FOCUS ON VOCABULARY AND LANGUAGE

Adolescence

Adolescence—the years spent morphing from child to adult . . . The time period between the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood (adolescence) involves many social and biological changes. The person is transformed (morphed) from one type of entity (a child) to something quite different (an adult).

Physical Development

For boys, early maturation has mixed effects. If the onset of puberty occurs before the expected or usual time (early maturation), it will be much less stressful for boys than for girls. In general, for boys in their early teen years, being stronger and more athletic leads to more self-assurance, greater popularity, and greater independence; but it also puts them more at risk for alcohol use, delinquency, and premature sexual activity (it has mixed effects).

If a young girl’s body and hormone-fed feelings are out of sync with her emotional maturity and her friends’ physical development and experiences, she may begin associating with older adolescents or may suffer teasing or sexual harassment (Ge & Natsuaki, 2009). Sync is an abbreviation of the word synchronize, which means to occur at the same time. So, if a girl’s biological development (her body and hormone-fed feelings) is not proceeding at the same rate (is out of sync) with her emotional and social development, she may start socializing (associating) with and imitating the behavior of older girls. Thus, early maturation can be a problem for girls, especially if the people around them react in an inappropriate or suggestive manner to their physical development (sexual harassment) or make fun of them (tease them).

Cognitive Development

When adolescents achieve the intellectual summit Jean Piaget called formal operations . . . The formal operational stage is the highest level in Piaget’s theory of cognitive development (the intellectual summit). Most adolescents reach this stage and become capable of logical and abstract reasoning. For example, many think about (ponder) and discuss (debate) such issues as good and evil, truth and justice, and other abstract topics about human nature.
Two crucial tasks of childhood and adolescence are discerning right from wrong and developing character—the psychological muscles for controlling impulses. Character refers to the total qualities a person possesses, including attitudes, beliefs, interests, actions, and a philosophy of life. By developing character, adolescents learn to have the intellectual strength (psychological muscles) to refrain from acting immorally (to control their impulses). Much of our morality is derived from (rooted in) our emotions and passions (quick gut feelings—the “low road” of unconscious, automatic thinking), which the mind seeks to justify or rationalize (the intuitionist perspective on morality). Kohlberg proposed a stage theory of moral reasoning that has three levels: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional.

Kohlberg claimed these levels form a moral ladder. In Kohlberg’s view, children have to proceed in succession through each of the three stages of moral thinking (preconventional, conventional, and postconventional)—much as a person climbs a ladder, one rung at a time, from bottom to top. The lowest rung on this moral ladder involves self-interest and avoidance of punishment; the highest rung, which often develops during and after adolescence, is concerned with personal ethical principles and universal justice. Critics contend that the theory has cultural and gender biases.

. . . throw the switch . . . This means to pull a lever. People’s moral reasoning and judgments are affected by basic emotional reactions (quick gut feelings). This phenomenon is evident in situations that require a choice between two unpleasant alternatives (a dilemma). In the Myers example, either pulling a lever (throwing a switch) to switch the tracks or pushing a person onto the tracks results in five people being saved and one person dying. However, the latter choice causes much more emotional conflict (the brain’s emotion areas light up).

Our moral thinking and feeling surely affect our moral talk. But sometimes talk is cheap and emotions are fleeting. The expression talk is cheap means that it is easy to say you believe something or to say that you are going to do something—it costs you nothing just to speak about it (talk is cheap). However, action—that is, actually following through with the correct behavior—is also involved in morality.

Social Development

. . . psychosocial task . . . According to Erikson, each stage of life involves a problem (a crisis or psychosocial task) that has to be resolved before we can move on to the next stage. These tasks involve interactions between ourselves, our surroundings, and other people; thus, they are social in nature. Young children struggle (wrestle) with issues of trust, then autonomy (independence), then initiative; school-age children try to achieve (they strive for) competence—feeling able and
productive. The psychosocial assignment (psychosocial task) of adolescence involves role confusion vs. identity formation. (This is sometimes called an “identity crisis.”)

As sometimes happens in psychology, Erikson’s interests were bred by his own life experience. Erikson’s approach to developmental psychology was influenced by events in his own life (his interests were bred by his own life experience). Certain incidents that happened to him motivated him to research the adolescent struggle for identity (such episodes fueled his interest).

Erikson noticed that some adolescents forge their identity early, simply by adopting their parents’ values and expectations. Forge literally means to form or shape by heating and hammering metal. Erikson observed that some young people form (forge) their identities early by taking on (adopting) their parents’ beliefs, attitudes, ethics, and so on. He further observed that other young people are influenced more by specific peer groups such as athletes (jocks), computer and technology lovers (geeks), nonconformist dressers (goths), or neat and traditional dressers (preps) when forming their identities.

. . . the 14-year-old who wouldn’t be caught dead holding hands with Mom. To say you “wouldn’t be caught dead” doing something means you would be extremely reluctant to do this thing under any circumstances. When adolescents in Western cultures attempt to develop their own identities, they begin to distance themselves from their parents (they pull away). Thus, the younger child who has a very strong need to be near her mother (she loves to touch and cling) develops, during adolescence, a desire to be independent; she would not like to be seen, especially by her peer group, holding hands with her mother (she wouldn’t be caught dead holding hands with Mom).

. . . heredity does much of the heavy lifting in forming individual temperament and personality differences . . . Genetic inheritance and biological predispositions contribute much (they do much of the heavy lifting) to the formation of individual differences in personality and temperament—and peer influences do much of the rest.
Do adults differ from infants as a giant redwood differs from its seedling . . . ? Or do they differ as a butterfly differs from a caterpillar . . . ? The giant redwood is a large coniferous tree that grows in a continuous, cumulative way from seedling to mature tree. On the other hand, the butterfly emerges as a different creature after passing through a stage as a caterpillar. Developmental psychologists ask: Are changes throughout the life span (from infant to adult) due to a slow, continuous shaping process (like the giant redwood tree), or do we go through a series of genetically preprogrammed stages (like the butterfly)?