognitive factors that affect an adolescent's development and sense of identity, as depicted throughout the course.

Readings:

- 1) Aries, Chapter 5: "Theoretical Foundation of Personal and Social Identity Development" (pp 128-160).
- 2) Browning, Chapter 12: (Erikson: The Problem of Ego Identity); Chapter 18: (Noshpitz: Self-Destructiveness in Adolescence) (pp 223-240, 307-322).
- 3) Schulenberg, Chapter 15: "Self-Definition and Mental Health during Adolescence and Young Adulthood" (pp 395-419).

Response paper #9 due

V. Session 14: Conclusion - The Adolescent Paradox Revisited. Storm and Stress?

Adolescence is a unique developmental stage posing distinct challenges and vulnerabilities along with enormous opportunity. Although generally a remarkably healthy period physically, there is also an enormous increase in morbidity and mortality, largely secondary to high risk behaviors, creating the "adolescent paradox." In this final session, we will tie together concepts studied throughout the course, discussing the biopsychosocial influence on adolescent identity, behavior and emotions. We will revisit the overarching question we have considered with an in-class debate: Given contemporary understandings of these developmental factors during adolescence, to what extent should the period of adolescence still be viewed as a period of inherent "storm and stress?" We will conclude by examining potential trends in future research and theories, then end with a

discussion of the movie “Breakfast Club,” which symbolizes the hardships characteristic of the adolescent period and the multiple complexities associated with being an adolescent.

Final take home exam due

Readings:

- 1) Irwin C et al. *America’s Adolescents: Where Have We Been, Where Are We going?* Journal of Adolescent Health 2002; 31: 91-121.
- 2) Kumpfer KL and Summerhays JF. *Prevention approaches to enhance resilience among high-risk youth.* Annal of the New York Academy of Sciences 2006; 1094: 141-63.
- 3) Shore R and Shore B. *KIDS COUNT Indicator Brief; Reducing the Teen Death Rate.* Annie E. Casey Foundation 2009 July.
- 4) “The Breakfast Club” is to be viewed prior to this session.

Readings:

- 1) “Adolescent Behavior: Readings and Interpretations” E Aries 2001 Dushkin/McGraw-Hill.
- 2) “Adolescent Identities: A Collection of Readings” Ed. Browning, DL 2008 The Analytic Press.
- 3) “Health Risks and Developmental Transitions during Adolescence” Eds: J Schulenberg, JL Maggs, K Hurrelmann 1999 Cambridge University Press.
- 4) “Readings on Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood” JJ Arnett 2001 Prentice Hall.

Assignments and Grading:

- a. Class participation (20%): Students will be expected to attend and participate actively in all class sessions and to demonstrate familiarity with the content of the assigned readings and film viewings during class discussions.
- b. Response Papers (30%): Students will complete 8 out of 9 assigned 2-page response papers, correlating with sessions noted in the syllabus above. Expectations for the papers will be reviewed during the first class session: To earn full credit, each response paper will present a thoughtful answer to 3 questions that will be distributed in advance. These papers will demonstrate a mastery of a portion of the assigned reading and the student’s ability to reflect on the material.
- c. Midterm Exam (25%): For the midterm exam, students will complete a take home midterm (worth 70 points), as well as an in-class essay exam, consisting of 2 short essay questions

(each worth 15 points) focused on developing a biopsychosocial formulation of two adolescents who will be interviewed in class prior to the assignment.

- d. Final Essay / Exam (25%): For the final assignment, students will complete a take home final exam in which they will be asked to answer 4 out of 5 essays covering material presented in the course. The assignment will be due at the beginning of the final session.